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Education under Attack 2010 - Iraq

Between March 2003 and October 2008, 31,598 violent attacks against educational institutions were reported in Iraq, according to the Ministry of Education (MoE).⁵⁰⁸ Although overall security in Iraq had improved, the situation faced by schools, students, teachers and academics remained dangerous.⁵⁰⁹ The MoE reported 259 academics assassinated, another 72 abducted and 174 in detention between 2003 and 2008. The Ministry of Human Rights, however, reported 340 university professors and 446 students killed by insurgents and militias between 2005 and 2007. UNAMI Human Rights Reports indicate that between July 2005 and late March 2007 more than a hundred students were killed, mostly by suicide bombs, car bombs and mortar rounds targeted at universities and schools, with more than half the deaths occurring in two incidents in January 2007.⁵¹⁰

Education under Attack (2007) reported that 296 people serving as education staff were killed in 2005; and 180 teachers were killed between February and November 2006.⁵¹¹ In 2007, the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MODM) reported that at least 30 per cent of professors, doctors, pharmacists and engineers had fled the country since 2003.⁵¹²

The number of attacks on education targets reached a peak in 2006 and fell with the drop in the overall level of violence in Iraq, following the introduction of 30,000 extra US troops in June 2007.⁵¹³ By June 2008, the number of civilian deaths per month was down 75 per cent from July 2007 and the number of sectarian deaths in Baghdad had fallen from 1,600 in December 2006 to zero.⁵¹⁴ By December 2008, the number of daily attacks in Iraq had dropped by 95 per cent from 180 per day to ten, according to the US military.

Attacks on education targets continued throughout 2007 and 2008 at a lower rate – but one that would cause serious concern in any other country. In 2007, 53 academics and one student were assassinated and one academic went missing, presumed assassinated, according to the Brussels Tribunal Group. Nineteen of the victims were kidnapped or abducted before being killed; one was beheaded.⁵¹⁵

Analysis of English-language press reports of incidents in 2008 suggests that as many as ten academics and two intellectuals, one university student, 28 school students and two education ministry officials were killed; and one academic and one university student were injured. One academic (among those killed) and 60 students were kidnapped. Twenty academics were detained.⁵¹⁶ Threats to education institutions remained at a high level in some areas; in the case of Basra University, threats against female students were openly pinned to billboards or spray-painted on walls.⁵¹⁷

In one incident on 22 January 2008, a suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance to al-Mutwra school in Ba'qubah, injuring 17 students and four teachers.⁵¹⁸ On 22 March 2008, armed elements blew up a school building in Saydiyah.⁵¹⁹ MNF-I, the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police units occupied more than 70 school buildings for military purposes in the Diyala governorate.⁵²⁰

In 2008, kidnapping was a serious problem for university students, particularly on the roads leading to Kirkuk city. On 20 April, nine students and two drivers were kidnapped at a fake checkpoint near Baquba. On 12 May, six university students were kidnapped by armed men near Baquba. On 24 June, four students were kidnapped on their way to Mosul university by gunmen. In addition, on 26 June five students were wounded when the bodyguards of the Minister of Education fired on student protests in Sabe' Abkar.⁵²¹

Most of the academics killed were tracked down and assassinated at their place of work, at home or in a vehicle.

In May 2008, residents and government officials of Sadr City accused the Mahdi Army of closing down 86 schools and threatening teachers, staff and families of students.⁵²²

In central and southern Iraq, there were reported threats by militia, extremists or insurgent groups against schools and universities, urging them to modify activities, favour certain students or face violence. The institutions often complied with the threats, according to the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.⁵²³

In the first half of 2009, English-language media and human rights reports suggest six academics, three university students and four school students were killed; upwards of 20 university students and 12 schoolchildren were injured. The reduced numbers reflected continuing falls in the level of general violence.

By March 2009, insurgent attacks in Iraq had fallen from an average of 130 attacks per day in 2008 to about ten, according to Army Major General David G Perkins, Director for Strategic Effects at Multi-National Force, Iraq.⁵²⁴ Nevertheless, attacks on education targets continued, mostly in Mosul and Baghdad.⁵²⁵

On 11 February 2009, the morgue in Anbar, west of Baghdad, received the body of an Anbar university psychology professor, Izz al-Din Ayyoub, who was shot down near Falluja by gunmen as he left his house for work.⁵²⁶ On 26 February, a blast aimed at a police patrol wounded a number of Baghdad University students in southern Baghdad.⁵²⁷ On 26 February, gunmen reportedly killed a literature professor in Mosul.⁵²⁸ In early March, a car bomb exploded near the Medical University in Mosul killing three Iraqi soldiers and wounding ten civilians (mostly college students), the majority of whom were critically injured. There was light damage to the university building.⁵²⁹ On 14 March, Dr Murad Ahmed Shihab, a professor at the College of Administration and Economy at Mosul University, was killed by gunmen.⁵³⁰ On 17 March, a student of management and economy was reported killed by gunmen in Western Mosul.⁵³¹ On 25 March, four female schoolchildren were killed and seven others wounded when an explosive detonated near a primary school in Mosul as the children were leaving to go home. They were all under 12 years old.⁵³² On 21 April, a female university professor was assassinated in front of her home in western Mosul; police declined to give her name.⁵³³ On 24 May, an unnamed university teacher was ambushed by gunmen and shot dead in Al Andulus, Mosul.⁵³⁴ On 25 May, gunmen opened fire on three female students in Mosul as they left their school in 17 Tamouz neighbourhood, wounding all three.⁵³⁵ On 22 June, three university students were killed, and 12 other students and their minibus driver were injured when a roadside bomb was detonated during the rush hour in Sadr City, a Shiite neighbourhood of Baghdad.⁵³⁶

The UN Secretary-General reported "frequent attacks on schools, children and teachers" in Iraq between 2006 and 2007. In January 2007, members of an armed group were believed to have deliberately targeted a girls' school in western Baghdad, killing five students and injuring 21 others. In June 2007, members of an armed group reportedly abducted 30 students, aged 17 to 19, from a secondary school in Saydiyah.⁵³⁷

[Refworld note: The source report "Education under Attack 2010" was posted on the UNESCO website (www.unesco.org) in pdf format, with country chapters run together. Original footnote numbers have been retained here.]

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