



Factsheet

Sexual and gender-based crimes committed by ISIL (Da'esh) in Iraq

Launch of investigation: mid-2019

SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

The investigation covered ISIL (Da'esh) crimes committed between 2014 and 2017 against all affected communities. These included religious and minority communities namely the Yazidi, Christian, Shi'a Turkmen, the Shabak and the Kaka'i communities, as well as members of the Sunni community.

DESCRIPTION OF VICTIM GROUP

Those affected by sexual violence committed by ISIL (Da'esh) were overwhelmingly women and girls, the age of the victim often varying depending on the community to which she belonged. Yazidi women and girls as young as nine years old were sexually enslaved and subjected to frequent rapes and other forms of sexual violence. Victims from the Shi'a Turkmen community were mostly girls who upon capture were forced to marry ISIL (Da'esh) members, while all cases documented by the Investigative Team of victims from the Shabak community who were raped in detention were adult women. In regard to the Christian community, the Investigative Team documented sexual violence including rapes of both girls and women. Similarly, women and girls from the Sunni community were targeted by ISIL (Da'esh) who forced many to marry members of the organization.

MAIN LOCATIONS/AREAS

Sexual crimes took place across the territory controlled by ISIL (Da'esh). Often the crimes started in the hometown of the victims, such as the Yazidis who were captured in villages and towns across Sinjar, and then continued in other locations to where ISIL (Da'esh) took the victims. Similarly, several Christian women and girls were first victimized in their hometown, including those from Qaraqosh. This was not, however, the case of Shi'a Turkmen girls who were captured in Sinjar after fleeing their homes in Tal Afar. Shabak women and girls were raped in detention after attempting to flee.

MAIN INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITIES

As part of its work, the Investigative Team screened and/or interviewed dozens of witnesses. It also collected documentary and audio-visual evidence. The Investigative Team conducted 15 field missions to various locations to meet community representatives and identify potential witnesses.



COOPERATION

The Investigative Team received substantial support from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), including survivors' groups. Through cooperation with these CSOs, the Investigative Team was able to build a network of actors who could provide relevant information for the investigations. When there was consent, CSOs also provided their own interviews with survivors, video and photographs of relevant sites, and analytical reports on the crimes they documented.

OUTREACH

In February 2023, the Investigative Team hosted a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Dialogue Forum [on the topic of sexual and gender-based violence](#), which was attended by a large number of local NGOs representing victims from different communities. This was an opportunity to discuss sexual and gender-based crimes from different perspectives, ranging from options for criminal accountability to reparations for the survivors.

OVERVIEW OF FACTUAL FINDINGS

YAZIDIS

Upon attacking Sinjar on 3 August 2014, ISIL (Da'esh) captured large numbers of Yazidi families and proceeded to separate men and teenage boys from the rest of their relatives, with men often being killed on the spot. Women and children were taken to holding sites such as schools and prisons where hundreds of captives could be held. This marked the beginning of the organized slave trade system that they entered, and which was designed for the sexual enslavement of Yazidi women and girls. ISIL (Da'esh) laid out their justification for the sexual enslavement of Yazidi women and girls in a number of documents that were issued or published after the attack on Sinjar. Upon arrival to the holding sites, ISIL (Da'esh) organized Yazidi captives in groups: married women and children, young and unmarried women, and girls and boys. First, the captives were held in large groups. Later, they were divided further whereby married women with children were taken to Raqqa in Syria to be sold, while girls over nine years old and unmarried women were transferred to other locations and taken as sex slaves, "*sabaya*", by ISIL (Da'esh) fighters. In captivity, women and girls were subjected to frequent, often brutal, rapes, endured physical violence, and were forced to perform domestic labour. Many were given contraceptives or were forced to undergo abortions. While some were forced to convert to Islam and marry their captor, most were sold multiple times to different ISIL (Da'esh) members.

The slave trade system operated in a number of ways. In some cities women were sold or gifted to ISIL (Da'esh) members in physical slave markets. After the first six months of captivity, the markets were moved online, and ISIL (Da'esh) members also sold "*sabaya*" directly to one another.

While many Yazidi women and girls have escaped captivity, often after being enslaved for several years, others perished while being held by ISIL (Da'esh), some by having committed suicide and others by being killed during military operations. More than 2,500 Yazidis remain missing.



