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Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Iraq

Latest Update: 31 December 2013

Progress on human rights remained difficult over the last three months. Terrorist attacks continued to occur on an almost daily basis, with the UN reporting over 2,300 people killed between October and December. The majority of these attacks were directed at civilians. We have repeatedly raised our concerns with the Iraqi authorities, and have urged all political entities in Iraq to work together to reject extremism. The Foreign Secretary expressed his concern about current levels of violence when he met the Iraqi Speaker on 10 October and the Iraqi Foreign Minister on 25 November. Tension in the western provinces has continued, with a number of violent clashes and a significant mobilisation of Iraqi security forces.

Iraq's minority communities continued to be targeted by terrorists as part of the increased violence. On 6 October attacks on the Turkmen village of Qabak, which included a suicide attack on a school, left 17 people dead, including 13 children and many more wounded. A suicide bomb attack on the village of Mwafaqiya in Ninewa Province, which is inhabited by the Shabak minority, left at least 15 people dead and 52 people wounded, most of whom were children and women. In December, an assassination attempt was made on the Iraqi Turkmen Front leader Arshad al-Salihi, and a further 17 Turkmen were killed on 20 December in Latifya and Tuz Khurmatu. On Christmas Day two bombs in Christian areas of Baghdad, one outside a church, reportedly claimed 37 lives. Our Chargé d'Affaires in Baghdad joined others in condemnation of these attacks.

During the build-up to the Day of Ashura, an important date in the Shia Muslim calendar, during which Shia Muslims have been targeted by extremists in the past, Iraqi security forces reportedly carried out indiscriminate, mass arrests. We share Human Rights Watch's concerns about these incidents, including reports that a number of individuals were detained without arrest warrants and held for several days without Iraqi authorities notifying their families or putting them before an investigative judge.

We remain concerned by Iraq's continued application of the death penalty including mass executions. Between 8-9 October, 42 people were executed, mostly for offences related to terrorism. This means that at least 177 people have been executed in 2013, making Iraq the country with the third highest number of executions in the world. Disappointingly, both the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Human Rights publicly reaffirmed their support for Iraq's use of the death penalty during this period. HM Ambassador Baghdad joined other EU Heads of Mission as signatories to a statement on World Day Against the Death Penalty in October, which expressed

deep concern at Iraq's use of the death penalty, and called on the government of Iraq to introduce a moratorium.

There were a number of attacks on journalists during the reporting period, including the assassination of at least five journalists in Mosul. We are also troubled by reports of a list of 44 journalists that armed groups in the area have targeted for assassination. HM Ambassador Baghdad condemned the assassination of two al-Shariqya journalists in a statement on 6 October. There were also reports of journalists being arrested by Iraqi security forces after they had reported on politically sensitive topics, such as corruption or the worsening security situation. This is a worrying trend as Iraq prepares for parliamentary elections in April 2014. In the Kurdistan region, Kawa Garmiyani, editor-in-chief of Rayalla magazine and correspondent of Sulaimaniya-based Awina Newspaper, was assassinated outside his home in Kalar on 5 December. HM Consul General in Erbil called on the Kurdistan Regional Government to honour its commitment to investigate the attack and to bring those responsible to justice.

In November and December, the global campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence was marked enthusiastically across Iraq with a number of events hosted by the international community, the Iraqi government, civil society and political parties, demonstrating public support for change. But the reality for most women remains difficult. In October, a draft personal status law was tabled which would have reduced women's rights, lowering the age of marriage and changing custody and inheritance rights. Civil society rallied against the draft law, and with little public or political support, it was rejected by the Iraqi parliament.

The first EU-Iraq subcommittee meeting on human rights and democracy took place in Baghdad in November. The meeting, led by Foreign Minister Zebari and attended by a range of Iraqi ministries, was an opportunity for a structured dialogue on a range of human rights issues, including the justice system and the death penalty.

