



# NORTHERN IRAQ

CIVILIANS IN THE LINE OF FIRE

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## INTRODUCTION

The takeover in early June by the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and other towns and villages in north-western Iraq has resulted in a dramatic resurgence of sectarian tensions and the massive displacement of communities fearing sectarian attacks and reprisals. Virtually the entire non-Sunni population of Mosul, Tal 'Afar and surrounding areas which have come under ISIS control has fled following killings, abductions, threats and attacks against their properties and places of worship.

It is difficult to establish the true scale of the killings and abductions that ISIS has committed. Amnesty International has gathered evidence about scores of cases. To date, ISIS does not appear to have engaged in mass targeting of civilians, but its choice of targets – Shi'a Muslims and Shi'a shrines – has caused fear and panic among the Shi'a community, who make up the majority of Iraq's population but are a minority in the region. The result has been a mass exodus of Shi'a Muslims as well as members of other minorities, such as Christians and Yezidis. Sunni Muslims believed to be opposed to ISIS, members of the security forces, civil servants, and those who previously worked with US forces have similarly fled – some after they and their relatives were targeted by ISIS.

ISIS has called on former members of the security forces and others whom they consider were involved in government repression to "repent", and has promised not to harm those who do. The process involves a public declaration of repentance (*towba*), which in effect also entails a pledge of allegiance and obedience to ISIS, in mosques specially designated for the purpose. Many of those who have remained in ISIS-controlled areas are taking up the invitation and publicly repenting. The practice, however, is not without risks, as it allows ISIS to collect names, addresses, ID numbers and other identification details of thousands of men, who it could decide to target later.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International has gathered evidence pointing to a pattern of extrajudicial executions of detainees by Iraqi government forces and Shi'a militias in the cities of Tal 'Afar, Mosul and Ba'quba. Air strikes launched by Iraqi government forces against ISIS-controlled areas have also killed and injured dozens of civilians, some in indiscriminate attacks.

This briefing is based on a two-week investigation in northern Iraq, during which Amnesty International visited the cities of Mosul, Kirkuk, Dohuk and Erbil and surrounding towns and villages in these areas, and the camps for displaced people in al-Khazer/Kalak and Garmawa; and met with survivors and relatives of victims of attacks perpetrated by ISIS and by government forces and allied militias, civilians displaced by the conflict, members and representatives of minorities, religious figures, local civil society organizations, international organizations assisting the displaced, and Peshmerga military commanders. All the interviews mentioned in the document were carried out during this visit.

# KILLINGS OF CAPTIVES AND ABDUCTIONS BY ISIS

Eighteen-year-old Mahmoud Anwar Mohammed Redha and his 44-year-old uncle Zainal Mohammed Redha, a father of six, were abducted at an ISIS checkpoint at the entrance of their home town of Gogjali (east of Mosul) in the early morning of 20 June 2014 while on their way to work. Their bodies were found two days later in the town's cemetery with horrendous injuries. Their hands were cuffed behind their back. Mahmoud's mother told Amnesty International:

*"At 6.15am Mahmoud and his uncle Zainal left home to go to work in Bartalla. Zainal worked as a day-labourer in construction and Mahmoud was driving him to work. At 7am we heard from someone who had just passed the checkpoint that Mahmoud and Zainal had been stopped and were being held at the checkpoint. We tried calling but their mobiles were off. Zainal's wife went to the checkpoint, a few minutes' drive from our home, and there she saw one of the ISIS members holding Zainal's ID card in his hand as well as another ID, which she could not see; probably it was Mahmoud's. The ISIS members told her to leave. At 8am I, myself went to the checkpoint but, when I asked for them, one of the ISIS men pointed his rifle at me and said 'keep your place' and made me leave.*

*"I then went to Dar al-Diyafa [formerly part of the Governorate, now an ISIS-run Shari'a court], but could not get any information, and then I went to the governorate building, where the top leadership of ISIS was. There one of them told me: 'You Shi'a, go home and in a couple of days your son will be home'. But the following day my brother, while searching for my other brother who had been abducted on 18 June, called me from the cemetery and said he had found two bodies. They were not recognizable because most of their heads had been smashed and were missing, but he described their clothes and so we knew these were the bodies of Mahmoud and Zainal. Someone who was present told us that they had been dumped there by ISIS members."*

In photographs shown to Amnesty International by the men's family the bodies appear horrendously mutilated. Most of their heads are missing, having seemingly been smashed with a rock or other heavy object, and Zainal's throat has been cut and his body partly burned. The family fled Gogjali immediately after.

