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The UN Human Rights Commission on Human Rights must discuss Iraq

The human rights situation in Iraq urgently requires a thorough, in-depth discussion, Amnesty International said in response to the UN Commission on Human Rights' decision not to hold a special sitting on that country.

"The Commission must discuss the situation in Iraq, not just limited to abuses committed by the current government, but also looking at the impact of war on the human rights and humanitarian conditions," Amnesty International said.

"After all the Commission is the UN's principal body responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights."

The Commission has appointed a Special Rapporteur on Iraq. However, his mandate is limited to investigating human rights violations committed by the Government of Iraq. Amnesty International is calling for this mandate to be expanded to cover human rights violations committed by any party in Iraqi territory.

Amnesty International demands that Human Rights monitors be deployed without delay.

Civilian life at risk if landmines and cluster bombs are used

Indiscriminate weapons must not be used by any side in the conflict, Amnesty International said today, as claims of the use of cluster bombs and anti-personnel mines continued to emerge.

Both the US and UK officials have refused to rule out the use of cluster bombs. The organization's concern is heightened as allegations emerge that cluster bombs have been dropped on Basra and may be responsible for civilian deaths and injuries.

Iraqi troops were reportedly laying anti-personnel mines and using landmine booby-traps in southern Iraq. There have been other reports that Iraqi forces were laying mines around Kirkuk in the north and elsewhere in the country.

The US Pentagon has stated that "it retains the right to use landmines." The International Campaign to Ban Landmines has stated that the US has already deployed about 90,000 landmines to the region for possible use in Iraq. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair has so far refused to rule out the use of cluster bombs by UK forces. The US has been stockpiling thousands of anti-personnel mines (banned under UK law) off the coast of the British territory of Diego Garcia for use in Iraq. If anti-personnel mines had entered the territory of Diego Garcia, this would appear to breach the UK Land Mines Act.

Strengthening Fortress Europe in Times Of War

Amnesty International has described British proposals on processing refugees as totally inappropriate. EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers are due to discuss the proposal launched by the UK, for regional protection zones and processing zones.

"It is extraordinary that a proposal to reinforce "Fortress Europe" is being debated at this time when war in Iraq may result in many people fleeing the country. It is doubly incongruous that the present proposals were initiated by the EU member state that is part of the military operations in Iraq," said Dick Osting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

Iraqi POWs and Guantánamo Bay

Amnesty International notes with grave concern comments from senior US officials which suggest that the US is planning to send Iraqi POWs to Guantánamo Bay. "If we catch any terrorists we're going to whisk them off to Guantánamo," said Capt. Jim Wherry of the Judge Advocate General's Corps, the army's legal arm. (Associated Press)

The organization has repeatedly expressed concern about the status under which prisoners are held in Guantánamo Bay, and their treatment in the facility.

Civilian deaths must be investigated

Amnesty International has called for an immediate and impartial investigation into the deaths of civilians during the conflict in Iraq.

According to reports, at least 15 Iraqi civilians were killed today and around 30 wounded when missiles hit a residential area in north Baghdad.

Amnesty International is concerned about the increase in civilian casualties caused by targeting errors in this war. In one instance on 23 March, five Syrian nationals were killed and another 10 were hurt when a US missile hit a bus in Rutba, western Iraq, as it was returning to Syria. A US military spokesman admitted that a US missile had hit the bus and that the real target was a bridge.

For more information on the Iraq Crisis go to http://web.amnesty.org/pages/iraq_summary

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