

AI INDEX: MDE/14/04/98
13 November 1998.

PUBLIC STATEMENT

US/IRAQ

Amnesty International demands that protection of civilians be paramount

Amnesty international today expressed its fear that military action against iraq may result in the loss of civilian lives. Life, safety and security of civilians must be the paramount consideration in any action taken to resolve the current crisis. Amnesty international takes no position on the use of force to resolve international disputes.

“The experience of previous armed intervention in the gulf has shown that, all too often, civilians become the acceptable casualties of war”, amnesty international said. “All governments have an obligation to respect and protect civilian life”.

There are clear rules on the conduct of hostilities which are designed to protect civilian lives to the maximum extent possible. The geneva conventions and their additional protocol I prohibit any direct attacks on civilians or civilian objects. Protocol I also includes prohibitions on certain types of attacks which, while aimed at a military target, have an indiscriminate or disproportionate impact on civilians. The fundamental principle of the protection of civilians is generally considered part of customary law and therefore binding on all states.

Amnesty international reminds the governments of the united states and its allies of their obligation to ensure the maximum protection of civilian lives in accordance with international humanitarian law. The organization also reminds the government of iraq of its obligation to take all measures to protect the civilian population.

Amnesty international also notes that as a result of military action, civilians may be internally displaced or forced to flee their country as refugees. The organisation reminds governments that refugees fleeing, when their life, safety and security are at risk, have a right to protection in another country, and that all states have an obligation to provide this. Amnesty international calls on all neighbouring countries to guarantee this right and calls on the international community to provide all necessary assistance to ensure that the responsibility of dealing with refugees is shared by all states and does not fall disproportionately on those geographically close to Iraq.

ENDS.../