



## Factsheet

### ISIL (Da'esh) crimes committed against the Christians in Iraq

Launch of investigation: early 2019

#### SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

The investigation focused on ISIL's (Da'esh) crimes committed against the Christian communities in or around Mosul and the Nineveh Plains in the Nineveh governorate between at least June 2014 and July 2017. It looked into ISIL's (Da'esh) takeover of Mosul and Christian towns in the Nineveh Plains, including Qaraqosh, Bartella, and Karamlesh, while also focusing on incidents in Sinjar, Bashiqa and Kirkuk.

#### DESCRIPTION OF VICTIM GROUP

The victim group consists of members of Christian communities in Iraq, the indigenous people of Mesopotamia including Assyrians/Syriacs, Chaldeans and Armenians, who were persecuted by ISIL (Da'esh) from June 2014 to July 2017. The Christian families were concentrated primarily in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains towns of Qaraqosh, Bartella, and Karamlesh. ISIL (Da'esh) began marking Christian homes and properties in Mosul with the Arabic letter "ن" (pronounced "nun"), which stands for "*Nasrani*" (Nazarene), a term used to refer to Christians. This symbol was purposely used as a discriminatory label, singling out Christian families and signalling their religious identity.

#### MAIN LOCATIONS/AREAS

Mosul, Qaraqosh, Bartella, Karamlesh, Nimrud, Sinjar, Bashiqa (Nineveh governorate); Kirkuk (Kirkuk governorate).

#### MAIN INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITIES

As part of its work, the Investigative Team screened and/or interviewed nearly 150 witnesses. It also collected documentary evidence, including judicial documents, audio-visual material, including ISIL (Da'esh) propaganda material. The Investigative Team also focused on the collection of evidence documenting the damage or destruction of around 90 Christian cultural heritage sites, including churches, monasteries and cemeteries.

A confidential report on ISIL (Da'esh) crimes committed against Christian communities was shared with the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council in August 2024.



## COOPERATION

The Investigative Team benefitted from cooperation with several Iraqi authorities, including the Iraqi Nationality and Civil Status Department, the Nineveh Anti-Terrorism Court, the Nineveh Antiquities Department and the Mosul Cultural Museum. These organizations provided significant amounts of valuable information to support the collection of evidence. The Investigative Team also cooperated with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Foreign Relations Office coordinating various aspects of the investigation and evidence collection efforts. This collaboration expanded to coordination with the KRG's Ministries of Interior and Endowments and Religious Affairs, as well as local security forces.

The Investigative Team engaged extensively with civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to bolster its investigation. Through such cooperation, the Investigative Team obtained valuable documentation, expert reports and testimonial evidence. These organizations facilitated access to affected communities, assisted in gathering evidence, and supported the verification of information related to ISIL's (Da'esh) actions.

## OUTREACH

The Investigative Team conducted outreach activities with affected Christian communities, meeting with different community representatives in Iraq, including those displaced within Iraq and abroad. Furthermore, the Investigative Team conducted field missions to gather testimonies and evidence, and to build trust.

As part of its outreach efforts, in August 2023, the Investigative Team organized a [conference](#) titled "Pursuing Justice for the Christian Community in Iraq." The conference brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including community religious leaders, NGOs and international organizations, to discuss the ongoing investigation and advocate for accountability. This event provided an opportunity to share findings, listen to local (religious) leaders and strengthen partnerships.

## OVERVIEW OF FACTUAL FINDINGS

On 10 June 2014, ISIL (Da'esh) took over the city of Mosul, where many Christian families resided, and began appropriating and destroying Christian property, religious symbols and cultural heritage. Many Christians fled the city in the first wave of mass displacement. A planned meeting called by ISIL (Da'esh) with Christian leaders did not take place; the meeting was reportedly meant to address the option of converting to Islam or paying a religious tax (*jizyah*) to receive protected-person status. Instead, in July 2014, ISIL (Da'esh) leadership issued an ultimatum, ordering the remaining Christians to leave their territory or be killed. This led to further waves of mass displacement of Christians from the city.

In the subsequent months, ISIL (Da'esh) expanded its control to the Nineveh Plains, including key areas in the Hamdaniyah district (Qaraqosh, Bartella and Karamlesh). Christians there were presented with the same ultimatum as those in Mosul: leave or be killed. As a result, thousands of Christians were forced to flee to Erbil, Türkiye or other countries. In total, approximately 60,000 to 100,000 Christians from Mosul and the Nineveh Plains were displaced between June and August 2014. As in Mosul, Christian property, religious symbols and cultural heritage were appropriated, co-opted or destroyed. ISIL (Da'esh) took over



Qaraqosh, Bartella and Karamlesh on or about 7 August 2014. In Qaraqosh, Christians who did not flee were captured and detained. Several Christian women were held in captivity as *sabaya*. In Bartella, Christians were forced to convert and those who refused were killed or kidnapped. In Karamlesh, Christians who remained in the town were captured and are still missing. Christian houses were looted and set on fire.

During the takeover of Sinjar on 3 August 2014, Christians were also targeted, along Yazidis. In particular, Christians were forced to convert, and those who refused were killed, kidnapped or forced to leave their houses. Some are still missing. Christian houses in Sinjar were looted as well.

During ISIL's (Da'esh) control of Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, at least 90 Christian cultural heritage sites were damaged, destroyed or misused by ISIL (Da'esh). These include churches, monasteries, cemeteries, church schools, archdioceses and museums. Three main, often overlapping patterns of misuse, damage or destruction could be identified: (1) use of Christian sites for shooting practice or as training centres, ISIL (Da'esh) headquarters, Sharia courts and detention facilities, or their sale to local contractors; (2) removal, damage and destruction of Christian symbols (while the site itself was used for the aforementioned purposes); (3) bombing or burning of Christian sites.

Publications, public speeches and *fatwas* (religious edicts) issued by ISIL (Da'esh) at the time point to internal directives sanctioning the systematic targeting of Christians.

## OVERVIEW OF PRELIMINARY LEGAL FINDINGS

The Investigative Team found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that, between June 2014 and July 2017, ISIL (Da'esh) committed acts that may amount to:

- **war crimes**, such as: intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population, sexual violence, outrages upon personal dignity, damage or destruction of cultural property, pillage, spreading terror amongst the civilian population;
- **crimes against humanity**, such as: sexual violence and forcible transfer.

## RELEVANT PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

[Summary of Factual and Legal Assessment of Crimes Committed by ISIL \(Da'esh\) against Christians in Iraq](#)

[Damage and destruction of cultural heritage by ISIL \(Da'esh\) in Iraq \(September 2024\)](#)