Mahmoud's mother's brother, a 45-year-old baker and father of seven, was abducted by ISIS members from outside his home in Gogjali in front of his wife and children on 18 June at about 5pm. He has not been seen since and, although his body has not been found, his family believe that he has been killed. His sister told Amnesty International that he had taken part in the "popular uprising" of 1991 and had a weapon.<sup>1</sup> It is not clear whether he had been a member of one of the Shi'a militias in recent years.

A second brother, Ra'ed Khodr Qasem, a 40-year-old member of the Iraqi police force and a

father of six, was summarily killed with two colleagues at the 17 July Police Station in Mosul, where he served, by ISIS members on 6 June 2014 – the first day of ISIS' attack on Mosul, which ended with ISIS' complete takeover of the city on 10 June. While most members of the Iraqi armed and security forces fled Mosul without attempting to resist ISIS' takeover of the city, some policemen at the 17 July Police Station did engage in armed clashes with ISIS. Amnesty International listened to a recording of a two-and-a-half-hour telephone conversation between Ra'ed Khodr Qasem and his wife, his son and his nephew. The conversation takes place between 8.30am and 11am on 6 June, during which time Ra'ed and his colleagues inside the 17 July Police Station end their armed resistance and ISIS members break in and capture Ra'ed and his two colleagues who are still alive (several others were killed during the clashes). Towards the end of the recording Ra'ed tells his wife, son and nephew: "They [ISIS] have entered". ISIS members are heard saying: "Surrender and you will be safe". The recording finishes with ISIS members saying to Ra'ed and the other two policemen: "Get in the car". Ra'ed's family subsequently learned from residents of the area with whom they spoke on the telephone that he and his two colleagues were lying dead near the police station. Ra'ed's wife eventually went to Mosul to recover Ra'ed's body on 11 June, the day after ISIS established complete control over the city. She told Amnesty International that she found her husband's body about 100 metres from the 17 July Police Station, next to two other bodies which she presumes were his colleagues. *"He was alive when they [ISIS members] entered the police station. They killed him deliberately,"* she said.

Other similar cases of individuals deliberately killed after having been captured by ISIS members when they took control of villages and towns have been reported to Amnesty International by victims' relatives. On 27 June 2014, ISIS members overran Tobgha Ziyara, a small Shabak village east of Mosul, and killed three men, all Shi'a. According to residents the village was home to some 70 families of the minority Shabak people,<sup>2</sup> about half of them Sunni and half Shi'a, and had been left unprotected since the withdrawal of the Iraqi army from the area on 10 June. Relatives of the three victims told Amnesty International that they and the other Shi'a residents had left the village the previous evening, when they were told by residents of a nearby village that ISIS members were probably going to overrun Tobghra Ziyara the following day:

*"My son, my cousin and my nephew stayed to look after the homes, so they would not get looted. They planned to run away if ISIS arrived, but they did not manage to run away and were taken by ISIS and later were killed and their bodies were dumped by the wadi [dry riverbed]. We were told what happened by some of the Sunni residents and shepherds who remained in and around the village. The three victims are Hafeth Jalil 'Aatya, a 34-year-old driver and father of three young children, his cousin 'Ezzat Mashallah 'Abdallah, a disabled 52-year-old father of seven, and the latter's nephew Shaker Mahmoud Mashallah, a father of three in his late thirties."*

When Amnesty International met the family in early July, they had not yet been able to collect the bodies of the three, as neither they nor any of their Shi'a relatives had dared to go back to the village, now under ISIS control.

