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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN IRAQ

ISSUE

The human rights situation in Iraq continues to be of serious concern to the international community. While this concern was manifest before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, it became the subject of specific consideration by the United Nations in the aftermath of the Gulf war in March 1991.

BACKGROUND

The serious abuses of human rights in Iraq are primarily political and are designed to maintain and reinforce the monopoly of power of Saddam Hussein, the ruling Ba'ath party, and its main controlling institution, the Revolutionary Command Council. It, in turn, is supported by an omnipresent security apparatus. Violence in Iraqi politics has existed for years, but was exacerbated by Saddam's wars against his neighbours. In the aftermath of the Gulf war, he took draconian measures to put down rebellions by elements of the population not associated with the ruling Sunni elite - the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south - and moved to consolidate his power in the face of international pressure against his regime.

UN reports paint a grave picture for human rights in Iraq. They include detailed descriptions of a wide variety of illegal abuses such as arbitrary detention, disappearances, torture of the cruellest kind and other inhuman practices, political killings, summary or arbitrary executions, extreme and indiscriminate measures in the control of civil disturbances, and hostage taking and use of persons as "human shields" in the Gulf crisis. Constitutional, legislative and judicial protection, while on paper, are revealed as totally ineffective in combatting human rights abuses in Iraq.

Repression and loss of life associated with these abuses has been very high, particularly for thousands of Kurdish civilians forcibly taken from their homes or subjected to chemical weapons attacks (such as the town of Halabja in March of 1988). Repression against Shiites has also been intense. The interim report of the human rights situation in Southern Iraq, submitted by Special Rapporteur Max van der Stoep in August 1992, detailed systematic abuses of the Shiite community. At least in part, this report prompted the imposition of the Southern "no fly" zone in late August. In 1993, the Iraqi Government began to systematically drain the southern marches and destroy the habitat and villages of the Marsh Arabs to better control the Shiite insurgency.

Security Council resolution 688, (passed on April 5, 1991 at the height of the abortive efforts by Kurds and Shiites to rebel against Saddam Hussein's regime), demanded an end to the repression of the Iraqi civilian population, insisted that Iraq cooperate with humanitarian organizations and take measures to ensure that the human and political rights of all Iraqi citizens are respected. By the reference to the threat to international peace and security, this

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