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PUBLIC STATEMENT

IRAQ

Expulsion of Kurdish families must stop

Amnesty International is alarmed at reports that at least seven families who have lived all their lives in the Kirkuk area have been expelled to the Kurdish provinces in the north of Iraq because of their Kurdish ethnic origin.

They are said to be among the first victims of a wave of expulsions targeting 1,468 Kurdish families scheduled a few months ago to take place between 15 April and 15 June 1998.

A number of relatives of the targeted families have apparently been detained in preparation for the expulsion. They are reportedly held until the expulsion of their respective families and arrangements for their own expulsions are completed. Furthermore the food rationing tickets as well as the properties of the targeted families have been reportedly confiscated by the Iraqi authorities.

That these families are being expelled or detained just because they are Kurds or because of their political beliefs is unacceptable, according to Amnesty International.

The organization's concern is heightened by reports that since November 1997 several hundred Kurdish families have forcibly been moved from the Kirkuk area and sent to areas under the control of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

On 30 March Amnesty International wrote to the Government of Iraq expressing concern about the reported expulsion plans and urging it to halt such expulsions and to allow all those families already expelled to return to their homes in the Kirkuk area.

The organization also called for the immediate and unconditional release of those relatives currently detained in preparation of the expulsions, which the organization considers to be prisoners of conscience. No response has been received from the government.

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