ISIS killed an unconfirmed number of prisoners hours after they had escaped from Badush Central Prison, west of Mosul, after army and security forces fled the town on the morning of 10 June. Among those killed was Mushtaq Saleh al-Mazeel, a 31-year-old Shi'a resident of

Baghdad, detained since 2005 and serving the ninth year of a 15-year sentence on charges of unauthorized possession of weapons and belonging to the Mahdi Army, a Shi'a militia.<sup>3</sup> His brothers told Amnesty International that they had been in a telephone conversation with him between 6.30am when he and other prisoners broke free, and 10.45am when he and other Shi'a were killed. One of his brothers said:

*"He last called at 10.33am to say that he and other prisoners were being loaded on a lorry; he knew that his end was near. At 10.45am, the communication ended for the last time. I tried to call back for hours in vain and when I finally got a reply, the man who answered my brother's phone told me that my brother was dead. I offered to pay him a lot of money if he helped me to get my brother's body back but he refused and said he did not need my money."*

Mushtaq's family learned from other prisoners that ISIS members separated Shi'a prisoners from the Sunni prisoners, and killed the Shi'a ones. Other prisoners who managed to get away before ISIS' arrival told Amnesty International that many non-Sunni fellow prisoners had gone missing and were believed to have been captured and killed by ISIS. A man from the Yezidi minority said that his 19-year-old cousin, who had served three-and-a-half years of a five-year-sentence, had called his family on 10 June at about 7-8am saying he was out of prison and would go to relatives in Sinjar, but that he never reached Sinjar and was never heard from since. A Yezidi ex-prisoner from Badush Central Prison told Amnesty International that another Yezidi inmate, aged about 55 and serving the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> year of a 15-year sentence, also went missing after leaving the prison and never made it to his family home in Sinjar.

According to former inmates and lawyers who used to regularly visit the jail, some 2,500 to 3,000 prisoners were held in Badush Central Prison in early June when ISIS took control of the area. They included a large majority of Sunnis, some 400-500 Shi'a and about 100 individuals from ethnic and religious minority communities. Among them were a small number of minors and some were detainees awaiting trial. Amnesty International has so far not been able to obtain precise information about the number and identities of the prisoners reportedly killed by ISIS.<sup>4</sup>

In every town and village which has come under the control of ISIS in recent weeks, men have been abducted and their families' attempts to find information on their fate and whereabouts have often been in vain. The victims are men of all ages, professions, socio-economic status, and ethnic and religious groups. Some were later released while others remain missing.

Local tribal chiefs are the only ones who at times can have influence over ISIS, to obtain information or negotiate the release of those abducted – in some cases in exchange for large sums of money. Some 24 Yezidi border guards and soldiers from the Sinjar area, who were captured in north-western Iraq and shown in a video published by ISIS at the end of June being held across the border in north-eastern Syria,<sup>5</sup> were eventually released on payment of a significant ransom.

In the absence of any legal framework or official mechanism governing the actions of ISIS, which now controls vast swathes of the country, families of those abducted are at a loss as to

where or who to turn to in order to find their missing relatives. Most families do not dare to complain or to speak publicly about their relatives' abduction for fear of endangering them. Every single family who told Amnesty International about their relatives having been abducted by ISIS asked that the cases be kept confidential – a telling indication of the rule of fear which prevails in ISIS-controlled areas.



# ATTACKS AND THREATS AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

The conflict which is engulfing the region today is taking place against a background of years of violence. Some of those currently targeted or at risk of attack by ISIS have been caught up in previous waves of sectarian and political violence.

Members of the Iraqi security forces and their families, regardless of which faith or ethnic group they belong to, have long been targets of armed groups. Maysun, a 31-year-old Sunni Muslim, and her three young children were forced out of their home in Sharqat (south-east of Mosul) on 20 June by men who identified themselves as ISIS members. She told Amnesty International:

*“Six masked men came at sunset looking for my husband, a policeman in Mosul’s anti-terror branch. They said they would kill him. They came back two days later and threw me and the children out. I had no time to take anything.”*

Her husband, also a Sunni, said that his brother and three of his cousins had been killed by armed groups in recent years:

*“First the terrorists killed my cousin Anas in 2007, then my younger brother Gheith, also a policeman, in 2012, then my cousins Firas and Kamal at the end of 2013. My cousins were not in the security forces but they were against al-Qa’ida and ISIS and all these terrorists. That is why they were killed.”*

