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# IRAQ

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## Republic of Iraq

Head of state: **Fuad Masum (replaced Jalal Talabani in July)**

Head of government: **Haider al-Abadi (replaced Nuri al-Maliki in September)**

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**There was a marked deterioration in human rights as armed conflict intensified between government security forces and fighters of the Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) armed group, which gained control of large parts of central and northern Iraq. IS fighters committed widespread war crimes, including ethnic cleansing of religious and ethnic minorities through a campaign of mass killings of men and abduction and sexual and other abuse of women and girls. Government forces carried out indiscriminate bombing and shelling in IS-controlled areas, and government-backed Shi'a militias abducted and executed scores of Sunni men in areas under government control. The conflict caused the deaths of some 10,000 civilians between January and October, forcibly displaced almost 2 million people and created a humanitarian crisis. This was exacerbated by the continuing influx of thousands of refugees from Syria, mostly to Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region. The government continued to hold thousands of detainees without charge or trial, many of them in secret detention with no access to the outside world. Torture and other ill-treatment in detention remained rife, and many trials were unfair. Courts passed many death sentences, mostly on terrorism charges; more than 1,000 prisoners were on death row, and executions continued at a high rate.**

## BACKGROUND

Armed conflict flared in January between government security forces and the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) armed

group, a month after the authorities forcibly dispersed a year-long protest camp set up by members of the Sunni community in Ramadi, Anbar province. Government forces used indiscriminate shelling to regain control over Fallujah and parts of Ramadi from ISIS, killing civilians and causing damage to civilian infrastructure. Anbar province remained in conflict throughout the year amid allegations that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki had undermined efforts by tribal leaders to broker a solution.

The government's failure to resolve the crisis, among other factors, left Anbar unable to stem the rapid military advance of ISIS, whose fighters seized control of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, in June and then much of Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninevah and Salah al-Din provinces. This sparked a dramatic resurgence in sectarian tensions and massive displacement of communities at risk from armed attacks by ISIS or government air strikes. Ethnic and religious minorities were particularly targeted by ISIS, which forced all non-Sunni and non-Muslims out of the areas under its control.

On 30 June, ISIS declared a "caliphate", renamed itself Islamic State (IS) under the leadership of Iraqi-born Abu Baker al-Baghdadi, and called on Muslims around the world to declare allegiance to him.

In August, IS fighters seized control of the Sinjar region, killing and abducting large numbers of its Yezidi inhabitants who were unable to flee. Following IS advances and the public beheading of UK and US nationals in IS captivity, a US-led international coalition of 40 countries began air strikes against IS in August, and increased military support and training to Iraqi government forces and Kurdish Peshmerga forces fighting against IS.

Parliamentary elections took place in April amid violence that saw two members of the Independent High Electoral Commission and at least three candidates killed, and attacks by gunmen on polling stations in Anbar, Diyala and other predominantly Sunni areas. Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition, mostly

Shi'a, won the largest bloc of seats but he did not secure a third term as Prime Minister and was replaced in September, following domestic and foreign demands for a more inclusive government.

The proposed Ja'fari Law, intended as a personal status law for Shi'a communities in Iraq, was withdrawn after widespread criticism that it could undermine the rights of women and girls, including by legalizing marriage for girls as young as nine.

Tension between the Baghdad authorities and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the north eased following an interim agreement in November over oil revenues and KRG contributions to the federal budget.

## **INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT**

Government forces and Shi'a militias armed and backed by the government committed war crimes and human rights violations, predominantly targeting Sunni communities. In Anbar, Mosul and other areas under IS control, government forces carried out indiscriminate air strikes in civilian areas, including with barrel bombs, that killed and injured civilians. In September, Prime Minister al-Abadi called on the security forces to cease all shelling of civilian areas, but air strikes in IS-controlled areas continued, with ensuing civilian casualties.

Security forces and Shi'a militias abducted or detained Sunnis and carried out scores of extrajudicial executions with impunity. In areas where they regained control from IS, they also destroyed homes and businesses of Sunni residents, in reprisal for the alleged support for IS by members of those communities. KRG Peshmerga forces also carried out reprisal destruction of homes of Sunni Arab residents in areas they recaptured from IS.

