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Statement by Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and Jennifer Welsh, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, on the situation in Iraq

(New York, 18 June 2014) The Special Advisers to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, expressed deep concern at the deterioration in the situation in Iraq and the impact on Iraq's populations.

The Special Advisers strongly condemned reports of attacks against the lives and physical integrity of civilians and other persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including attacks by terrorist and armed groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Such attacks are violations of international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes.

“The protection of civilians should be the primary focus of any strategy to address the current situation”, stated the Special Advisers, who reiterated the United Nations Secretary-General's warning of the risk of further sectarian violence on a massive scale, within Iraq and beyond its borders, noting that the use of sectarian rhetoric could further exacerbate the conflict.

The Special Advisers raised special concern at the situation of religious and other minorities, noting that members of the Christian community were fleeing the northern city of Mosul en masse following the ISIL-led invasion. Noting the reports of incitement to destroy Christian churches, the Special Advisers underlined that: “Given the context of sectarian and confessional polarisation in the country, special consideration must be given to assisting religious and other minorities, which are particularly vulnerable”. The Special Advisers noted that the reported capture of the town of Tal Afar in north-western Iraq raises concerns about the well-being of Yazidis and other religious minorities living in the area.

They also reiterated the call by the United Nations Security Council for cooperation in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, adding that: “It is key that the Government of Iraq and Iraqi leaders from across the political spectrum work with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and humanitarian agencies to ensure the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian relief”.

The Special Advisers called on all parties involved in the crisis and on Iraqi leaders - political, military, religious and community leaders – “to abandon strategies of violence and confrontation, undertake all possible efforts to prevent sectarian reprisals amid the ongoing violence and to engage constructively to ensure respect for diversity”. Finally, they also stressed that all States have an obligation to ensure that measures taken to combat terrorism comply with international law, in particular human rights, refugee and humanitarian law.

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