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Press release No. 03/28
11 April 2003

**Iraq: ICRC calls urgently for protection of the civilian population
and services and of persons no longer fighting**

Geneva (ICRC) – The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is profoundly alarmed by the chaos currently prevailing in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq. Lawless persons, sometimes armed, have been ransacking and looting even essential public facilities such as hospitals and water-supply installations. Hospitals in Baghdad are closed because of combat damage, looting or fear of looting. Hardly any medical or support staff are still reporting for work. Patients have either fled the hospitals or have been left without care. The medical system in Baghdad has virtually collapsed. The dead are left unattended, and the increasing summer heat and deteriorating water and electricity supplies create a high risk of epidemic disease.

The ICRC urgently appeals to the Coalition forces and all other persons in authority to do everything possible to protect essential infrastructure such as hospitals and water-supply and evacuation systems from looting and destruction. In areas under their control, the Coalition forces have specific responsibilities as Occupying Powers under international humanitarian law. These include taking all measures in their power to restore and maintain, as far as possible, public order and safety by putting a halt to pillage and to violence against civilians and civilian facilities.

Civilian facilities which have been damaged or destroyed must be repaired as soon as possible, in order to ensure that the basic needs of the population can be met. Water and electricity supplies are vital. Medical units and personnel must be protected and their work facilitated, and access to them by all persons in need, whether military or civilian, friend or foe, must be granted. In all circumstances, the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblem must be respected.

To the fullest extent of the means available to them, the occupying forces have a duty to ensure that the population has sufficient supplies in terms of water, food and medical care. As the temporary administrators of the occupied territory, the Occupying Powers must support public services and manage resources primarily in the interests of the population, without discrimination. If the whole or part of the population under occupation is not adequately supplied, the Occupying Powers must allow impartial humanitarian organizations to undertake assistance operations. However, the provision of humanitarian aid in no way relieves the Occupying Powers of their administrator's responsibilities towards the population under occupation.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: CHARLES L DARIS
DATE CASE ID: 04 DEC 2004 200303827
ACLU-RDF 4193 p.1

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DOS-001850

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All persons deprived of their freedom and held in enemy hands must be spared and protected, in accordance with the Third or the Fourth Geneva Convention, depending on whether they are combatants or civilians. Prisoners of war must be treated humanely at all times. The ICRC has been granted access to POWs in Coalition hands. It is deeply concerned that this is not the case as regards Coalition POWs captured by Iraqi forces, and strongly urges those who are holding them today to afford them protection and treat them in full observance of the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention, including their entitlement to ICRC visits.

Wherever military operations are taking place, constant care must be taken to spare the civilian population and civilian objects. All those bearing arms must take all necessary precautions to avoid exposing civilians to the dangers resulting from military activity. The wounded and the dead must be evacuated without delay. Acts of perfidy are prohibited.

The ICRC, which has been present and active in Iraq throughout the conflict, is fully committed to pursuing the tasks incumbent upon it under the Geneva Conventions, to working for the faithful application of international humanitarian law, and to endeavour to ensure that all victims of the conflict and of its consequences receive protection and assistance.

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