## **ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS**

Armed groups carried out indiscriminate suicide and car bomb attacks throughout Iraq, killing and injuring thousands of

civilians. As they gained control of much of northwestern Iraq, IS fighters embarked on a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing in which they committed war crimes, including mass summary killings and abductions that targeted religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians, Yazidis, Shi'a Turkmen and Shi'a Shabaks.

Hundreds of detainees, mainly Shi'a, were killed by IS fighters who seized Badush Central Prison, west of Mosul, in June. In July, IS fighters forced thousands of Christians from their homes and communities, threatening them with death unless they converted to Islam, and in August carried out deadly mass attacks against the Yazidi minority. IS fighters who attacked the Sinjar region abducted thousands of Yazidi civilians, summarily killing hundreds of men and boys as young as 12 in Qiniyeh, Kocho and other villages. Hundreds, possibly thousands, including entire families remained missing. Hundreds of women and girls were subjected to sexual abuse.

IS fighters also killed members of the Sunni community they suspected of opposing them or of working for the government, its security forces or previously for US forces in Iraq. In October, IS killed over 320 members of the Sunni Abu Nimr tribe in Anbar as the government sought to mobilize and arm Sunni tribes to fight against IS.

IS fighters carried out summary killings of hundreds of people they captured, including government soldiers. In June, they summarily executed more than 1,000 soldiers and army volunteers taken prisoner as they fled unarmed from Camp Speicher, a major military base in Tikrit. IS posted video footage of some of the killings on the internet.

IS forces destroyed or desecrated historical sites and places of worship across all ethnic and religious communities, established Shari'a courts in areas they controlled and called for those who had worked for the government or US forces to repent. They issued strict rules on individual behaviour, requiring women and girls to wear face

veils and to be with a male relative outside the home, segregating males and females at schools and workplaces, and banning smoking and "western-style" activities and lifestyles.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

Women and girls, mainly from the Yazidi community, were abducted by IS fighters and subjected to forced marriage, rape and other sexual abuses. They were also reportedly sold as slaves and sexually exploited, both within Iraq and in IS-controlled areas of neighbouring Syria. By November, more than 200 women and children, some only a few months old, had managed to escape from IS captivity. Among them was an 18-year-old woman who was abducted with other relatives when IS fighters raided the Sinjar area in August and forcibly "married" to an IS fighter who repeatedly raped her and beat her after she tried to escape. She escaped together with a girl aged 15 who had also been abducted and given to an IS fighter as a "wife". Other women were victims of unlawful execution-style killings for criticizing the IS or disobeying its orders. In October, IS killed a former parliamentarian, Iman Muhammad Younes, after holding her in captivity for weeks.

## **ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS**

The authorities held thousands of detainees without charge or trial under provisions of the anti-terrorism law. In February, the head of the Parliament's Human Rights Committee alleged that around 40,000 detainees remained in prison awaiting investigations. Many were held in prisons and detention centres run by various government ministries.

A letter sent by the Central Investigation Court to the Head of the Supreme Judicial Council in 2013, published in April 2014, reported that authorities continued to carry out unlawful arrests using a list containing partial names of thousands of suspects that the Anti-terrorism General Directorate had sent to police stations in connection with

sectarian violence in 2006 and 2007. This was believed to have led to the detention of the wrong people on the basis that part of their names corresponded to partial names on the list.

## **TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT**

Torture and other ill-treatment remained common and widespread in prisons and detention centres, particularly those controlled by the Ministries of the Interior and Defence, and were committed with impunity. These centres were blocked to inspection by the Independent High Commission for Human Rights. Interrogators tortured detainees to extract information and “confessions” for use against them at trial; sometimes detainees were tortured to death. Government representatives attending the Universal Periodic Review of Iraq at the UN Human Rights Council said the authorities had investigated 516 torture cases between 2008 and 2014, with many resulting in prosecutions, but provided no details and did not identify the security agencies responsible.

‘Uday Taha Kurdi, a lawyer and father of two, died in June after 15 days of detention by Anti-terrorism General Directorate officials in Baghdad. In a letter to the Iraqi Lawyers’ Union in July, the Ministry of the Interior said that ‘Uday Taha Kurdi had suffered a “health problem” in detention and had been taken to hospital, where he died. The Ministry also said that a judge had concluded that ‘Uday Taha Kurdi, whose brother was held on terrorism charges, was “from the IS leadership” and belonged to “a terrorist family”, and that he had told the judge, when asked, that he had not been tortured. The Supreme Judicial Council said his death resulted from kidney failure, not torture as alleged. However, photographs of ‘Uday Taha Kurdi’s body taken at the morgue and obtained by Amnesty International showed that he had sustained bruises, open wounds and burns - consistent with allegations of torture - prior to his death.

