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Public Statement

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Iraq: Amnesty International condemns the killing of a trial lawyer and urges greater protection for the defence team

Amnesty International urged the Iraqi authorities and the US-led Multinational Force (MNF) today to guarantee protection for all the legal team involved in the trial of former President Saddam Hussein and seven other people. The organization strongly condemns the killing of Iraqi trial lawyer Sa'dun al-Janabi whose body was found in Baghdad today.

Sa'dun al-Janabi was representing 'Awad Hamad al-Bandar al-Sa'dun, a former judge at the revolutionary court and one of Saddam Hussein's seven co-defendants at the first session of the trial on 19 October. He was abducted from his office in the al-Sha'ab district of Baghdad on 20 October. At least 12 armed men reportedly burst into Sa'dun al-Janabi's office in the early evening and dragged him into a car. He was said to have been hit over the head by the gunmen with rifle butts. His body was found with a bullet in the head in the Ur area, north of Baghdad.

Amnesty International fears for the safety of other defence lawyers representing the eight defendants who appeared before the Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal (formerly known as the Iraqi Special Tribunal) on 19 October, as well as those charged with trying or giving evidence in the case.

"Defendants, defence lawyers, judges, prosecutors and witnesses must all be protected", says Amnesty International. "It is the responsibility of the Iraqi authorities and the MNF to ensure effective physical safety of these people".

This trial is very important for Iraqis as it should set the pattern for affording justice for many of the victims of the gross human rights violations that have plagued Iraq over the last decades. It is therefore vital that it proceeds in the best circumstances.

Background

On 19 October former President Saddam Hussein and seven others appeared before the Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal. Charges against them included the killing of at least 140 people from al-Dujail village, northeast of Baghdad following an attempted assassination of the former president who was visiting the village in 1982. The trial was adjourned until 28 November 2005 to allow defence lawyers to prepare their case and to ensure that witnesses will be able to come forward to give testimonies in court without fear. Amnesty International observed the proceedings before the tribunal in order to assess its fairness. See Amnesty International's press release issued on 20 October: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE140402005>

