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## Human Rights Now

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Secretary General, Kazuko Ito

**For Immediate release**

### **Iraq: Call for an immediate stop to indiscriminate attacks in Anbar province that have resulted in civilian casualties and thousands of IDPs**

1. Human Rights Now, a Tokyo based international human rights NGO expresses grave concern over the escalation of conflict in the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, Iraq, resulting in significant numbers of civilian deaths.

Violence in the Anbar Province of Iraq has been escalating rapidly since the December 28th, 2013, arrest of prolific Sunni politician Ahmed al-Alwani<sup>1</sup>. According to several witnesses, the government of Iraq has deployed security forces in the two cities in response to the alleged attack by al-Qaeda fighters on January 1st, 2014. Iraqi security forces surrounded the two cities and conducted indiscriminate attacks using heavy mortar fire in residential areas throughout Fallujah and Ramadi, without taking any protective measures for civilians.

2. Due to the intensified attacks, many people, including civilians have been killed. Local witnesses told HRN that Iraqi Forces were randomly shelling and bombing areas of the 2 cities. Fallujah general Hospital recognized 25 deaths and 160 wounded, including women and children from the period 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2013 to the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2014, however, the actual death rate is unknown. The Anbar Peace organization for Human Rights estimates that there were 370 casualties in Ramadi and Fallujah as of January 11th, 2014. According to Chairman Mohammed Ali, 73 people were killed, including 21 children and 13 women<sup>2</sup>. 297 were injured, 89 of them critically<sup>3</sup>. The casualties in Fallujah seem to be mostly civilians, local hospitals

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1 [http://www.ncciraq.org/en/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=3543:un-situation-report-anbar-humanitarian-crisis&Itemid=339&acm=2648\\_69](http://www.ncciraq.org/en/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=3543:un-situation-report-anbar-humanitarian-crisis&Itemid=339&acm=2648_69)

2[http://en.aswataliraq.info/\(S\(rka5i3escg4xxhejezicfo55\)\)/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=155107&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/(S(rka5i3escg4xxhejezicfo55))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=155107&l=1)

3[http://en.aswataliraq.info/\(S\(rka5i3escg4xxhejezicfo55\)\)/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=155107&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/(S(rka5i3escg4xxhejezicfo55))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=155107&l=1)

claim that the majority of the victims were injured or killed by shrapnel from mortar rounds fired during the conflict<sup>4</sup>.

According to local witness that HRN has interviewed, it seems that a death toll of hundreds is recognised only within the city of Ramadi, independent investigation is essential to determine the exact number of casualties. According to medical staff at the Ramadi Teaching Hospital, the remains of a hundred people lie in the morgue of the hospital. Moreover, on 13<sup>th</sup> January, a mortar shell landed at the site of the Fallujah General Hospital and at least one civilian was severely injured due to the attack. The local witnesses told us that it was shelling by the Iraqi forces. On 4<sup>th</sup> January, mortar shells hit a private house in Fallujah city and killed 3 people. Local witnesses told us that Iraqi Forces were randomly shelling and bombing in that area.

3. Furthermore, a significant number of people have fled to the outskirts of Anbar province due to fear of further attacks. The UN and Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) gathered the information collected so far and reported that on 14<sup>th</sup> of January the number of IDPs was 13,824, this number is expected to increase due to the continuing nature of the situation<sup>5</sup>. Other sources reported a higher number of 25,000<sup>6</sup>. Humanitarian responses have been struggling to deliver aid to those in need due to the intense fighting in the region.

On Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> January, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq (SRSG), Mr. Nickolay Mladenov said that “The situation in Fallujah is particularly concerning as existing stocks of food, water and life-saving medicines begin to run out.”<sup>7</sup> Accessibility to bring aid to and within the Anbar area is limited where emergency supplies had to turn back, said Eliana Nabaa, director of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)<sup>8</sup>.

4. Human Rights Now stands firmly against the indiscriminate use of violence on civilians by Iraqi government forces amid this armed conflict. In particular, the use of mortar rounds on civilian neighbourhoods is unacceptable under the international law. Also, attacks against hospitals are a clear violation of the Geneva Conventions. These attacks violate both

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/09/iraq-protect-anbar-residents-abuses>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ncciraq.org/en/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=3543:un-situation-report-anbar-humanitarian-crisis&Itemid=339&acm=2648\\_69](http://www.ncciraq.org/en/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=3543:un-situation-report-anbar-humanitarian-crisis&Itemid=339&acm=2648_69)

<sup>6</sup><http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-fighting-prevents-aid-workers-reaching-displaced>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1528:the-united-nations-engages-in-assisting-the-population-of-anbar-province&Itemid=605&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1528:the-united-nations-engages-in-assisting-the-population-of-anbar-province&Itemid=605&lang=en)

<sup>8</sup><http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-fighting-prevents-aid-workers-reaching-displaced>

international human rights and humanitarian law. The Iraqi government has a responsibility to protect its citizens' lives, to reduce the amount of damage caused to civilian property, as well as safeguard individual Iraqi citizen's rights in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution.

HRN recognizes that al-Qaeda fighters are involved in the current conflict, and that the Iraqi government has characterised this conflict as part of the "war against terror". However, the "war on terror" cannot be used to justify attacks against civilian and hospitals, or for any escalation of indiscriminate attacks in residential areas. The government holds the primary responsibility to protect civilians.

5. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has requested a list of weapons from the United States to back his military<sup>9</sup>. According to Iraqi diplomatic sources, Russia has already supplied equipment such as 24 war cannons and 32 APCs through the Om al-Qasr Port<sup>10</sup>. HRN expresses serious concern that the supply of weapons by foreign countries will further escalate grave human rights violations against innocent civilians.

6. Thus, HRN urges the Iraqi government

- to immediately stop indiscriminate attacks against civilians and protect the right to life of the civilian population,
- to refrain from any intensification of the conflict,
- to investigate grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law and prosecute those responsible,
- to cooperate with international organisations and facilitate delivery of humanitarian aid to those in desperate need,

HRN also urges all parties involved in the conflict

- to refrain from any act against international human rights and humanitarian law

HRN requests other states

- to refrain from providing any military support or supplying weapons to parties involved in the ongoing conflict, in order to prevent more grave human rights violations.

HRN requests the UN

- to immediately send an independent commission of inquiry to the area in order to investigate violations of human rights

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/iraqs-maliki-says-he-has-asked-for-weapons-from-us-will-also-see-training-for-troops/2014/01/16/0f369ed6-7ea0-11e3-9556-4a4bf7bcbd84\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqs-maliki-says-he-has-asked-for-weapons-from-us-will-also-see-training-for-troops/2014/01/16/0f369ed6-7ea0-11e3-9556-4a4bf7bcbd84_story.html)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.mojahedin.org/newsen/26247>