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1 JUNE 1994

IRAQ: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON KURDISH LEADERSHIP TO PUT AN END TO HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Amnesty International is today appealing to Kurdish political party leaders in the region to stop deliberately killing and mutilating prisoners in custody, and abducting, killing and torturing civilians based on their political ties.

"It is an outrage that the Kurds -- having suffered gross human rights violations for so long at the hands of Iraqi Government forces -- should once again have to endure such abuses, only this time at the hands of their own political leaders", Amnesty International said.

Since 1 May when the conflict was sparked off by a land dispute in Qala Diza in Arbil Province, Amnesty International has received dozens of reports of abuses said to have been committed mainly by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Although it is difficult at this stage to independently verify many of these reports, the organization said similar abuses have previously taken place in the area since it fell under Kurdish control almost three years ago.

"The types of human rights abuses reported now are similar to those seen in December 1993, when fierce fighting erupted between forces of the PUK and the Islamic Movement in Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK)", Amnesty International said.

In the past month, several hundred fighters and party cadres in the conflict have been taken prisoner by both sides and, while scores have been released in prisoner exchanges, both the KDP and the PUK are said to have deliberately killed prisoners in their custody. Amnesty International has received the names and some details of 51 KDP members allegedly executed by the PUK after arrest between 2 and 23 May in Qala Diza, Rania, Kifri, Halabja, Koi Sanjaq, Sulaimaniya, Derbendikhan and Chwarqurna.

Amnesty International has also received the names and details of 49 PUK members allegedly executed by the KDP after arrest between 4 and 28 May in Khormal, Salahuddin, 'Aqra, Haj Omran and in the Bardarash region. In Khormal, IMIK forces reportedly carried out some of the killings alongside the KDP.

The KDP and PUK have denied killing prisoners in custody, saying they died in battle. Some alleged victims on both sides were said to have been tortured prior to execution or their bodies subsequently mutilated. Incidents involving the arrest, killing or torture of individuals on the basis of their political affiliation are also being investigated by Amnesty International.

The month-long conflict has rapidly developed into a major military conflict between the two parties in Sulaimaniya, Kirkuk, Arbil and Duhok provinces. IMIK forces and those of a smaller group, Kurdish Revolutionary Hizbollah, as well as Iranian Revolutionary Guards, were said by the PUK to be fighting alongside the KDP. Both the KDP and IMIK have disputed this.

In the past few days, serious clashes involving heavy artillery and rocket-propelled grenades have spread to the city of Arbil, the region's administrative centre until now regarded as 'neutral territory'.

The Kurdish administration has been paralysed by the conflict, as has the Kurdistan National Assembly (parliament), since the occupation of its building by PUK forces on 3 May. Other public buildings in Arbil have also been occupied, including Rizzari Hospital where KDP forces are stationed. Mediation by the Iraqi National Congress (INC) has resulted in at least two agreements being signed by the KDP and PUK, but have been persistently flouted. Calls for an end to the fighting by civilian demonstrators have gone unheeded by the Kurdish leadership.

After the May 1992 parliamentary elections and the appointment of the Kurdistan Council of Ministers, a number of positive measures were adopted to improve the human rights situation. However, the deepening political crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan, resulting in large part from disagreements over power-sharing arrangements between the KDP and PUK, has led to a gradual deterioration of the human rights situation. For example, politically motivated killings by Kurdish political parties, among them the KDP, PUK and IMIK, have increased. This was especially marked in 1993 in the Bahdinan region, where the KDP killed some political activists belonging to smaller Marxist or communist groups in targeted assassinations.

After a fact-finding visit in February 1994 to Iraqi Kurdistan, Amnesty International concluded that both PUK and IMIK forces deliberately killed some prisoners in their custody in December 1993. There was also photographic and medical evidence that both sides had tortured prisoners and mutilated some of those they killed. Officials of both parties accused each other of such atrocities but, as far as Amnesty International is aware, neither party has investigated accusations levelled at their own members and no one has been brought to justice to date.

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