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Iraq: Grave concern at recent killings of men because of their sexual orientation

Amnesty international has written to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki expressing grave concern about a reported spate of killings of young men solely because of their sexual orientation and calling for urgent and concerted action by the government to bring those responsible to justice and to afford effective protection to the gay community in Iraq.

Over the last few weeks at least 25 boys and men are reported to have been killed in Baghdad because they were, or were perceived to be, gay. The killings are said to have been carried out by armed Shi'a militiamen as well as by members of the tribes and families of the victims. Certain religious leaders, especially in al-Sadr City neighbourhood, are also reported in recent weeks to have urged their followers to take action to eradicate homosexuality in Iraqi society, in terms which appear effectively to constitute at least an implicit, if not explicit, incitement to violence against members of the gay community. Three corpses of gay men are reported to have been found in al-Sadr City on 2 and 3 April 2009; two of the bodies are said to have had pieces of paper bearing the word "pervert" attached to them, suggesting that the victims had been murdered on account of their sexual identity.

In the letter sent to the Prime Minister Amnesty International expressed concern at the government's failure to publicly condemn the killings and ensure that they are promptly and effectively investigated, and that the perpetrators are brought to justice. The letter also drew attention to reported statements by one senior police officer that appear to condone or even encourage the targeting of members of the gay community in Baghdad, in gross breach of the law and international human rights standards.

Amnesty International reminded the Iraqi government that it is a fundamental principle of international human rights law, including international treaties that have been ratified by and are binding on Iraq, that "All human beings are equal in dignity and rights" and are entitled to all rights and freedom set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, without distinction of any kind, such as on grounds of race, sex, religion, political, or other status, including sexual orientation and gender identity. The organization called on Prime Minister al-Maliki to take immediate and concrete steps to address this situation, including to publicly condemn, unreservedly and in the strongest terms, all attacks on members of the gay community or others on account of their sexual, gender, ethnic or other identity, and to commit to ensuring that those responsible for such abuses are identified and brought to justice. Further, police officers or other officials who encourage, condone or acquiesce in such attacks must also be held to account and either prosecuted or disciplined and removed from office.

Public Document

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