



Factsheet

ISIL (Da'esh) crimes committed against the Kaka'i community in Iraq

Launch of investigation: May 2020

SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

The investigation focused on the crimes committed by ISIL (Da'esh) between June 2014 and December 2017 against the Kaka'i community residing in several villages of the Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates.

DESCRIPTION OF VICTIM GROUP

Kaka'is are an ethno-religious minority group in Iraq practicing Yarsanism, a syncretic religion that contains elements of other religions. The group has historically kept its beliefs hidden. Yarsanism is mostly practiced within groups in Iraq and Iran. The Kaka'i community in Iraq numbers between 100,000 and 250,000 people, located mainly in Kirkuk, Diyala, Erbil, Nineveh, and Sulaymaniyah governorates. Kaka'is are generally considered to be of Kurdish ethnicity, while maintaining a distinct religious identity.

MAIN INVESTIGATION LOCATIONS/AREAS

Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates

MAIN INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITIES

As part of its work, the Investigative Team screened and/or interviewed dozens of witnesses, including victims. It also collected videos and photographs and other open-source information, including social media posts. The Investigative Team conducted field visits to approximately ten Kaka'i villages, meeting community representatives and witnesses as well as documenting the destruction of cultural heritage sites, such as religious shrines.

COOPERATION AND OUTREACH

The Investigative Team established contact and maintained communication with representatives of two Kaka'i associations, including the Methra organization for Yarsan culture and development. The Investigative Team organized meetings with local Kaka'i dignitaries and civil society representatives to gather information and apprise the communities about UNITAD's work.

A confidential report on ISIL (Da'esh) crimes committed against the Kaka'i community was shared with the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council in September 2024.



OVERVIEW OF FACTUAL FINDINGS

When ISIL (Da'esh) began its advance in northern Iraq in early June 2014, most Kaka'is living in villages east of Mosul in Nineveh governorate fled to Erbil for fear of being killed or mistreated by ISIL (Da'esh). ISIL (Da'esh) reportedly released statements threatening Kaka'is with death if they did not convert to their radical and extreme interpretation of Islam. Several Kaka'i villages were taken over by ISIL (Da'esh) in 2014 and remained under ISIL (Da'esh) control until their liberation starting in mid-2016. During its period of control, ISIL (Da'esh) engaged in widespread destruction of cultural buildings and shrines, including by planting booby traps and other explosive devices.

OVERVIEW OF PRELIMINARY LEGAL FINDINGS

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

- **war crimes**, such as: murder, torture, arbitrary detention, hostage-taking, destruction or plunder of property, destruction or damage to cultural heritage, directing attacks against the civilian population and spreading terror;
- **crimes against humanity**, such as: murder, torture, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, forcible transfer, persecution and other inhumane acts, especially of forced religious conversion;

against members of the Kaka'i community across Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates.

Whilst some of the collected information (ISIL (Da'esh) official publications, witness accounts, open-source publications), suggests ISIL (Da'esh) may have adopted a genocidal policy for the destruction of the Kaka'i group as such, in whole or in part, further investigations are needed to find reasonable grounds to believe that ISIL (Da'esh) acts against members of the Kaka'i community in Iraq in 2014-2017 were undertaken with genocidal intent.

RELEVANT PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

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