We were concerned by a further attack on Camp Liberty on 26 December. This attack was reported to have left three residents dead, and a number of others, including Iraqi guards, injured. On 27 December, our Embassy in Baghdad released a statement condemning the attack and other violence over the Christmas period.

Update: 30 September 2013

We remain concerned by the deteriorating security situation in Iraq and the increasing frequency of coordinated attacks. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, almost 3,000 people were killed in acts of terrorism between July and September with many more wounded. We have publicly condemned these attacks, the majority of which target civilians, and are often in places of worship or at markets.

On 21 July coordinated attacks on Abu Ghraib prison, on the western outskirts of Baghdad, and Taji prison, 12 miles north of the city, resulted in the escape of several hundred prisoners, most of whom were believed to be convicted terrorists affiliated with Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The then Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, made a statement on 23 July condemning the attack.

This incident, and the increase in terrorist attacks, has led to a resumption of executions in Iraq. On 19 August, 17 prisoners were executed, of which 16 were for terrorism-related convictions. On 22

September, 13 people were executed, and on 26 September a further ten prisoners were executed, mostly for terrorism-related convictions. This all follows a suspension of the use of the death penalty by the government in April this year in response to protests taking place in Western Iraq. HM Ambassador to Iraq formally raised our serious concerns about the resumption of executions with the Iraqi Foreign Minister, and on 22 August the EU High Representative Baroness Ashton issued a statement of concern on behalf of EU Member States, and urged the government of Iraq to move towards a moratorium.

On 31 August a number of individuals protesting in Nasiriyah and Baghdad were assaulted and detained by police. This followed reports that several provinces had refused to issue permits allowing people to protest. On 2 August Iraqi Security Forces in Baghdad are reported to have detained 13 people to prevent them from protesting against corruption and the deteriorating security situation in the country. Some of those detained also claim they were assaulted by security forces. We share Human Rights Watch's concerns about this incident, and the government of Iraq's use of regulations which allow police to prevent peaceful protest. We are also concerned by reports that Iraqi Security Forces raided Baghdadiya TV station offices on 13 September.

Iraq's ethnic and religious minority communities continued to be targeted by extremists during this period. On 12 July an explosion in a coffee shop in Kirkuk left 30 members of the Turkmen community dead. On 14 September at least 23 members of the Shabak community were killed following an attack on a funeral in the village of Arto Kharab near Mosul.

On 1 September an attack on the residents of Camp Ashraf left 52 people dead. The UK publicly condemned this attack, and we call on the Iraqi government to honour its subsequent commitment to conduct an open and transparent investigation. We welcome the transfer of the surviving residents to Camp Liberty and urge the government of Iraq to take the necessary steps to ensure the safety of residents at Camp Liberty. We also note that UN monitors have reported human rights concerns inside the camp, including denial of medical care by the camp leadership, restrictions on movement, expression, contact with others and access to information.

Update: 30 June 2013

We are concerned by the increased levels of violence taking place across Iraq in recent months, including reports that over 1000 people were killed in May alone. Responsibility lies squarely with terrorist groups, whose attacks claim victims from all communities in Iraq. We have repeatedly condemned these attacks, most recently in a statement made by Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt on 28 May.

There were several incidents of concern involving Iraqi Security Forces and Police during the reporting period. On 23 April clashes between Iraqi Security Forces and armed protestors in Hawija left at least 50 protestors and 6 soldiers dead and many wounded, while Human Rights Watch reported that federal police executed four men and a 15-year-old boy, south of Mosul on 3 May. Witnesses report last seeing the victims in the custody of the federal police 3rd Division, commanded by Gen. Mehdi Gharawi. We call on the government of Iraq to complete its investigation of these incidents in an open and transparent way and for those responsible to be held accountable.

We remain concerned about reports of threats to freedom of expression, in particular media freedoms. On 7 April the government banned foreign journalists from travelling to Anbar province, where many of the protests currently taking place across Iraq are being staged. There were also reports that three news agencies in Baghdad were attacked on 1 April after they published articles about a senior Shia cleric and his close relationship with Prime Minister Maliki.

