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Clerics slam "disastrous" gays but forbid anti-gay violence Iraq's Sadr wants homosexuality eradicated



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BAGHDAD (AFP, AlArabiya.net)

Iraq's radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr ordered the "depravity" of homosexuality be eradicated but warned against the anti-gay violence that has recently erupted, a spokesman said on Friday.

"The purpose of the meetings is to fight the depravity and to urge the community to reject this phenomenon," said Sheikh Wadea al-Atabi, referring to a Thursday seminar attended by clerics, tribal leaders and police.

"The only remedy to stop it is through preaching and guidance. There is no other way to put an end to it," he said, stressing that the movement could not resort to violence after a series of killings of gay men in Baghdad.

In the sprawling Baghdad Shiite district of Sadr City, police last month recovered the bullet-riddled bodies of three men said to have been homosexuals.

Another three men were found dead on the outskirts of Sadr City, with police saying an additional four men were found tortured but alive.

Also in April, a group calling itself "Brigades of the Righteous" posted signs around Sadr City listing alleged homosexuals and threatening to kill them.

"Al-Sadr rejects this type of violence ... and anyone who commits violence (against gays) will not be considered as being one of us," Atabi said.

Disaster

Homosexuality is forbidden in Islam, frowned upon in Arab society and illegal in many Middle Eastern countries. Iraq has no law against homosexuality but prominent religious authorities have condemned it.

At Thursday's seminar, which was held in Sadr City, Sheikh Dawud al-Enezi, a Sadr movement leader, said "we must correct the morals of the nation. Homosexuality is a disaster that has come to the community."

An Iraqi human rights activist recently revealed that Iraqi militias have been using a particularly brutal form of torture against homosexual men that involves gluing their buttocks together and feeding them laxatives.

"An anti-gay group uses a very strong form of glue that if applied, sticks to the skin so tight that it can only be removed surgically" Yonar Mohamed, the first human rights activist to reveal this issue, told AlArabiya.

"After the buttocks have been glued together, the victim is given a laxative," Mohamed added. Because they are not able to defecate, the diarrhea eventually leads to death.

The recent persecution prompted rights group Amnesty International to write a letter to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki last month urging government protection of homosexuals.

It said that as many as 25 boys and men had been killed in Baghdad alone because they were either gay or believed to be amid concerns that religious leaders may be inciting violence against Iraq's gay community.