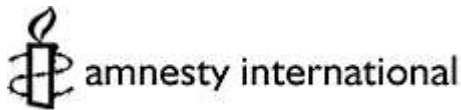


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Iraq: Tribal militia tortured detainees in revenge attacks during Mosul offensive

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Militia fighters from the Sab'awi tribe have unlawfully detained, publicly humiliated and tortured or otherwise ill-treated men and boys in villages south-east of Mosul that were recaptured from the armed group calling itself the Islamic State (IS) in recent days, said Amnesty International.

The organization's researchers on the ground in Iraq interviewed local officials and eyewitnesses including villagers who described how members of the Sab'awi Tribal Mobilization militia (*Hashd al-'Ashairi*) carried out punitive revenge attacks. Residents suspected of having ties to IS were beaten with metal rods and given electric shocks. Some were tied to the bonnets of vehicles and paraded through the streets or placed in cages.

"There is strong evidence that Sab'awi tribal militia members have committed crimes under international law by torturing and otherwise ill-treating residents in Qati' al Sab'awiin in revenge for crimes committed by IS," said Lynn Maalouf, Deputy Director for Research at Amnesty International's Beirut regional office.

"There is no doubt that IS fighters who are suspected of committing crimes must be held accountable in fair trials, but rounding up villagers and forcing them to endure public humiliation or other violations, including torture, is no way of securing justice, truth and reparation for victims of IS crimes."

Violations took place in al-Makuk, Tal al-Sha'eir, and Douizat al-Sufla – a group of villages located on the south-eastern bank of the river Tigris known as Qati' al-Sab'awiin (Sector of the Sab'awi tribe). Eyewitnesses described how members of the Sab'awi Tribal Mobilization militia seized men and boys from the villages without a warrant.

One of the affected villages, al-Makuk, was [retaken by Iraqi forces from IS](#) on 20 October 2016. Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that fighters from the Sab'awi tribe entered the village before the Iraqi army arrived but after IS fighters had retreated, so no armed confrontations took place. According to the residents, tribal militia fighters, who belong to the same tribe as the villagers, started rounding up men and older boys as soon as they arrived.

One witness described how six militia members (*Hashd al-Ashairi*) dragged "Ahmed" (whose name has been changed to protect his identity) into the courtyard of his house and accused his brother of being a *Daeshi* (Arabic colloquial term for a person affiliated with the IS) before brutally beating him in front of his wife and children.

"They kicked him to the ground and 'tasered' him three times. They punched him and beat him with the back of their Kalashnikovs, with metal rods, and even a rubber hose – the thick ones used for agriculture," he said. The witness said "Ahmed" was unable to stand after the beating.

"They had no commanders. Every fighter from the *Hashd* had his own personal revenge to take... They drove around the village with men strapped onto car bonnets shouting things like 'come see the *Daeshi* who informed on me and my father'," said two of the witnesses.

Some residents told Amnesty International that they believe that the tribal militia were motivated by revenge for relatives killed by IS, as well as longstanding enmities unrelated to the conflict.

One woman said she saw militia members parading an IS suspect, who was believed to have been involved in an attempted bomb attack on a government official's home, through the village on the bonnet of their vehicle.

"They called for everyone to come out and see the *Daeshi*... His face was bloody...I was too scared to look at his face" she said.

Another witness, interviewed separately, corroborated the incident. He explained that militia men, accompanied by the security guards of the official who had been the target of the attack, beat the man on his face with cables.

All the witnesses interviewed described a disturbing scene in which seven men and boys, between the ages of 16 and 25, were placed in large poultry cages on display in the middle of a public roundabout. A Tribal Mobilization fighter asked each to walk out of the cage in turn saying to them: "What are you? Say you're an animal, say you're a donkey", before beating them and forcing them into cars.

Witnesses also said that on 21 October, Tribal Mobilization members gathered dozens of men and older boys in a public square in al-Makuk and spent two hours calling out the names of the 'wanted'. At least 14 boys and men whose names were called had their hands bound and were taken away.

Witnesses said that arrests by militia fighters were being carried out around the clock, even after a large convoy of Iraqi armed forces from the Ninewa Operations Command arrived on 22 October.

"Instead of being dragged through the streets, publicly harassed and taunted for being IS members, people suspected of committing human rights abuses should be referred to judicial authorities and if there is sufficient admissible evidence against them, tried according to international law," said Lynn Maalouf.

"All detainees must be treated humanely and must be protected from torture and other ill-treatment. Only those legally sanctioned to detain and interrogate suspects must be allowed to do so."

Some of those seized were held in a school in Sidawa, one of the villages in the Qati' al-Sab'awiin, along with men and boys from other nearby villages. A group of detainees was handed over to the Iraqi armed forces on 30 October, bearing marks of torture, according to witnesses. Others are

believed to still be held by the Tribal Mobilization fighters in unofficial detention facilities, including abandoned homes in villages in the Qita' al-Sab'awiin.

Amnesty International also received accounts of abuses carried out by the *Firsan Jbour* tribal militias targeting villagers from the al-Shora sub-district, south of Mosul. Witnesses told Amnesty International that on 26 October, militia fighters at checkpoints taunted them for belonging to *Daesh*, spat and threw rocks at them and threatened to kill or detain those with IS links as they were being transported to safer areas by Iraqi forces.

"They tried to grab us from the trucks. A few shouted that we should all be taken to be executed," said one 17-year-old boy.

"Iraqi authorities have [repeatedly failed to stop revenge attacks](#) or investigate crimes by militias from the Popular Mobilization Units, who are also participating in the Mosul offensive. This has fostered a dangerous culture of impunity in which perpetrators of such attacks feel they have free rein to commit crimes and go unpunished," said Lynn Maalouf.

"The authorities must rein in the tribal militia fighters responsible and bring them to justice, in order to prevent such crimes being repeated in the ongoing Mosul offensive. Those suspected of committing crimes must be removed from duty without delay."

Background

Tribal Mobilization militias, composed of fighters from Sunni tribes, have played an increasing role in the fight against IS and in securing their areas after they have been recaptured. While much less powerful than the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), predominantly Shi'a militias, some tribes within the Tribal Mobilization have also received support from government authorities.

Amnesty International has [previously documented](#) war crimes and human rights violations including abductions, extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings, torture and destruction of homes carried out by the Popular Mobilization Units.

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