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Iraq: Security Council needs to deploy human rights monitors now

"Whatever the outcome of the debate on the disarmament of Iraq, the protection of the human rights of the people of Iraq will remain a central concern. Concrete measures to address the human rights situation in Iraq must be considered as a matter of urgency," said Secretary General Irene Khan.

"It is essential that arrangements for the speedy deployment of sufficient numbers of qualified human rights monitors begins immediately. The Security Council has recognized the role of monitors in other country situations. It is time to do so with Iraq."

Amnesty International is calling on the United Nations (UN) Security Council to authorize the deployment of UN human rights monitors throughout Iraq and on the Iraqi government and the Kurdish authorities controlling parts of northern Iraq to provide the monitors with all the necessary access and cooperation.

In a new paper released today, Iraq: The need to deploy human rights monitors, Amnesty International argues that UN human rights monitors can make a crucial contribution to addressing human rights concerns in Iraq regardless of whether there will be a major military action in Iraq.

Human rights monitors can make a difference. They are needed now to address the current grave human rights concerns in Iraq. They would also play a crucial role in the immediate aftermath of any possible large-scale military action against Iraq, as the human rights situation in the country may deteriorate further. In the longer term a human rights field presence in the country would provide necessary expertise and advice for legislative and institutional reform and the establishment of the rule of law.

Human rights monitors would seek to provide protection by pro-actively addressing the authorities. They would work to ensure the establishment of durable human rights safeguards, including reformed legislation, practices and institutions, and promote the full range of human rights.

In addition, human rights monitors would provide the Security Council and other organs of the UN with much needed authoritative and timely information on human rights developments in Iraq.

The deployment of human rights monitors has been called for since 1993 by the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights. Between 1994 and 1998 monitors gathered information on behalf of the Commission's Special Rapporteur on Iraq by visiting countries neighbouring Iraq. The Iraqi government has granted access to the Special Rapporteur, but has not allowed the stationing of human rights monitors in the country.