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Iraq: People held in Al-Jed'ah Centre subjected to torture and enforced disappearance after arrests – new investigation

- *Beatings, electric shocks and stress positions all commonplace*
- *Iraqis returned from Al-Hol detention camp in north-east Syria*
- *Authorities must act now before thousands more face similar violations*

Iraqis are being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment as well as enforced disappearance after being arrested in Al-Jed'ah Community Rehabilitation Centre in northern Iraq, Amnesty International said in a new investigation.

Amnesty International documented the cases of eight people, including seven men and one woman, who were arrested in Al-Jed'ah Centre (also known as Jed'ah 1 Camp) in 2023 and 2024. Seven of them faced torture and other ill-treatment. Interviewees said that the torture included severe beatings, electric shocks, being forced into stress positions, and being forcibly submerged in water or having their heads covered with a plastic bag so that air supply was restricted. Family members said they observed obvious effects of torture on their relatives, such as broken fingers and dislocated shoulders.

Many Iraqis have been transferred to Al-Jed'ah Centre from Al-Hol detention camp in north-east Syria, where tens of thousands are being [arbitrarily detained](#) as a result of their alleged links to the Islamic State (IS) armed group. Since 2021, an estimated 9,500 people have been returned to Iraq from Al-Hol. The Iraqi authorities are considering scaling up the return of Iraqis in Al-Hol – estimated at more than 18,000 – so that the vast majority are transferred by the end of 2027.

“The torture and other ill-treatment suffered by those arrested in Al-Jed'ah Centre is horrifying. It must be stopped and investigated immediately,”

said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"The Iraqi authorities and UN have agreed that tens of thousands of Iraqis will be returned to Al-Jed'ah Centre from Al-Hol detention camp in north-east Syria in the years ahead. It's unconscionable that after escaping a decade of war and detention, Iraqis return only to face further horrors. Before these practices affect the thousands of people due to be returned to Al-Jed'ah Centre, the Iraqi authorities must take urgent steps to end the use of torture and other ill-treatment."

Amnesty International conducted in-person interviews with individuals who had been arrested in Al-Jed'ah Centre and with their family members during a research visit to Iraq in July 2024, and in remote interviews conducted between July and September 2024. The organization also interviewed 16 staff members of the UN and other international organizations, and the president of the Ninewa Court of Appeal.

Seven of the eight cases documented involved detailed accounts of torture and other ill-treatment used during interrogations by the Iraqi security forces. Six of those interviewed are now serving lengthy prison sentences, based on their torture-tainted confessions. These patterns of violations are similar to those faced by Iraqi men transferred from prisons in north-east Syria to the Iraqi authorities, which Amnesty International [documented](#) in a major report earlier this year.

In July 2024, Amnesty International was refused access to visit or to conduct interviews in Al-Jed'ah Centre by the Iraqi authorities citing "security concerns". On 2 October 2024, Amnesty International wrote to the Prime Minister of Iraq detailing the findings of the investigation. No response had yet been received by the time of publication.

'Almost every person arrested will face torture... It's just the routine'

As of September 2024, Al-Jed'ah Centre held 2,223 people, including 1,318 children, 627 women and 278 men. Al-Jed'ah Centre is run by the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement, with the support of several other Iraqi ministries, the UN – including IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA, WHO and WFP – and international and local NGOs.

Since 2021, Iraqi security forces have carried out around 80 arrests of people in Al-Jed'ah Centre on charges of IS affiliation. The vast majority of those arrested are men, yet women and children have also been arrested.

Arrests of Iraqis in Al-Jed'ah Centre are made by the Iraqi security forces, including the army, police, and the intelligence forces. According to the president of the Ninewa Court of Appeal, those arrested in Al-Jed'ah

Centre are usually interrogated in Faisaliya Prison in Mosul or in Baghdad, and then usually tried in the Ninewa Counterterrorism Court in Mosul.

Saleem*, who was arrested along with his son Abdullah* in 2023, said that both suffered torture and other ill-treatment during their interrogations. He told Amnesty International: "They beat me, and... handcuffed my hands behind my back. They hit the soles of my feet with a green water pipe... I was just saying 'no', again and again... During the torture, they said they wanted me to confess to things I didn't do. I didn't confess, and so I didn't walk for four days."