Another Sunni member of the federal police told Amnesty International:

*“Three months ago, on 11 March, my home in the Wadi Hajar district of Mosul, was blown up. Luckily I was out with my wife and our four children. When I heard that ISIS had entered Mosul on 6 June I fled immediately; I knew that they would kill me. In January 2012 they killed my younger brother; he was a civilian. They killed him because they could not get me. And in March 2013 they killed my brother’s son. He too was a civilian, but his father was a soldier.”*

Individuals from all faiths and communities who worked with US forces in previous years, including civilians who worked for private companies hired by US forces to do cleaning or catering, have similarly been targeted by ISIS.

Other resurfacing long-standing tensions have a greater sectarian dimension, notably in areas which have for years seen conflict involving Sunni and Shi’a militias. For example, in the area around the city of Kirkuk (south-east of Mosul), which the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has long sought to incorporate into the areas it administers and which is home to different ethnic and religious groups (Kurds, Arabs and both Shi’a and Sunni Turkmen), armed confrontations took place in mid-June between members of ISIS (and possibly allied Sunni groups) attempting to gain control of the areas, and Shi’a Turkmen militias attempting

to fend off ISIS attacks in Beshir and other villages nearby. The clashes resulted in the death of dozens of people from the Shi'a Turkmen community. The casualties were initially reported as having been all civilians deliberately targeted by ISIS. However, while some of those killed were indeed unarmed civilians who may have been caught in cross-fire or deliberately targeted while fleeing, according to the testimonies of some of those involved in the clashes and of witnesses from the Shi'a Turkmen community, some of those killed and injured were armed civilians and militia members who were taking part in the armed confrontations with ISIS.<sup>6</sup> Some of them were killed while fighting and others were reportedly deliberately killed after having been captured by ISIS members. After the attack on the village of Beshir on 17 June, in which more than 15 people were killed, it took villagers five days to obtain the bodies back and some of the bodies had reportedly been burned or mutilated.

In other Turkmen and Shabak villages around Mosul which were attacked and overrun by ISIS in June and early July, including Qubba and Shireikhan (north of Mosul), and Gogjali, Tobghra Ziyara and 'Amarkan (east of Mosul), ISIS abducted dozens of Shi'a Turkmen and Shabak men and blew up Shi'a mosques, *husseiniyas* (congregation halls), *maqams* (shrines) and homes and looted homes and property. Iman, a 40-year-old woman from Qubba, showed Amnesty International photographs and a video recording of the destruction of her home:

*"We fled when ISIS took over Mosul and two weeks later [on 25 June] ISIS men blew up the al-'Abbas mosque, and my home, which was near the mosque, was partly destroyed in the process. They then went back and completed the destruction of my home."*

One of her neighbours told Amnesty International that his home and the home of his brother were likewise destroyed by ISIS on the same day:

*"First they got my neighbour out of his home, then they looted my home and then set fire to it. They did the same with my brother's house. My neighbour was allowed to go back to his home but he got scared and fled."*

Shi'a residents of the Shabak village of 'Amarkan, which was overrun by ISIS on 2 July, told Amnesty International that, after they left, ISIS thoroughly looted their homes:

*"We are poor people; now they took even the little we have. What will we do? How will we feed our children?"*

According to residents in some of these villages ISIS members have specifically been looking for weapons and for militia members and politically active individuals, and have seized assault rifles from some houses of Shi'a residents – who all fled (Sunni Turkmen and Shabak residents of these villages mostly remained in the villages after ISIS took control). Most of the men who were abducted were subsequently released while others remain unaccounted for. According to villagers' testimonies in several cases local ISIS members, were searching for specific people.<sup>7</sup>

## ABUSES BY GOVERNMENT FORCES

While ISIS has claimed responsibility and even publicized some of its atrocities, the Iraqi government, busy trying to secure international support, has been keen to hide those committed by its forces. Amnesty International has gathered evidence pointing to a pattern of extrajudicial executions of detainees by government forces and Shi'a militias in the cities of Tal 'Afar, Mosul and Ba'quba.<sup>8</sup>

Surviving detainees and relatives of those killed gave graphic accounts that suggest Iraqi forces carried out a series of vengeful attacks against Sunni detainees before withdrawing from Tal 'Afar and Mosul, in northern Iraq. Both are now controlled by ISIS. In Ba'quba, central Iraq, government forces and Shi'a militias have been fending off attempts by ISIS to capture the city.

