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Head of state: **Jalal Talabani**

Head of government: **Nuri al-Maliki**

Thousands of people were detained; hundreds were sentenced to death or prison terms, many after unfair trials and on terrorism-related charges. Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remained rife and were committed with impunity. Hundreds of prisoners were on death row. At least 129 people were executed, including at least three women. Armed groups opposed to the government continued to commit gross human rights abuses, killing hundreds of civilians in suicide and other bomb attacks. Harassment, intimidation and violence against journalists and media workers continued to be reported. Over 67,000 refugees from Syria sought safety in Iraq.

Background

The political stalemate in parliament continued to stifle the legislative progress, preventing, among other things, the adoption of an amnesty law. Political tensions were exacerbated by the arrest of scores of people associated with Vice-President Tareq al-Hashemi, who fled from Baghdad after he was accused of organizing death squads. In December 2011 Iraqi television broadcast "confessions" by detainees reported to have worked for him as bodyguards, who said they had been paid by the Vice-President to commit killings. The Vice-President evaded capture but was charged, tried and sentenced to death in his absence in September, together with his son-in-law, Ahmad Qahtan, in connection with the murder of a woman lawyer and government official. They received further death sentences in their absence in November and December following further trials.

Relations between the Baghdad authorities and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) remained fraught due to differences over the distribution of oil revenues and the continuing dispute over internal boundaries.

Young people, particularly those seen locally as nonconformists, were subject to a campaign of intimidation after flyers and signs targeting them appeared in the Baghdad neighbourhoods of Sadr City, al-Hababiya and Hay al-'Amal in February. Those targeted included youths suspected of homosexual conduct and those seen as pursuing an alternative lifestyle because of their distinctive hairstyles, clothes or musical tastes.

In March, the League of Arab States held its summit meeting in Baghdad for the first time since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Prior to the meeting, the security forces carried out mass arrests in Baghdad, apparently as a "preventive" measure.

In April, parliament approved the establishment of an Independent High Commission for Human Rights.

In December, tens of thousands of mostly Sunni Iraqis began holding peaceful daily anti-government protests against the abuse of detainees. The unrest was triggered by the detention of several bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafi'e al-Issawi, a senior Sunni political leader, and by allegations of sexual and other abuse of women detainees. Parliamentary committees delegated to examine these allegations reached conflicting conclusions.

Abuses by armed groups

Armed groups opposed to the government continued to commit gross human rights abuses, including indiscriminate killings of civilians.

- On 5 January, at least 55 civilians, including Shi'a pilgrims making their way to Karbala, were killed and dozens injured in suicide bombings and other attacks. The attacks targeted predominantly Shi'a districts in Baghdad, including Sadr City and Khadimiya, and a police checkpoint near al-Nassirya where pilgrims were waiting to travel south.
- At least 100 people, both civilians and members of the security forces, were killed on 23 July in a wave of bomb attacks and shootings in Baghdad and other cities, including Kirkuk and Taji.
- At least 81 people, including many civilians, were killed on 9 September in a wave of co-ordinated bomb attacks in Baghdad, Baquba, Samarra, Basra and other cities.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment were common and widespread in prisons and detention centres, particularly those controlled by the Ministries of the Interior and Defence, and were committed with impunity. Methods included suspension by the limbs for long periods, beatings with cables and hoses, the infliction of electric shocks, breaking of limbs, partial asphyxiation with plastic bags, and sexual abuse including threats of rape. Torture was used to extract information from detainees and "confessions" that could be used as evidence against them at trial.

- Nabhan 'Adel Hamid, Mu'ad Muhammad 'Abed, 'Amer Ahmad Kassar and Shakir Mahmoud 'Anad were arrested in Ramadi and Fallujah at the end of March/early April. They were reported to have been tortured while held incommunicado for several weeks at the Directorate of Counter-Crime in Ramadi. Their "confessions" were then broadcast on local television. When brought to trial, they told the Anbar Criminal Court that they had been forced under torture to "confess" to assisting in murder. Witness testimony of fellow detainees supported their torture allegations. A medical examination of one defendant recorded burns and injuries consistent with torture. Despite this, all four men were sentenced to death on 3 December. No independent investigation into their torture allegations was known to have been held.

Deaths in custody

Several detainees died in custody in circumstances suggesting that torture or other ill-treatment caused or contributed to their deaths.

