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## Human Rights Now

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Secretary General, Kazuko Ito

**For Immediate release**

### **Iraq: HRN calls for all parties in the conflict to refrain from attacks against civilians and urges an international inquiry to investigate grave human rights violation in Anbar province**

1. Human Rights Now, a Tokyo-based international human rights NGO, expresses grave concern over the intensified indiscriminate attacks on civilians and hospitals in Anbar province, Iraq, and call on all parties involved in the conflict to cease the violation of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Violence in Anbar province continues to intensify following the Iraqi government's December crackdown on protest groups. Local news suggests that last month clashes contributed to at least 650 dead and wounded<sup>1</sup>. On 26<sup>th</sup> February, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reported that the "official number of IDP families has now reached 68,333 as per Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) official numbers."<sup>2</sup> In February 2014, military operations to retake Fallujah featured excessive force in the form of heavy shelling and attacks from aircraft, resulting in the disproportionate loss of civilian life and property including destruction or damage to non-military facilities such as hospitals. On 22<sup>nd</sup> February it was reported that Iraq's defense ministry had announced a 72-hour halt to military operations in Fallujah<sup>3</sup>. However, local news continued to report civilian casualties caused by a mortar shell and subsequent random bombing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 650 citizens killed and wounded in the events of Ramadi and Fallujah, National Iraqi News Agency. 30 Jan. 2014:  
[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GMMGJJ](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GMMGJJ)

<sup>2</sup> Situation Report Anbar Humanitarian Crisis, UNAMI,  
<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Anbar%20Situation%20Report%20%23%2013.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Iraq announces 72-hour truce in Fallujah, Aljazeera,  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/02/iraq-announces-72-hour-truce-fallujah-2014222153442273250.html>

<sup>4</sup> Four civilians wounded, west of Fallujah, National Iraqi News Agency,  
[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GMMGJJ](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GMMGJJ)

According to UNAMI's situation report, the Council of Ministers' peace plan on Anbar was adopted on 18<sup>th</sup> February and the Supreme Committee tasked with its implementation convened its first meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February. Anbar Provincial Council "continues to advocate with the Central Government to extend the ceasefire in Ramadi and Fallujah and to find alternative peaceful/political solutions to end the crisis."<sup>5</sup> Information concerning the results of this process is still unknown.

2. One of the biggest concerns is that attacks have even reached hospitals. Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, stated that "I am particularly concerned about the rapidly deteriorating conditions in Fallujah where many residents are caught up in the fighting." He continued, stating that "Recent reports that the Fallujah General Hospital may have been used as headquarters for armed groups and also targeted by shelling are very worrying. Hospitals and medical facilities should be protected by all."<sup>6</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> February, the Fallujah General Hospital spokesperson told Anadolu Agency - one of the largest Turkish news agencies - that the hospital received "13 injured civilians, including women and children, after the army shelled homes in Fallujah."<sup>7</sup> According to HRN's local correspondent, the hospital was also subsequently attacked. Hospital staff and patients told HRN that the hospital is in no way a hiding place for combatants and there are no combatants in the hospital.

Furthermore, HRN discovered a worrying situation facing the staff of Fallujah General Hospital. As of 22<sup>nd</sup> February, there were 10 doctors and 3 specialists remaining at the hospital. An Iraqi officer stated, "In the next attack, the lives of all doctors remaining at the hospital will be under threat." He named the doctor also acting as a hospital spokesman, stating that "This person is helping the combatants, I'm going to kill him, and even if he survives he won't be able to stay in Iraq." The threatened doctor told HRN that "Even if [I survive] this war, [I] will have to flee to another country". He is asking for guidance for "when the time comes."

3. HRN condemns the above-mentioned grave violations of international human rights

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<sup>5</sup> Situation Report Anbar Humanitarian Crisis, UNAMI,

<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Anbar%20Situation%20Report%20%23%2013.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> UN Envoy Concerned about Deteriorating Situation in Fallujah, Calls for Unity and Political Engagement, United Nations Iraq:

[http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1633:un-envoy-concerned-about-deteriorating-situation-in-fallujah-calls-for-unity-and-political-engagement&Itemid=605&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1633:un-envoy-concerned-about-deteriorating-situation-in-fallujah-calls-for-unity-and-political-engagement&Itemid=605&lang=en)

<sup>7</sup> 13 civilians injured by army shelling in Iraq's Fallujah, Anadolu Agency:

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/286428--13-civilians-injured-by-army-shelling-in-iraqs-fallujah>

and humanitarian law committed during this military operation.

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, it is prohibited directly to target civilians in a military attack. Failing to distinguish between civilians and combatants and attacking civilian objects, especially civilian hospitals, is clearly to violate the Geneva Convention. Hospitals may in no circumstances be the object of attack unless it totally changes its nature such as to serve a military objective.<sup>8</sup>

4. Therefore, HRN urges the Iraqi government;

- Immediately to halt attacks on civilians and civilian premises as well as indiscriminate attacks,
- To cease attacks against hospitals and protect all doctors and staff,
- To investigate the above-mentioned human rights violations, identify those responsible and ensure their accountability,
- To facilitate access for humanitarian aid and to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights to life and health for all affected people.

All parties implicated in the current situation;

- To refrain from any violation of international human rights or humanitarian law.

The United Nations;

- To establish an independent commission of inquiry in the Anbar province promptly to investigate all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

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***Human Rights Now ~Protecting Human Rights for All~***

Human Rights Now is a Tokyo based international human rights NGO comprising a body of experienced legal professionals dedicated to protecting and promoting human rights around the world, with a special focus on Asia. The activity includes monitoring/ fact-finding of human rights, human rights education and advocacy work. Human Rights Now has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since August 2012.

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<sup>8</sup> The Article 18 of the Geneva Convention (IV) 1949 articulates that “Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack but shall at all times be respected and protected by the Parties to the conflict.”

Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949:

<http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/385ec082b509e76c41256739003e636d/6756482d86146898c125641e004aa3c5>