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**PUBLIC STATEMENT**  
**IRAQ:**  
**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS THE KILLING OF AYATOLLAH**  
**MOHAMMAD SADEQ AL-SADR AND URGES AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION**

In a letter sent today to the Iraqi Government Amnesty International expressed grave concern at the killing of Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr, the highest Shi'a Muslim authority in the country, and two of his sons.

The organization called for an immediate, thorough and independent investigation into the killing and for the methods and conclusions of such an investigation to be made public.

Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr, aged 56, and two of his sons -- Hojjatu al-Islam al-Sayyid Mostafa al-Sadr, aged 34, and al-Sayyid Mu'ammal al-Sadr -- were shot dead by armed men in al-Najaf during the night of 18 February. The bodies were buried on Friday 19 February and the family were said to have been denied a funeral ceremony.

These killings sparked off mass protests in pre-dominantly Shi'a Muslim districts in Baghdad and in southern towns of al-Hilla, Karbala', al-Nassiriya and al-Najaf. In the course of clashes with the security forces, dozens of protesters are said to have been killed, particularly in al-Thawra district of Baghdad and in the southern towns of al-Nassiriya. Several hundred people have reportedly been arrested in the last few days and may be at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Amnesty International fears that others Shi'a leaders in the country may be at risk and has called on the Iraqi Government to take immediate steps to ensure their safety.

The organization's fears are heightened by the fact that Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr is the third prominent Shi'a Muslim leader to have been killed in suspicious circumstances in less than a year.

On 21 April 1998, Ayatollah al-Shaikh Mortadha al-Borujerdi was shot dead while walking home from morning prayers in al-Najaf. Two months later, on 18 June Ayatollah al-Shaikh Mirza 'Ali al-Gharawi, his son-in-law Mohammad 'Ali al-Faqih, his driver and one other person were shot dead on their way from Karbala' to al-Najaf.

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