Saleem said he saw Abdullah in their shared prison cell after his interrogation: "They hanged my son for four hours... He faced *ta'liq* [beating while suspended from a metal bar], beating on his feet, cursing, and insults to his dignity... Almost every person arrested will face torture... It's just the routine."

Maryam*, arrested from Al-Jed'ah Centre in 2024, told Amnesty International she was subjected to electric shocks, kicks, beating with a stick on her neck, and sexual harassment during her interrogation. She was also forced to witness the torture of other detainees. She told Amnesty International: "[The investigator] was... cursing me and saying things about my body. Some words [he said] I can't say, I can't even have them in my mouth... They kept saying that I should say I was with IS."

Mostafa*, arrested in 2024, was visited by his wife soon after his interrogation. She told Amnesty International: "I didn't recognize him... His teeth were broken, and he couldn't hear. He still can't hear properly. His ribs were broken... We could see how badly he was tortured."

Enforced disappearance

In six of the eight cases documented by Amnesty International, the person arrested from Al-Jed'ah Centre appeared to have been forcibly disappeared for a period of time ranging from 14 days to three months. In most cases, officials refused to disclose the whereabouts of the person arrested. Often, family members only learned of the fate of their relative through other detainees who were released.

Amnesty International has previously [documented](#) the pattern of the security forces arresting Iraqis in camps for internally displaced persons and subjecting them to enforced disappearance.

Mostafa's wife told Amnesty International: "We kept asking the administration where he was. They were just telling me, they took him... [and they were] always giving different answers. They did not like me to ask them about my husband. I was so afraid to ask, and I could see they were getting angry when I asked."

Wrongful arrests

While some arrests in Al-Jed'ah Centre may have been made on legitimate grounds, Iraqis and staff members of international organizations raised several factors that can often lead to a false accusation of IS affiliation.

In some cases, individuals have been accused of involvement with IS if one of their relatives joined the group. Fatima's* son Haider*, aged 14 when he reached Al-Hol camp, was arrested in Al-Jed'ah Centre. She told Amnesty International: "There was someone from [our village] who said everyone in our family was terrorists, the father and the sons... He [Haider] had no connection to terrorism. He was just a kid."

Personal feuds can also lead to false accusations. In two cases documented by Amnesty International, the accusations of IS affiliation arose out of marital disputes. These [patterns](#) have previously been [documented](#) by Amnesty International throughout the conflict involving IS in Iraq and its aftermath.

In some instances, community members who have taken residence in the house of a person who has left Iraq may accuse the individual of IS affiliation to avoid relinquishing possession of the property.

Inhumane prison conditions

In all eight cases documented by Amnesty International, each individual was charged under Iraq's [deeply-flawed 2005 Anti-Terrorism Law](#). Two of them were released after their investigations and trials. The remaining six were convicted, with five individuals sentenced to life in prison (20 years), and one to 15 years. All six are serving their sentences in either Nasiriyah Central Prison or Babel Central Prison.

According to some of their family members, the conditions in which they are held, particularly in Nasiriyah, are inhumane, with detainees being deprived of access to adequate food, water, sanitation and healthcare. Amnesty International has previously received reports of mistreatment by prison guards at Nasiriyah, including routine verbal and physical abuse.

All family members described how costly it is to provide their detained relatives with the food, clothing and medication they needed. The father of Abdullah, currently held in Babel, said: "We send him medicine, 300-350,000 dinars a month [the equivalent of US \$230-270]... There is so much money spent to visit them, to bring them food and clothes."

Many family members said they were left in desperate situations, as those arrested were often the sole wage earners for the family. The wife of Mostafa, who is serving a 20-year sentence in Babel, told Amnesty International: "We are really broken now. One of the children is working in

a car parking lot, giving receipts... The other is working in an ice cream and juice shop. They are the ones supporting the family... We are just begging for help from whoever we meet... We can't even afford the rent."

Amnesty International is calling on the Iraqi authorities to immediately end the use of torture and other ill-treatment and the enforced disappearance of those arrested in Al-Jed'ah Centre, and to conduct re-trials that meet international fair trial standards for all those convicted on the basis of torture-tainted confessions. The UN should conduct further investigations into the treatment of those arrested in Al-Jed'ah Centre, and cease their cooperation and support of the Iraqi authorities when such support is used in a way that is complicit with human rights violations.

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