

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Iraq: Kurdistan Regional Government must rein in armed political party militias and investigate killings during protests**

Amnesty International has today called on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) authorities to rein in armed political party militias and open an independent, impartial and thorough investigation into the deaths of three men and two teenage boys during protests at offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) on 9 and 10 October.

### **Qaladze**

On 9 October, Mohammed Rasool, aged 16, was shot dead after armed men belonging to the KDP militia opened fire on a protest outside the party's headquarters in Qaladze, Sulamaniyah governorate.

Protests started peacefully in front of the governor's building and moved to the KDP headquarters at around 6pm. Mohammed Rasool's brother, who was at the protest, told Amnesty International that he saw four armed men in KDP militia uniform on the roof of the headquarters fire in the air a number of times to disperse the protesters. Some protesters responded by throwing stones, breaking a number of windows. Uniformed members of the Asayish, the official security agency of the KRG, cleared a path through the protest for another four armed men in KDP uniform to enter the headquarters and join the others on the roof.

Mohammed Rasool's brother said that all eight men then started shooting at the protesters and that he felt bullets fly close over his head. When he turned round, he saw that his brother had been shot in the head.

A second person was killed outside the KDP offices later that day. Amnesty International has received information that at around 10pm, a 31-year-old teacher was shot dead. He had gone to the protest to ask his younger brother to come home, after he heard that protests were turning violent.

According to information received by Amnesty International, police cars arrived at the scene shortly after 10pm and transported the KDP armed militia men away. According to media reports, at least 20 protesters were injured that evening in addition to the two men who died.

Apparently in retaliation for these deaths, a group of protesters set fire to the KDP headquarters in Qaladze on 10 October. After the fire had subsided, the body of a 13-year-old boy was found in the building by his father. The circumstances under which the boy had entered the building are not clear.

### **Kalar**

Protests also took place late in the afternoon of 10 October in front of the KDP headquarters in Kalar, Kirkuk governorate, with protesters throwing stones at the building. Shots were fired in the course of the protest and media organizations reported that two men, Aram Bayiz Abid and Osman Adnan Muhammed, were killed and 19 people were injured.

The KDP said on 10 October that Osman Adnan Muhammed, who the party identified as a KDP employee making his way to the headquarters, was killed in a "hail of bullets" fired by

protesters. It added that three other KDP security guards and six members of the Asayish were injured. In a statement on 12 October the party said that Aram Bayiz Abid was “killed by a stray bullet”, without specifying who had fired this bullet.

Amnesty International has received reports that the two men were killed by three unidentified armed men who opened fire randomly out of the rear window of a moving four-wheel drive vehicle. These reports contradict the KDP’s account of the events of 10 October.

Following the death of Aram Bayiz Abid, a father of two in his thirties, his family held a protest outside the Court of First Instance in Kalar on 18 October. His cousin said in a public statement that Aram Bayiz Abid had been making his way home from prayers and was not a protester.

### **Calls for investigation**

On 15 October, the KDP said in a statement that 400 people had been arrested in relation to the “burning and destruction of KDP headquarters” and “other violent acts during the protests”. A KDP Member of Parliament said on the same day that the Parliament’s Legal Committee was “collecting evidence regarding the burning of the KDP headquarters and the death or injury of KDP members” and that it would “hand those responsible over to the courts”.

Amnesty International urges the KRG authorities to promptly and independently investigate all deaths that occurred in relation to the events of 9 and 10 October, and to disclose the findings. The investigation should not be limited to the deaths of KDP members but should include deaths of protesters and bystanders. Anyone suspected of unlawful killing should be prosecuted in fair trials without the possibility of the death penalty.

The organization is also calling on the KRG authorities to rein in armed political party militias and ensure that everyone can exercise their right to peaceful assembly without fear of attack by political party militia or arbitrary interference by security forces.

### **Background**

In the last few weeks, hundreds of public sector employees have been protesting in several cities across the eastern part of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) to demand payment of their overdue salaries.

Discontent from the opposition also grew after a meeting of five political parties failed to resolve the crisis resulting from opposition to KDP seeking an extension of Massoud Barzani’s term as President of the KRG, after his presidency term officially ended on 19 August.

The two political parties which jointly rule Iraq’s three Kurdish provinces, the KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, operate armed militia who act almost as a law unto themselves and have a history of committing human rights abuses with impunity.