Survivors and relatives of the victims told Amnesty International that around 50 Sunni detainees were extrajudicially executed in the building of the Anti-Terrorism Agency in al-Qala'a in Tal 'Afar, on the night of 15 June. A survivor who narrowly escaped the attack described how four soldiers opened the door of the room where he was being held and began shooting at random:

*"It was about 1.45 at night when four soldiers opened the door and called out a few names; it seems they were trying to check that they had the right room. They started to shoot continuous automatic fire, which went on for a long time... Three had Kalashnikov rifles and one had a machine gun... There were at least three others that I could see behind them; maybe more but I could not see them. I was towards the back of the room and took cover by the toilet and then I was covered by the bodies of detainees who fell on top of me. I was saved by those who died. In the room where I was, 46 were killed and I heard that some others were killed next door."*

One woman, Umm Mohammed, described the horrific state of the body of her cousin's son, Kamal Fathi Hamza:

*"He had been shot several times in the head and chest; the body was covered in blood but you couldn't tell whose blood it was as the bodies were one on top of the other. He had not been convicted of anything; he had just been arrested 10 or 15 days earlier. He had only just got married less than a month before he was killed."*

Several other families also said they had relatives among the detainees who were killed in the Tal 'Afar jail, in some cases with two or more relatives from the same family. Most said their relatives were arrested shortly before the killing and had been held in pre-trial detention. None had been tried or even charged.

In a separate incident in Mosul, up to 20 Sunni detainees were killed in the Anti-Terrorism Agency in Hay al-Danadan district. A survivor said that at around 10pm on 9 June soldiers came into the cell and took away 13 of the 82 detainees being held there. Then they heard gunshots ringing out.

*“The soldiers took some of us out and beat us with cables and said we were terrorists, and then took us back to our cell. At 11.30pm they opened the door and threw a hand grenade into the cell and closed the door and turned off the light. Six detainees were killed on the spot and many were injured, me among them; I was injured in the eye and leg. One died of his injuries several hours later. In the early morning some armed guys came and released us and took the injured to the hospital. It was then that we learned that the army and security forces had left Mosul.”*

In Ba’quba up to 50 people were extrajudicially executed in a similar manner in al-Wahda Police Station in the Mufaraq district of central Ba’quba in the early hours of 16 June. The Mayor of Ba’quba, Abdallah al-Hayali, told Amnesty International that his nephew Yassir al-’Ali Ahmed al-Hayali, 21, was among the victims and that the killing was carried out by a Shi’a militia in the presence of the head of al-Wahda Police Station in Ba’quba. He said that Yassir was arrested about a month earlier and tortured, including by having his nails removed and being given electric shocks in custody.

The police chief of the Diyala governorate said to the media that the detainees died because of mortar strikes and reckless shootings carried out by ISIS when it was attempting to break into the prison. However, according to a medical report obtained by the mayor, his nephew had been shot in the head and many of those killed with him had likewise been shot in the head and the chest. Sunni policemen who witnessed the killing fled their posts afterwards for fear of reprisal.

The Governor of Diyala, ‘Amer al-Mujama’l, told Amnesty International that he spoke to the only survivor of the mass killing, Ahmed Khalas Zaydan al-Haribi, during his visit to Ba’quba Teaching Hospital. He told him: “We were having a quiet night when we heard the shooting. Then armed men in the presence of the head of the police station entered and started shooting at us.” Ahmed sustained injuries to his leg and shoulder during the attack. Two hours after he spoke to the Governor he was abducted by members of a militia who killed him and dumped his body behind the hospital.