CHRISTIANS

When ISIL (Da'esh) took over Qaraqosh, Karamlesh, and Bartella, on 7 August 2014, only a small number of Christians remained, most having fled out of fear for their lives. Those who remained became targets for violence and harassment. ISIL (Da'esh) members arrested Christians and held several women in Bartella as captives for several months. Also in August 2014, Christians in Qaraqosh were told to leave but ISIL (Da'esh) arrested a number of Christian men and women before they could do so. Some of the women were sexually assaulted while being searched and one reported an attempted rape in detention.

There is also evidence that in some cases Christian women were subjected to sexual slavery. It appears that in Qaraqosh, ISIL (Da'esh) members selected some Christian women and took them to Mosul to be sold or given to ISIL (Da'esh) members. ISIL (Da'esh) members expressly referred to these women as "*sabaya*". While a small number of women were released, other enslaved Christian women were taken to Syria and spent years in captivity where they were sold repeatedly. In captivity, they suffered repeated and often brutal rapes and other acts of sexual violence. They were also forced to convert to Sunni Islam, and some may have been forcibly married.

SHI'A TURKMEN

Similarly to Yazidi families, Shi'a Turkmen families from Tal Afar were captured together on or shortly after 3 August 2014, either in their homes or as they fled to Sinjar upon ISIL's (Da'esh) advances. ISIL (Da'esh) questioned them about their religious beliefs and insulted them for being Shi'a.

Shortly after being captured, Shi'a Turkmen boys and girls were taken to separate sections of an orphanage in Mosul. ISIL (Da'esh) members in charge of the orphanage in Mosul set up an arrangement for the systematic forced marriage of Shi'a Turkmen girls to ISIL (Da'esh) fighters. ISIL (Da'esh) judges visited the orphanage and questioned Turkmen girls above 12 years old and asked them to remove their niqab. Subsequently, ISIL (Da'esh) members selected girls and showed their pictures to ISIL (Da'esh) fighters seeking marriage. In other cases, ISIL (Da'esh) women would visit the orphanage to select girls for marriage with their male relatives. Once a decision had been made, the girls would be taken to a Shari'a Court to seek permission from a judge to proceed with the intended marriage.

SHABAK

Shabak-populated areas, such as Khursabat, Barima and Tal Yara, were occupied by ISIL (Da'esh) in early August 2014. Shi'a Shabaks who were captured or arrested and then detained by ISIL (Da'esh) were at an increased risk of sexual violence. Shabak women and girls, except elderly women, may have suffered sexual and physical violence from ISIL (Da'esh) members. In 2016, at two different locations, several Shi'a Shabak and Turkmen women and children were reportedly imprisoned, tortured and sexually abused by ISIL (Da'esh) members.

Several Sunni Shabak women were sexually assaulted and raped by ISIL (Da'esh) members during their detention after attempting to flee ISIL (Da'esh) controlled territory. In one case, an ISIL (Da'esh) member tried to take the woman's 12-year-old daughter, but she refused and told him to take her instead. In another case, the victim was informed by her rapist that he would treat her as a "*sabaya*". Several Shi'a



Shabak women whom ISIL (Da'esh) thought to be Sunni were subjected to the same fate upon being arrested as they fled Mosul.

OVERVIEW OF PRELIMINARY LEGAL FINDINGS

The Investigative Team found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that, in the context of ISIL (Da'esh) intending to destroy the Yazidis as a protected religious group, sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls may amount to **genocide**. In particular, the Investigative Team found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the sexual violence Yazidi women and girls endured may amount to the genocidal acts of serious bodily and mental harm and that ISIL (Da'esh) imposed measures to prevent births in the group.

The Investigative Team also found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes committed by ISIL (Da'esh) against Yazidi, Christian, Shi'a Turkmen and Shabak women and girls may amount to the:

- **war crimes** of rape, torture, and sexual slavery; and
- **crimes against humanity** of rape, torture, sexual slavery, persecution, and other inhumane acts.

RELEVANT PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

[Report on sexual violence against women and girls committed by ISIL in Iraq](#)

[Analysis of the Sexual and Gender-Based Crimes and Crimes Against or Affecting Children Committed Against the Shi'a Turkmen Community by ISIL \(Da'esh\)](#)