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Jordan: Secretary General Irene Khan discusses Iraq with King Abdullah

"The human rights and humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people must be at the forefront of the debate on Iraq," said Amnesty International Secretary General, Irene Khan at the end of her visit to Jordan. Speaking after an audience with His Majesty King Abdullah bin Hussein, Ms Khan welcomed his call for greater attention to be given to the humanitarian situation inside Iraq in case of war.

King Abdullah gave assurances that Jordan would provide protection for refugees in the event of hostilities, and give access to international organizations.

"Jordan has a long tradition of receiving refugees," said Irene Khan. "The international community must support Jordan and other neighbouring countries and make sure that there are adequate funds to protect and assist those who flee."

As tensions grow with the threat of war, and as freedom of expression and assembly come under increased pressure, Amnesty International's Secretary General emphasised the need for human rights to be protected in Jordan. She welcomed King Abdullah's commitment that "people must be able to express their views" and his readiness to look into existing legislation, including law 54 of 2001, which has been used to restrict freedom of expression and arrest and detain people.

The visit to Jordan is part of Amnesty International's campaign to lobby UN member states, including governments in the Middle East region, to ensure that the human rights and humanitarian implications of the Iraq crisis are fully taken into account. Amnesty International has been seeking permission to visit Iraq since 1983 and has recently received a positive response from the government of Iraq.

"We are seeking serious dialogue. We are aware that in this highly charged political situation human rights can be a tool for manipulation by any side. But we must seek an answer to the serious human rights concerns we have had in Iraq for decades," said Irene Khan.

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