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IRAQ

ISSUE

The Government of Iraq has for many years waged war on its own citizens. During the last eight years, the rights of a number of ethnic and religious communities have been systematically violated. The regime brutally represses the population through murder, summary execution, mutilation, torture and incommunicado detention. There is no semblance of freedom of expression and the death penalty is prescribed for criticizing the government and government officials.

BACKGROUND

From the end of Iraq's war with Iran in 1988 until the present, the regime of President Saddam Hussein has maintained its overall control of Iraq, despite several major internal and external crises, by launching attacks on specific groups within the country and by maintaining a reign of terror against the population, including all potential rivals for power. The officer class, various tribal clans, and significant minorities have all been singled out for especially cruel treatment by the Iraqi leadership.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iraq has reported not only on the extensive sufferings of the general population at the hands of the regime but also on the organized forced displacement of ethnic minorities (Kurds, Turcomans, Assyrians) and the alarming situation of children in rural areas. Iraqi forces continue to launch military actions against the majority Shi'a population in the southern region. Rumours abound of regular purges of the officer corps for suspected sedition.

The Special Rapporteur also reported that the system of military dictatorship effectively requires that human rights violations occur in order to maintain the positions and privileges of those in power and that government authorities place little value on human life. The Special Rapporteur's September 1998 report condemned an execution campaign in Iraqi prisons and the assassination of two leading Shi'a religious leaders.

In the past year, both the Commission on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly Third Committee have passed resolutions, by very large majorities, strongly condemning human rights violations in Iraq. Canada co-sponsored both resolutions. These resolutions condemn human rights violations such as summary and arbitrary executions, arbitrary detention of political and religious opponents, enforced or involuntary disappearances, torture, denial of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and forced displacement and deportation of Iraqi citizens. The CHR resolution also expressed concern over the use of chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians as well as the destruction of their towns and villages.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada does not favour the ending of UN sanctions against Iraq until Iraq fully complies with all relevant UN Security Council resolutions. The Iraqi record on human rights is so appalling that what is required is nothing less than a fundamental change in the behaviour of the Iraqi Government towards its own citizens.

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