



## Factsheet

# The ISIL (Da'esh) attack against Sinjar and subsequent crimes against the Yazidi community

Launch of the investigation: May 2019

### SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

The investigation focused on crimes committed by ISIL (Da'esh) against the Yazidi community in the Sinjar region of Iraq between August 2014 and at least April 2015.

### DESCRIPTION OF VICTIM GROUP

Indigenous communities of Yazidis are present in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia and Georgia. They speak the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish as their native language. The Yazidis practice Yazidism, a non-Abrahamic monotheistic religion with ancient elements from Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. The Yazidis have faced historical persecutions due to their unique beliefs and practices, including their reverence for Tawûsî Melek, the Peacock Angel who descended to Earth. ISIL (Da'esh) openly acknowledged and sought to justify criminal acts against the Yazidi people under its interpretation of Islam, equating Yazidism to a pagan religion and associating the "fallen angel" with the story of Lucifer.

### MAIN LOCATIONS/AREAS

Sinjar region, Nineveh governorate

### MAIN INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITIES

As part of its work, the Investigative Team screened and/or interviewed over 200 witnesses, including victims. It also collected documentary evidence, including case files, digital evidence, telecommunication data, forensic evidence, including aerial and satellite imagery, open-source information, including ISIL (Da'esh) materials and audiovisual materials. Furthermore, the Investigative Team conducted nearly 100 site visits to relevant locations in Sinjar to gather information and apprise the relevant local community about UNITAD's work. In 2021, the Investigative Team prepared, in collaboration with SITU, a [video](#) describing the crimes committed by ISIL (Da'esh) in Kocho and Solagh in August 2014.

### COOPERATION

The Investigative Team substantially benefitted from its cooperation with the Iraqi authorities, including those in Kurdistan, and particularly the Iraqi Judiciary. This cooperation resulted in the collection of a wide range of information and evidence, especially judicial casefiles and ISIL (Da'esh) produced materials.

The Investigative Team established contact and maintained regular communications with almost 30 civil society organizations in Iraq and international community partners – including non-governmental



organizations, foundations, think-tanks, universities and other UN agencies – involved in accountability and justice. Many of them provided valuable information relevant to the investigation.

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

## OUTREACH

The Investigative Team recruited members of the Yazidi community as liaison personnel and with their support engaged extensively with the community and its representatives, including religious leaders. This engagement proved to be central to furthering the Investigative Team's investigation. The Investigative Team's support to the excavation of mass graves and participation in several commemoration and return of remains ceremonies also strengthened its links with the impacted community.

## OVERVIEW OF FACTUAL FINDINGS

Having taken control of Mosul on 10 June 2014 and Tal Afar on 16 June 2014, ISIL (Da'esh) closed in on the town of Sinjar and its neighbouring villages. On 3 August 2014, ISIL (Da'esh) launched a coordinated attack across the Sinjar region, targeting its civilian Yazidi population. An estimated 35,000 to 50,000 Yazidis fled towards the Sinjar mountains. Once ISIL (Da'esh) controlled the area, it besieged the mountains and cut off all escape routes, leaving those hiding there without adequate access to water or food. This resulted in numerous deaths, mostly of children and the elderly. Others, who had not managed to reach the mountains or had not tried to flee, were captured. Upon capture, ISIL (Da'esh) separated Yazidi men and older boys from women and children. Men and older boys were forced to convert to ISIL's (Da'esh) interpretation of Islam and those who refused were, for the most part, immediately executed. The ones who converted were reunited with their families and first allowed to live in captivity under ISIL (Da'esh). This policy then gradually changed and eventually most of the forcibly converted men and older boys were also executed. The separation of the captives by gender marked the beginning of ISIL's (Da'esh) efforts to establish a systematic and organized slave trade and enslavement system of Yazidis. While in Solagh, a group of older women were separated from the other captives and executed; most of the women and girls were kept captives and distributed to ISIL (Da'esh) members. While in captivity, these women and girls were sold, traded and subjected to enslavement, sexual abuse, physical and mental sufferings, forced conversion and forced labour. These crimes continued for years, as thousands of women and girls were kept in continuous detention. Younger boys, on the other hand, were forcibly conscripted into the ranks of ISIL (Da'esh) and nearly all were subjected to forced labour, including for military operations.



## OVERVIEW OF LEGAL FINDINGS

The Investigative Team found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes committed by ISIL (Da'esh) against the Yazidi community in Sinjar region, Iraq, may amount to **genocide**.

The Investigative Team also found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the same acts may also amount to the:

- **war crimes** of intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population, murder, torture, cruel treatment, sexual violence, spreading terror amongst the civilian population, outrages upon personal dignity, enlisting children into armed forces groups, damage or destruction of cultural property and pillage; and
- **crimes against humanity** of murder, extermination, torture and other inhumane acts, sexual violence, enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, forcible transfer and persecution.

## RELEVANT PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

[The ISIL Attack on Sinjar in August 2014 and Subsequent Acts Committed Against the Yazidi Community in Iraq \(September 2024\)](#)

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