

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Iraq: Amnesty International greatly concerned by rising toll of civilian killings, including for discriminatory motives

Amnesty International is greatly concerned about the continuing killings of civilians in Iraq, and the continuing failure of the Iraqi authorities to end the killings and bring the perpetrators to justice. In recent months hundreds of people were reportedly killed every week, as a result of bomb and suicide attacks and in the ever increasing sectarian violence, in Baghdad as well as in other towns and cities.

According to a recent UN report, 5818 civilians were killed and at least 5762 wounded in May and June 2006. Today 35 people were reportedly killed in a suicide bomb attack in the southern city of Najaf. Further, scores of people, mostly young or adult men, have been abducted and murdered; often, their hands had been tied and they appear to have been tortured before death.

The killings are continuing despite a security operation involving thousands of Iraqi government troops and the recent deployment of nearly 4,000 US troops in Baghdad. Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned the deliberate killings of civilians by armed groups opposed to the Iraqi government and the presence of foreign troops. Such killings and other abuses by armed groups amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Discriminatory motives

Many of the victims appear to have been targeted for sectarian reasons, because of their religious affiliation as members of the Sunni or Shi'a communities as well as membership of religious minorities – including the Christian and Mandaean communities. Others, however, appear to have been targeted on account of their gender, sexual orientation or national origin, including women, Palestinian refugees who are long term residents of Iraq, and gay men or men imputed to be gay.

According to a number of media reports, individuals thought to be gay have been singled out, attacked, and in some cases killed because of what the perpetrators consider their 'immoral behaviour'. Alleged perpetrators include militias and members of the Iraqi security forces - such as the Wold Brigade, a special police unit which reports to Iraq's Interior Ministry, and which has been accused of other abuses including detention and torture of Palestinian residents in Baghdad.

Amnesty International is calling on the Iraqi government to take concrete steps to promptly, thoroughly, impartially and independently investigate these killings and to ensure that the perpetrators are identified and brought to justice. The organization is also calling on all political, religious and community leaders in Iraq to condemn all civilian killings, regardless of the victim's gender, race, ethnic background, religion, political beliefs, sexual orientation or gender identity, and to demand that their followers refrain from such killings and respect without discrimination the rights of all Iraqis.

