



Factsheet

ISIL (Da'esh) crimes committed against the Shabak 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 Shabak community in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains in Nineveh governorate.

DESCRIPTION OF VICTIM GROUP

Shabaks are a minority community who have lived in Iraq since the 16th century. While precise demographic breakdowns are not available, prior to ISIL's (Da'esh) control over parts of Iraq, Shabaks reportedly numbered between 200,000 and 350,000 – less than one per cent of the population. Most Shabaks identify as a distinct ethnic group, neither Arab nor Kurdish, and speak a distinct language, known as "*Shabaki*." The majority of Shabaks identify as Shi'a Muslims (about 70 per cent), and the remainder, as Sunni Muslims. Nevertheless, the Shabak faith blends elements of Islam, including Sufi Islam, with local beliefs - making it a distinct belief system and religion. Primarily located in Nineveh governorate, the Shabaks reside in about 75 villages across the Nineveh Plains and are mostly farmers. There is also a small number of Shabaks living in Mosul city.

MAIN INVESTIGATION LOCATIONS/AREAS

Investigations have focused on 13 key locations in the Nineveh governorate – seven in Mosul District (including Mosul city, Gogjali, Bawiza, Abu Jarboua, Tilyara, Al Fadhilya, and Bazwaya), three in Al-Hamdaniya District (Bayrbokh, Khorsabat, and Orthakarab), and three in Tal Kayf District (Ali Rash, Umarkan, and Kabarli).

MAIN INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITIES

As part of its work, the Investigative Team screened and/or interviewed dozens of witnesses, including victims. It also collected documentary evidence and open-source information, including social media posts. The Investigative Team conducted field visits to thirteen Shabak 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 several victim associations. The Investigative Team organized meetings with local Shabak dignitaries and civil society representatives in Mosul.



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

OVERVIEW OF FACTUAL FINDINGS

During its control of Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, ISIL (Da'esh) abducted, mistreated, murdered and persecuted members of the Shabak community on religious and political grounds. Hundreds of Shabaks were abducted, and most likely killed. Shabak women and girls were sexually abused during detention by ISIL (Da'esh) members. Furthermore, ISIL (Da'esh) destroyed Shabak cultural heritage sites in an effort to eradicate religious practices not aligned with ISIL's radical and extreme interpretation of Islam. In some cases, ISIL (Da'esh) members forced Shabak men to take part in the destruction of their own heritage. ISIL's (Da'esh) crimes affected both Shi'a and Sunni Shabaks.

OVERVIEW OF PRELIMINARY LEGAL FINDINGS

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

- **war crimes**, such as murder, cruel treatment, torture, pillage, destruction of civilian property, damage or destruction of cultural property, rape, forcible recruitment, enlistment and use of children into armed groups and spreading terror among the civilian population;
- **crimes against humanity**, such as murder, torture and other inhumane acts, rape, enforced disappearance, forcible transfer and persecution;

against members of the Shabak community in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains.

To reach a finding that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the ISIL (Da'esh) crimes committed against the Shabak community may amount to **genocide**, other instances of ISIL (Da'esh) killings against Shi'as, within the territory controlled by the armed group and in the context of an ISIL (Da'esh) genocidal policy towards the Shi'as of Iraq, must be corroborated and examined together. Such instances include the massacre at the Tikrit Air Academy, the Badush Central Prison massacre and crimes committed against Shi'a Turkmen.

RELEVANT PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

[Report on sexual violence against women and girls committed by ISIL in Iraq \(2023\)](#)

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