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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN IRAQ

ISSUE

Politically isolated by the international community and shaken by defections of leading officials, the Iraqi regime continues to stifle all forms of political dissent and oversee the general impoverishment of its citizens in a rapidly declining economy.

BACKGROUND

President Saddam Hussein enjoys a personal monopoly of political power in Iraq, enforced through the extensive Baath Party apparatus and the omnipresent security services. The Baathist regime, has never allowed its citizens even the most basic civil and political rights, repressing all forms of dissent by torture, disappearances, executions and assassinations. The government exercises total control over all forms of media and tightly controls all political life including sham elections and referenda.

In the last year, the defection of close members of the President's family, holding prominent government and military positions, prompted President Hussein to recast his inner circle, replacing some family members with Baath Party loyalists. The regime has also sought to neutralize the military by infiltrating party stalwarts, rotating officers and periodically purging the officer corps. Baghdad executed several high-ranking officers in 1995 on charges of sedition, the most well known case being General al-Dulaimi, whose mutilated corpse was returned to his family, setting off a riot in his home town of Ramadi.

Baghdad defies UN Security Council Resolution 688's requirement to end repression of its civilian population. It maintains an internal embargo on Iraqi Kurdistan and represses the mainly Shia south. Although the government has not singled out Iraqi Christians, some fear that Islamic-inspired laws, e.g. the ban on public consumption of alcohol, mandatory Islamic studies in public schools, and *Sharia* penalties for economic crimes, will erode religious freedom.

UN sanctions, particularly the prohibition of selling oil, have severely depressed the Iraqi economy, resulting in general impoverishment, deteriorating government services and shortages of medicine and food. The regime has rejected UNSC Resolution 986 allowing for UN-supervised selling of limited quantities of Iraqi oil (up to US\$ 1 billion per quarter) to purchase food, medicine and other humanitarian items.

The average wage of 4000-5000 dinars a month (\$2-2.5) is barely enough to buy two kg. of meat. The government has staved off famine by an efficiently managed rations system, providing 30-50% of the population's calorie needs. Some UN agencies and NGOs anticipate that the decline of government revenues will soon lead to a collapse of this system.

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