# CIVILIANS KILLED AND INJURED IN AIR AND ARTILLERY STRIKES

Many of those currently displaced have fled their homes for fear of being caught in government strikes against ISIS-controlled areas and, as air strikes are being launched more frequently, civilians face a growing risk. Dozens of civilians were killed and injured in an air strike on 6 July in al-Rashidiya, on the northern outskirts of Mosul. Indiscriminate artillery shelling and air strikes by government forces have killed and injured civilians since earlier last month.<sup>9</sup>

Five young men in their early 20s were killed on the evening of 7 June 2014 in the al-Sahha district of Mosul when an artillery shell struck the roof terrace where they were sitting drinking tea and chatting. The five are brothers Riadh and Ahmad Ibrahim Adnan, Seif Nouri Mohammed, Mohammed 'Imad Hamid, and Ibrahim Hikmat Dhannun. Ibrahim's brother, Ahmad Hikmat Dhannun, the sole survivor, was severely injured in the attack. Large pieces of shrapnel ripped through his chest, abdomen and groin, causing serious damage to internal organs. He told Amnesty International:

*"Nobody was going out because of the situation [ISIS militants had entered the city from the western outskirts in the previous two days and the army and security forces had withdrawn across the river in the east of the city], so we were sitting in our home, with family and neighbors. My parents, the women and children were downstairs and we, the young men, me and my brother and our neighbours, were sitting on the terrace. We did not hear any strikes before the one that hit us; we would not have stayed on the terrace otherwise. I just remember seeing a flash of light and a lot of pain."*

Pointing to the large recently repaired hole left by the shell, which exploded on the roof terrace and went straight through to the room below, the father of Seif Nouri Mohammed told Amnesty International:

*"We repaired this, but nothing will repair my broken heart. My boy was taken from me and my other son was so badly injured he will never recover. I thank God that my other children are safe; we were in the room next to the one where the shell came through; we could have all been killed if we had been in the next room."*

Seif's younger siblings and other neighbours said that the strike which hit the house was the first of a series of seven or eight strikes they heard. The rest landed nearby, without causing further casualties.

A civil servant who was with the Iraqi army as they withdrew from the city told Amnesty International that at that time the army was shelling the west of the city from the barracks of the second division in the al-Kind area in the east of the city. Artillery is too imprecise and should never be used against residential areas full of civilians. Repeatedly using such weapons in this manner, without due regard to the harm being caused to civilians, violates international humanitarian law and is a war crime.

More civilians were subsequently killed in similar strikes in and around Tal 'Afar, north-west of Mosul. On 22 June, as Amnesty International was interviewing a family who fled Tal 'Afar and was sheltering in an IDP camp near Erbil, family members received a call from their relatives in Tal 'Afar, telling them that their cousin Adnan, his wife Zeinab and their two young children, a boy of six and a girl of eight, had just been killed in an artillery strike by the Iraqi forces on their home. They too had fled Tal 'Afar when it had been taken over by ISIS earlier in June, but had returned back home two days earlier, thinking that it was safe and to escape grim conditions in the place where they were sheltering.

Nine other civilians were killed and several injured in another strike by Iraqi forces in Aayadiya, where they had sought safety after fleeing their homes in Tal 'Afar; the victims were children, women and men, among them elderly people.

# **VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW BY ALL SIDES**

Amnesty International's assessment is that all parties to the conflict have committed violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, and gross abuses of human rights. What is more, their attacks are causing massive displacement of civilians

Where armed actors operate in populated residential areas, the warring parties must take all feasible precautions to minimize harm to civilians. They must take precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects under their control against the effects of attacks by the adversary, including by avoiding – to the maximum extent feasible – locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas. International humanitarian law also expressly prohibits tactics such as using “human shields” to prevent attacks on military targets. However, failure by one side to separate its fighters from civilians and civilian objects does not relieve its opponent of its obligation under international humanitarian law to direct attacks only at combatants and military objectives and to take all necessary precautions in attacks to spare civilians and civilian objects. International humanitarian law prohibits intentional attacks directed against civilians not taking part in hostilities, indiscriminate attacks (which do not distinguish between civilian and military targets), and disproportionate attacks (which may be expected to cause incidental harm to civilians that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated). Such attacks constitute war crimes. These rules apply equally to all parties to armed conflicts at all times without exception.