On 28 April the independent Commission of Media & Communications revoked the operating licenses of 10 TV channels. The UK condemns this decision and believes that it represents a further, disproportionate use of regulatory policy, violating fundamental principles of media freedom. On 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, HM Ambassador to Iraq hosted a round table with 20 journalists from Iraq's major news channels. He also conducted a number of one-to-one TV interviews in which he condemned the decision. On 27-28 May, our Consul-General in the Kurdistan region of Iraq participated in a Conference called 'Media, Politics and Democracy in Iraq – Towards a Better Understanding'. Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani opened the Conference with a keynote speech on Freedom and Responsibility.

On 22 April, HM Ambassador to Iraq joined other EU Heads of Mission as a signatory to an article in Zaman newspaper expressing concern at Iraq's use of the death penalty, and calling on the government of Iraq to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. So far this year, 53 people have been executed in Iraq, the majority for terrorism offences. We welcome the recent press reports of the suspension of Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Act which carries the death penalty and call on the government of Iraq to review it thoroughly before any reinstatement.

The UK remains troubled by the situation facing Iraq's minority ethnic and religious communities. We were particularly concerned by the attacks on 25 June on members of Iraq's Turkmen community near Tuz Khurmato, which left at least 10 people dead, and on a church in Baghdad, which left at least three policemen injured. The incidents followed reports of an attack on members of Iraq's Yazidi community in Baghdad on 14 May, which left at least 12 people dead, and the assassination on 26 April of Jalal Diab, a leading advocate for minority rights in Iraq. We call on the government of Iraq to investigate these incidents fully, and to ensure that all members of Iraqi society are protected from discrimination and violence.

The UK is concerned by the attack on 15 June on Camp Liberty and its residents, in which two residents were killed and many injured. Mr Burt issued a statement on 16 June condemning the attack and calling for the government of Iraq to investigate the incident fully and to ensure that those responsible are found and brought to justice.

Update: 31 March 2013

We were deeply concerned by the deaths on 25 January of at least seven people who were killed when Iraqi troops opened fire on protestors in the north western province of Anbar. We understand that a number of soldiers were also killed, and others kidnapped, in what are believed to be reprisal attacks by militant supporters of the protests. Alistair Burt, FCO Minister for the Middle East, issued a statement on 28 January calling on all political groups to work together to resolve the current disputes and welcoming the Government of Iraq's announcement that it would conduct a full investigation into the deaths. A protestor was also killed by Iraqi troops in Mosul during another incident on 8 March.

The UK remains concerned by aspects of the administration of justice in Iraq, particularly allegations that women in detention in facilities administered by the Ministry of Interior have been mistreated and subjected to torture. While we welcome the Government of Iraq's establishment of a committee to visit prisons and detention centres and inspect the conditions of female detainees, it is important that alleged cases of abuse are thoroughly investigated and perpetrators of any mistreatment brought to justice. Mr Burt raised the issue with Adnan al Assadi, Senior Deputy Minister for the Interior, during his visit to Iraq in February. More recently, there were reports (which appear to be validated by online video footage) that detainees in Nasiriyah and Baghdad Central Prison facilities, both of which are administered by the Ministry of Justice, have been subjected to torture.

As part of their response to the protests the Government of Iraq agreed to review all death penalty convictions. This was a welcome development, and we were therefore concerned by reports that a number of executions took place in March, the first since November 2012. More positively, we welcome the withdrawal by the Parliamentary Culture Committee of the Information Crimes Law, which, as drafted, had the potential to restrict significantly freedom of expression.

The UK condemns the rocket attacks of 9 February on the residents of Camp Liberty, which are reported to have killed eight people and injured many others, including Iraqi guards. Mr Burt raised the attack and the humanitarian situation of residents with the Iraqi Minister for Foreign Affairs during his visit to Iraq in February. We call on the Government of Iraq to ensure the security and safety of the residents of Camp Liberty.
