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Iraq: First judicial executions in post Saddam Hussain era "a deeply retrograde step"

Amnesty International today strongly deplored the hangings yesterday of three people in Iraq, and described the first judicial executions since the overthrow of Saddam Hussain as a deeply retrograde step. According to Iraqi government spokesman Leith Kubba, Ahmad al-Jaf, 'Uday Dawud al-Dulaimi and Jasim 'Abbas, were hanged at 10.00 am on 1 September 2005.

All three were said to be members of the Ansar al-Sunna armed group and to have been tried and convicted by a criminal court in al-Kut, southeast of Baghdad, on charges of kidnapping, killing police officers and raping women, and sentenced to death on 22 May 2005.

At least 50 people have been sentenced to death in Iraq in recent months and Amnesty International fears that these first executions will be followed by many more.

Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned human rights abuses by armed groups who have committed crimes against humanity and war crimes in Iraq. However, the organization is opposed to the use of the death penalty, which it considers as cruel and inhuman punishment, in all circumstances. The death penalty has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than any other method.

From 1968 until 2003 when the Ba'ath party was in power, thousands of people were executed in Iraq after grossly unfair trials. In the 1980s and, especially, 1990s, the death penalty was extensively used for a wide-range of offences, including for example membership of underground political opposition parties such as al-Da'wa Party.

The death penalty was suspended by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in June 2003, but re-instated by the Iraqi interim government on 8 August, following the 28 June 2004 transfer of power.

Amnesty International is calling on the Iraqi government to reverse its policy and not to allow more executions. At the very least, the organisation said, there should be a moratorium on executions. The Iraqi authorities must ensure that all prisoners facing capital charges receive fair trials, including adequate legal assistance at all stages of the proceedings, and the full opportunity to appeal against conviction and sentence to a higher judicial body.