The conflict in northern Iraq has displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians, who have fled to neighbouring Kurdish areas administered by the KRG. Most are living in dire conditions, some in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) and others sheltering in schools, mosques, churches and with host communities. At first civilians who fled after ISIS captured large areas of north-western Iraq were being allowed to enter the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), but in recent weeks access for non-Kurdish Iraqis has been severely restricted by the KRG. Some of those who fled are seeking refuge in the KRI while others, mostly Shi'a Turkmen and Shabak, want to travel southwards to the capital and beyond where the majority of the population is Shi'a and where they feel they would be safer.

While the Iraqi central government remains beset by political and sectarian divisions, and the KRG appears increasingly focused on annexing more territory to the areas it controls, Iraqi civilians caught up in the conflict are finding it increasingly difficult to find protection and assistance.

Amnesty International calls on all parties to the conflict to put an immediate end to the killing of captives and the abduction of civilians; to treat detainees humanely at all times; to refrain from carrying out indiscriminate attacks, including the use of artillery shelling and unguided aerial bombardments in areas with large concentrations of civilians. It also reiterates its call on the KRG to allow civilians who are fleeing the fighting – whatever their religion or ethnicity – to seek refuge in and safe passage through KRG-controlled areas.

<sup>1</sup> In March 1991, following Iraq's defeat in the Gulf war, Kurds and Shi'a rose up against the Baath regime of Saddam Hussein in various parts of the country, briefly managing to overrun local government administrations and army positions in several locations. However, within weeks the uprising was crushed by Iraq's Republican Guards and many of those who participated fled the country while others were detained and/or summarily executed.

<sup>2</sup> Shabak people are an ethnic minority who live mainly in the in Nineveh Province in northern Iraq. Many are Shi'a Muslim and some are Sunni Muslims.

<sup>3</sup> Following the overthrow by US-led forces of the then President Saddam Hussein and his Baath regime in 2003, Shi'a and Sunni armed groups and militias sprang up in Iraq with the stated aim of ridding Iraq of the occupation by US and other foreign forces. One of the largest and better known Shi'a militias is the Mahdi Army, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, a cleric who quickly became politically influential and militarily powerful. Iraqi and US forces arrested large numbers of Shi'a and Sunni members of militias whom they accused – rightly or wrongly – of attacks against US and Iraqi forces and civilians.

<sup>4</sup> Some inmates of Badush Central Prison who still had many years of their sentences left to serve may be keeping a low profile or may have left the country to avoid having to return to jail to serve the remainder of their sentences.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/iraq-yezidis-captured-isis-amid-mounting-sectarian-attacks-2014-07-01> and <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=786693921382679&set=vb.336500783068664&type=2&theater>

<sup>6</sup> In late June Amnesty International observed members of a reasonably well structured Shi'a Turkmen armed militia operating in the town of Taza, which at the time of writing remained under the control of the said Militia and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. Nearby villages where the casualties had occurred could not be visited because they were under ISIS control and armed confrontations were ongoing in some areas.

<sup>7</sup> The ISIS fighters who took over Mosul and surrounding areas last month have frequently been described as outsiders, but in reality they are a mix of individuals from that region and individuals from outside it.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/iraq-testimonies-point-dozens-revenge-killings-sunni-detainees-2014-06-27>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/donatella-rovera/war-crimes-in-the-battle\\_b\\_5537661.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/donatella-rovera/war-crimes-in-the-battle_b_5537661.html)



## **NORTHERN IRAQ**

### **CIVILIANS IN THE LINE OF FIRE**

The takeover in early June by the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and other towns and villages in north-western Iraq has resulted in a dramatic resurgence of sectarian tensions and the massive displacement of communities fearing sectarian attacks and reprisals. Virtually the entire non-Sunni population of Mosul, Tal 'Afar and surrounding areas which have come under ISIS control has fled following killings, abductions, threats and attacks against their properties and places of worship.

Amnesty International has also gathered evidence pointing to a pattern of extrajudicial executions of detainees by Iraqi government forces and Shi'a militias in the cities of Tal 'Afar, Mosul and Ba'quba. Air strikes launched by Iraqi government forces against ISIS-controlled areas have also killed and injured dozens of civilians, some in indiscriminate attacks.

[amnesty.org](http://amnesty.org)

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