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Battle for Mosul: ISIL forces thousands of civilians from their homes and executes hundreds

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Credible reports suggest that ISIL has been forcing tens of thousands of people from their homes in sub-districts around Mosul and has been forcibly relocating civilians inside the city itself since operations began on 17 October to restore Iraqi Government control over Mosul.

ISIL fighters are allegedly killing civilians who refuse to comply with ISIL's instructions or who previously belonged to the Iraqi Security Forces, including 232 civilians who were reportedly shot to death last Wednesday.

At least 5,370 families were abducted by ISIL from Shura sub-district, another 160 families from al-Qayyarah sub-district, 150 families from Hamam al-Alil sub-district and 2,210 families from Nimrud sub-district of al-Hamdaniya district, reports indicate.

Forced out at gunpoint, or killed if they resist or try to flee, these people are reportedly being moved to strategic ISIL locations.

Information received indicates that 60,000 persons are currently residing in Hamam al-Alil, an ISIL stronghold with a previous population of 23,000.

"ISIL's depraved, cowardly strategy is to attempt to use the presence of civilians to render certain points, areas or military forces immune from military operations, effectively using tens of thousands of women, men and children as human shields," Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said. The use of human shields is prohibited under international humanitarian law, and constitutes a violation of the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life.

Of the 232 civilians reportedly shot to death on Wednesday, reports indicate that 190 were former ISF personnel who were killed at the al-Ghazlani military base in Mosul. It appears that a day earlier many of these men and their families had been forced by ISIL from Shura and al-Qayyarah sub-districts, and were initially taken to Hamam al-Alil, where the men were separated from the women and children. The other 42 civilians were reportedly shot in the head at the al-Izza military base after they refused to join ISIL. Another 24 former ISF officers were reportedly killed on 25 October.

These reports are by no means comprehensive, but they are indicative of a serious pattern of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law being committed by ISIL.

"In the face of these flagrant violations of the law by ISIL, it is even more crucial that Government forces and their allies ensure scrupulous respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law," High Commissioner Zeid said.

"It is of utmost importance to ensure full respect for the cardinal principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

Captured ISIL fighters and those perceived to have supported them must be treated in full accordance with international law and held accountable for their crimes by properly constituted tribunals."

The High Commissioner expressed deep concern at reports that some individuals in the areas south of Mosul have embarked on revenge killings and had vowed on television that there will be "eye for eye revenge" against those who sided with ISIL.

In a positive step, it has been reported that a number of tribal leaders from Ninewa have agreed that their members should not exact revenge but should ensure that perpetrators of crimes and captured ISIL fighters are handed to the authorities for formal justice. However, tensions remain high and the potential for revenge attacks remains high.

"Even as the military operation continues, political and community leaders need to prepare for the day after the defeat of ISIL, to ensure the protection of all Iraqis without discrimination, accountability for perpetrators of crimes, and justice for the victims," Zeid said. "This will be crucial to avoid stoking sectarian sentiments and to quench the thirst for revenge."

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