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Iraq: Amnesty International appalled by stoning to death of Yezidi girl and subsequent killings

Amnesty International is appalled by the killing of Du'a Khalil Aswad, aged about 17, who was stoned to death on or around 7 April 2007 for a so-called honour crime. A member of Iraq's Yezidi religious minority from the village of Bahzan in northern Iraq, she was killed by a group of eight or nine men and in the presence of a large crowd in the town of Bashika, near the city of Mosul. Some of her relatives are said to have participated in the killing.

Du'a Khalil Aswad's murder is said to have been committed by relatives and other Yezidi men because she had engaged in a relationship with a Sunni Muslim boy and had been absent from her home for one night. Some reports suggested that she had converted to Islam, but others deny this. Initially, she was reportedly given shelter in the house of a Yezidi tribal leader in Bashika, but her killers stormed the house, took her outside and stoned her to death. Her death by stoning, which lasted for some 30 minutes, was recorded on video film which was then widely distributed and is available on the internet. The film reportedly shows that members of local security forces were present but failed to intervene to prevent the stoning or arrest those responsible.

In an apparent act of retaliation, some 23 Yezidi workers were attacked and killed on 22 April, apparently by members of a Sunni armed group. The Yezidis, reportedly all men, were travelling on a bus between Mosul and Bashika when the vehicle was stopped by gunmen, who made the Yezidis disembark and then summarily killed them.

Amnesty International condemns in the strongest terms both the murder of Du'a Khalil Aswad and the subsequent murders of the Yezidi men, and is calling on the Iraqi authorities to take immediate steps to identify and bring to justice, through fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty, the perpetrators of these killings. As well, the organization is calling on the Iraqi authorities to investigate whether law enforcement officials were present but failed to intervene to prevent Du'a Khalil Aswad's death by stoning, and to take urgent, concrete measures, including through legislative reforms, to protect those at risk of becoming victims of so-called "honour crimes."

Background

There are frequent reports of "honour crimes" in Iraq - in particular in the predominantly Kurdish north of the country. Most victims of "honour crimes" are women and girls who are considered by



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their male relatives and others to have shamed the women's families by immoral behaviour. Often grounds for such accusations are flimsy and no more than rumour. "Honour crimes" are most often perpetrated by male members of the woman's family in the belief that such crimes restore their and their family's honour. While the Kurdish authorities introduced legal reforms to address "honour killings" they have, however, failed to investigate and prosecute those responsible for such crimes. Amnesty International has documented its concerns about Iraqi women victims of human rights violations, including "honour crimes", in a report issued in February 2005 (*Iraq: Decades of suffering-Now women deserve better*, AI Index: MDE 14/001/2005, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE140012005?open&of=ENG-IRQ>)

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