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There is no justification for the ongoing unlawful attacks on civilians by car and suicide bombs in Iraq.

An attack on November 19, 2014, targeting Erbil's governorate building killed at least 10 civilians and wounded dozens more. Attacks the same day in Baghdad killed or wounded 18 civilians. In early October, at the beginning of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar and especially holy for Shia worshippers, five car bomb attacks in Karbala killed at least 15 people and injured another 48. Since then, other bombings have killed dozens more in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and elsewhere.

"Bombings across Iraq are killing and maiming civilians in attacks so frequent they barely make the local news," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director. "But a government response that too often includes arbitrary arrests and summary executions will only fuel the cycle of abuses."

Iraq's central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government should redouble efforts to protect all civilians - Sunni and Shia, Arab and Kurd, and other minorities - in their fight against the militant group Islamic State (also known as ISIS), which has claimed responsibility for many of the attacks. Iraqi authorities have frequently responded to ISIS attacks with human rights abuses against Sunni civilians, including arbitrary arrests and detentions. In July, Human Rights Watch documented government-backed militias' summary execution of dozens of Sunni civilians in areas where they are battling ISIS.

Erbil Mayor Tahir Ali said that the suicide bomber tried to storm the building but detonated his explosive as security forces shot him before he could get inside. As well as the deadly Baghdad bombings on November 19, a car bomb in eastern Kirkuk wounded five civilians that day.

The Kurdistan Regional Government's Security Council said in a statement on November 19 that the influx into the region of more than 1 million people fleeing violence elsewhere in Iraq threatened security, and stated that "terrorists" were taking advantage of the influx to infiltrate.

For several months, Kurdish authorities have refused entry to Arab Iraqis seeking refuge in the autonomous region. In late October, Human Rights Watch researchers witnessed Kurdish Peshmerga troops and Kurdish intelligence police known as Asayish pushing families away from checkpoints outside Kirkuk and Erbil, yelling "No Arabs!"

Regional government authorities said Kurdish security forces would respond to the Erbil attack "with a heavy hand." But the authorities' response to such attacks should be limited to those responsible and adhere to the rule of law, avoiding arbitrary travel blocks against Arabs or other forms of collective punishment, Human Rights Watch said.

The November 19 attacks are part of an ongoing series of atrocities throughout Iraq, Human Rights Watch said. On November 11, a suicide bomber killed six police and two other civilians in an attack in Beiji, where ISIS has been fighting government forces and militia for months. On November 13, ISIS claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing at a police headquarters in west Baghdad that killed 11 people, saying a Dutch ISIS member carried out the attack. State forces frequently report having killed suspected attackers but it has not been possible to verify their claims.

"The brutal killings across Iraq underscore the need to protect all civilians, especially those fleeing violence," Stork said. "An effective response should end impunity for abuses by militias and government security forces as well as ISIS."

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