## **UNFAIR TRIALS**

The criminal justice system remained deeply flawed. The judiciary lacked independence. Judges and lawyers involved in trials of members of armed groups continued to be targets for killings, abductions and assaults by armed groups. Trials, particularly of defendants facing terrorism charges, were frequently unfair; courts returned guilty verdicts on the basis of torture-tainted “confessions”, which were often broadcast on the government-controlled al-Iraqiya TV channel. Other guilty verdicts were based on evidence from secret, unidentified informants, including in cases that resulted in death sentences.

In November, a Baghdad court sentenced former leading Sunni parliamentarian Ahmed al-‘Alwani to death on terrorism-related charges after a grossly unfair trial. Security forces had arrested him in December 2013 after they forcibly dispersed a year-long protest in Anbar.

## **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

Journalists worked in extremely hazardous conditions and faced threats from both state and non-state actors. Some were victims of targeted killings or assassination attempts; others were physically assaulted.

In March, Mohammad Bdaiwi al-Shammari, a university professor and Baghdad Bureau Chief for Radio Free Iraq, was shot dead at a checkpoint in Baghdad by a Presidential Guards officer during an argument over access to the presidential complex. In August, a court sentenced the officer to life imprisonment.

In June, the government-controlled Communications and Media Commission issued “mandatory” guidelines regulating media activities “during the war on terror”, demanding that media outlets not make public information about insurgent forces, and requiring them to not criticize government forces and to report on government forces only in favourable terms.

Journalists were abducted and executed by IS in areas under their control. In October, Ra'ad Mohammed Al-'Azawi, cameraman for Sama Salah al-Din TV Channel, was beheaded in Samarra, after a month in captivity, reportedly for refusing to co-operate with IS.

## **INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE**

Almost 2 million people were forced from their homes due to the fighting in the Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninevah and Salah al-Din provinces, with half of them fleeing to Iraq's Kurdistan Region, which by November was also hosting some 225,000 refugees from Syria. Thousands of Iraqi refugees returned to Iraq from Syria and elsewhere but could not return to their homes, swelling the number of internally displaced persons.

The unprecedented scale of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq led the UN to categorize it at the highest level of emergency and advised governments to afford international protection to Iraqi asylum-seekers and safeguard them from forcible return.

## **KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ**

Although Kurdish Peshmerga forces battled against IS in several areas of northern Iraq, the three provinces that comprise the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region remained largely immune from the violence engulfing much of the rest of Iraq until November, when a car bomb exploded outside an Erbil governorate building killing at least four and injuring 22 others.

The KRG authorities continued to target those who openly criticized official corruption or expressed dissent. The executive authorities continued to interfere in the judiciary, influencing trials. Incidents of torture and other ill-treatment continued to be reported. People arrested on terrorism charges were held incommunicado without access to family or lawyers for prolonged periods.

KRG authorities continued to detain journalist Niaz Aziz Saleh, held since January 2012 for allegedly disclosing details of election rigging, without charge or trial. General Security (Asayish Gishti) in Erbil reportedly refused repeatedly to take him to court to stand trial.

## **DEATH PENALTY**

Courts continued to impose death sentences for a range of crimes. Most of the defendants had been convicted on terrorism-related charges, often after unfair trials. In April, the Justice Ministry said 600 prisoners were on death row at al-Nassiriya Prison alone, where new execution facilities were installed. In August, the Justice Minister said that a total of 1,724 prisoners were awaiting execution, including some whose sentences had still to be finally confirmed.

The authorities continued to carry out large numbers of executions, including multiple executions. On 21 January, the authorities executed 26 prisoners less than a week after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the Iraqi authorities to impose a moratorium on executions. Rebuffing this call during a joint press conference with Ban Ki-moon, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said that his government did "not believe that the rights of someone who kills people must be respected".

# **IRELAND**

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## **Republic of Ireland**

Head of state: **Michael D. Higgins**

Head of government: **Enda Kenny**

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**Abortion legislation and guidance failed to comply with Ireland's human rights obligations. Transgender individuals faced barriers to legal gender recognition. Responses to victims of past institutional**