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## **European states must stop the imminent forcible return of Iraqis**

Amnesty International has called on four European states to immediately stop the forcible return of individuals to Iraq, because their human rights are at serious risk if they are returned to the country.

A number of Iraqis currently living in the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK are scheduled to be forcibly returned to Baghdad on 9 June on a flight jointly arranged by the authorities of the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK. The group being returned to Iraq includes a number of people who have sought asylum but whose claims have been refused.

Amnesty International believes that the decision to forcibly return Iraqis is in direct breach of guidelines set out by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), which has urged governments not to return individuals to Iraq, until the security situation improves.

“Forcible return of these people would violate international refugee and human rights standards which these governments have accepted,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, deputy director of Amnesty International’s programme for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Seven years after the US-led invasion, Iraqis are still living in a climate of fear, with hundreds of civilians being killed or injured every month.”

“The Iraqi government is clearly unable to protect its own citizens, including those returned to the country from abroad.”

Those most in danger when returned to Iraq come from the five provinces considered to be particularly dangerous by the UNHCR: Ninewa (Mosul), Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Baghdad. Anyone from these provinces should be granted refugee status or a form of subsidiary protection in Europe.

In the case of asylum-seekers from other provinces of Iraq, individual assessment should be made to assess whether they also qualify for refugee or subsidiary protection. In the event that they do not qualify for such protection, Amnesty International calls on host countries to grant Iraqis temporary humanitarian protection until the security situation in the country has further improved.

### **Background**

Amnesty International delegates currently visiting the Kurdistan region of Iraq have met a number of Iraqis from Baghdad, including members of ethnic and religious minority groups, who have been forced to leave their homes in the capital and come to the Kurdish provinces. Several people report having been forced out of their homes in Baghdad by members of armed groups.

Amnesty International has also spoken to several Iraqis from a group of 35 who were forcibly returned to Iraq by the Netherlands government on 30 March 2010, including Shi'a Turkoman, a 22-year-old man from Tal Afar, a city north of Mosul, currently stranded in Baghdad out of fear for his life should he return to a region where hundreds of civilians have been killed in sectarian or other politically motivated violence.

The UNHCR has called for no forcible returns of Iraqis to the five provinces considered to be particularly dangerous. UNHCR's guidelines also advise states not to return any Iraqis to any other area of Iraq unless an individual assessment has been carried out on the risks they would face if returned. Various international human rights treaties expressly prohibit the forcible return of anyone to a country where they would be at risk of torture or other serious human rights violations.

**Note to editors**

On 27 April 2010 Amnesty International published *Iraq: Civilians under fire*, highlighting the plight of the Iraq civilian population and the targeting of particular vulnerable groups by armed groups, government forces and others in Iraq. The report documents how hundreds of civilians are being killed or injured each month.