- 'Amer Sarbut Zaidan al-Battawi, a former bodyguard of Vice-President al-Hashemi, died in detention in March. His family alleged that marks on his body had been caused by torture. Authorities denied that his death was caused by torture and announced further investigations.
- Samir Naji 'Awda al-Bilawi, a pharmacist, and his 13-year-old son, Mundhir, were detained by security forces at a vehicle checkpoint in Ramadi in September. Three days later, his family learned that Samir Naji 'Awda al-Bilawi had died in custody. Images they released to Iraqi media showed injuries to his head and both hands. Following his release, Mundhir said he and his father had been assaulted at a police station then taken to the Directorate of Counter-Crime in Ramadi and tortured, including with electric shocks. He said he was ordered to tell an investigating judge that his father was connected to a terrorist organization. Lawyers for the family were allowed to read but not copy an official autopsy report that reportedly said Samir Naji 'Awda al-Bilawi's death was due to torture, including electric shocks. No action was known to have been taken against those responsible by the end of the year.

Counter-terrorism and security

The authorities arrested and detained hundreds of people on terrorism charges for their alleged participation in bomb and other attacks on security forces and civilians. Many alleged that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated in pre-trial detention and were convicted and sentenced after unfair trials. In some cases, the authorities allowed Iraqi television stations to broadcast footage of detainees making self-incriminating statements before they were brought to trial, gravely prejudicing their right to a fair trial. Some were subsequently sentenced to death. The Ministry of Interior paraded detainees before press conferences at which they "confessed". The Ministry also regularly uploaded detainees' "confessions" on its YouTube channel.

- In late May, the Ministry of Interior paraded at least 16 detainees accused of belonging to an armed group linked to al-Qa'ida at a press conference and gave television stations recordings of some of them making self-incriminating statements. At the press conference, one of the detainees, Baghdad Provincial Council member Laith Mustafa al-Dulaimi, protested and shouted out that he and others had been abused.
- Ramzi Shihab Ahmad, a 70-year-old with joint Iraqi and British nationality, was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on 20 June by the Resafa Criminal Court for helping to fund terrorist groups and issuing religious fatwas. The court accepted his "confession" made in pre-trial detention as evidence, despite strong indications that it was obtained through torture.

Death penalty

As in previous years, many, possibly hundreds, of people were sentenced to death, swelling the number of prisoners on death row. Most were convicted on terrorism-related charges. Ramadi's Tasfirat Prison held 33 prisoners sentenced to death during the first half of the year, 27 of whom had been convicted on terrorism charges. Trials consistently failed to meet international standards of fairness; many defendants alleged that they were tortured during interrogation in pre-trial detention and forced to "confess".

- Muhammad Hussain and Sohail Akram, two associates of Vice-President al-Hashemi, were sentenced to death in October after the Central Criminal Court convicted them of murdering security officers.

At least 129 prisoners were executed, more than in any year since executions resumed in 2005. The authorities sometimes carried out multiple executions; 34 prisoners were executed in one day in January and 21 prisoners, including three women, were executed in one day in August. In September at least 18 women were reported to be on death row in a prison in the al-Kadhemiya district of Baghdad.

- 'Abid Hamid Mahmoud, formerly Saddam Hussein's presidential secretary and bodyguard, was executed in June. He was sentenced to death in October 2010 by the Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

The process of gradually relocating some 3,200 Iranian political exiles from Camp New Iraq (formerly "Camp Ashraf") to Hurriya Transit Center ("Camp Liberty"), north-east of Baghdad, began in February and was nearly completed at the end of the year. They were long-term residents of Iraq and most were members or supporters of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran. They accused Iraqi security forces of attacking some of them while they were being relocated and criticized living conditions at Camp Liberty. In July, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, publicly urged the international community to offer resettlement places or other forms of humanitarian admission to the residents of Camp Liberty.

The worsening conflict in neighbouring Syria impacted heavily on Iraq. Over 67,000 refugees from Syria crossed into Iraq, mostly after 18 July, and mostly entering the Kurdistan Region. Thousands of Iraqi refugees returned from Syria. In October, the Iraqi authorities violated international law by closing al-Qaem border crossing to refugees fleeing Syria, except in emergency cases. Following an earlier closure in August, restricted access had been allowed.

Kurdistan region of Iraq

Tension between the KRG and the central government in Baghdad remained high. In June, Kurdistan's parliament adopted a general amnesty law applicable to the Kurdistan region. The amnesty law excluded prisoners convicted of "honour" killings, rape, terrorism and drug trafficking crimes.

The KRG authorities continued to target some who spoke out against official corruption or expressed dissent. Incidents of torture or other ill-treatment continued to be reported.

- Hussein Hama Ali Tawfiq, a businessman, was arrested on 27 March. He was taken to General Security (Asayish) in Suleimaniya where he was reportedly blindfolded, punched and beaten with an object while his hands were cuffed diagonally across his back. He was told to testify against others in a corruption case but refused. He was then charged with bribery and remained in detention until his acquittal in November. No investigations into his torture allegations were known to have been conducted.

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