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Victims of a massacre in a mosque in Diyala province by Iraqi pro-government militias and security forces recognized the attackers and knew them by name. The Iraqi government should promptly make public any investigation of the attack on the Musab Bin Omair mosque on August 22, 2014, which killed 34 people, and bring those responsible to justice.

According to accounts by five witnesses, including one survivor of the attack, armed men, some wearing civilian clothes and others in police uniforms, attacked the mosque at midday in the village of Imam Weiss in Hamreen, Diyala province, about 50 kilometers northeast of Baaquba, the provincial capital. The attackers shot to death 32 men, one woman, and one 17-year-old boy, all of whom witnesses said were civilians who were attending Friday prayer when they were killed, with PK-type and AK-47 Russian-made automatic weapons, the witnesses said. All of the witnesses said they recognized the attackers and knew them by name.

"Pro-government militias are becoming emboldened and their crimes more shocking," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director. "Iraqi authorities and Iraq's allies alike have ignored this horrific attack and then they wonder why the militant group Islamic State has had such appeal among Sunni communities."

Witnesses, all of whom asked Human Rights Watch not to reveal their identities for their protection, said the shooting began at about 12:10 p.m., during the imam's Friday speech. A survivor, who was inside the Sunni mosque, said he saw a man enter wearing the dark green T-shirt, pants, and headband typically worn by militiamen affiliated with Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, a pro-government militia. He was carrying a PK-type automatic weapon.

"He shouted, 'Do not move. No one leave!'" the witness said. "He aimed his first shot at the sheikh [imam], and then he continued shooting at the rest of us. When I heard the first gunshot I dropped to the ground."

The gunman continued shooting at random, the witness said. "People were on the ground screaming and crying, saying, 'Allahu akbar [God is great], La ilaha illa Allah [there is no God but God].'"

Three of the witnesses entered the mosque after this first attack. They said they saw eight armed men leaving the mosque. When they entered, they saw about 10 people who appeared to be already dead and

about 30 more injured. "What I saw was indescribable, inhuman," one said. "Most of the people were injured, not dead, and were crying out for water and for help with their injuries. I saw a man whose left side of his head was completely blown off."

Two witnesses said they had begun carrying the wounded into the garden in front of the mosque when, after about 10 minutes, they heard more shooting as a second group of between 20 and 30 armed men headed toward the mosque. The witnesses fled, leaving the wounded behind. Another witness who was watching from his house about 100 meters away confirmed this account.

All of the witnesses said they then heard screams and more gunshots. The second round of shooting lasted approximately 15 minutes, they said.

The witnesses told Human Rights Watch that all of the 34 dead except one were from the Beni Weiss, a Sunni tribe in Diyala. None of the witnesses knew the reason for the attack, but one said he believed it was in retaliation for an attack with an improvised explosive device earlier that day about 20 kilometers north of Imam Weiss that killed five militiamen. The witnesses all said there were no fighters in or around Imam Weiss at the time of the attack.

The witnesses said there was an army checkpoint about 200 meters from the mosque and a police checkpoint about 150 meters from the mosque, but that no security forces responded to the attack even though the shooting was broadcast over the mosque loudspeaker and could be heard from at least 600 meters away, where one witness heard the shooting from his home.

Two witnesses said they called for army assistance and for an ambulance, but none arrived until nearly an hour later. At about 1:30 p.m., they said, soldiers from the 5th brigade of the army's 20th division arrived in an army ambulance and a cargo truck, which carried the dead to the hospital morgue in Muqdadiyya, 15 kilometers away.

The survivor said that he was among a half dozen people who survived the shootings. He said his cousin sought treatment at the local hospital but left after doctors warned him that militiamen were heading to the hospital to kill survivors seeking treatment there. Human Rights Watch reviewed the cousin's medical records, dated August 22, which indicated that he required an operation and plastic surgery due to a bullet wound in his right arm that crushed the bone and created an abscess.

The witnesses and three other residents said that sectarian tensions in the town had escalated after fighters of the militant group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) took over the city of Mosul on June 10. While the largely Shia militias were already there, working with the security forces, after June 10, militias took control of the police and army, witnesses and residents said. Imam Weiss has a population of about 500 families, 300 of them Sunni and 200 Shia, the residents said.

On October 22, in response to Human Rights Watch's request for information about the attack, Interior Ministry Spokesman General Saad Maan Ibrahim told Human Rights Watch that the Interior Ministry had formed an "investigation commission" to look at the attack, which determined three suspects had carried out the killings. Maan did not know whether the judiciary had set a date for their hearings.

Maan said the killings were in response to an IED explosion that killed a number of volunteer fighters driving into Imam Weiss early morning on August 22. "We heard that some of their relatives, two or three, went to that mosque carrying AKs and opened fired on the mosque, killing them all, which was a normal, spontaneous reaction of revenge," Maan said. "It was a revenge operation for what they lost." None of the relatives of the victims knew whom the investigative committee had held responsible for the crime, the charges against them or whether there would be a public trial.

The August 22 attack is consistent with a pattern of attacks that Human Rights Watch has documented, including kidnappings and summary executions, by Shia militias Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, the Badr Brigades, and Kita'ib Hezbollah in Baghdad, Diyala and Babel provinces.

Foreign governments should stop providing Iraq with military support and assistance until the government ensures that such widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity have ended, including ensuring those responsible for such crimes are held accountable, Human Rights Watch said.

The United States has sent Iraq military aid and in August began air strikes against ISIS targets. Militias have taken over at least some of the areas where the US has carried out air strikes, according to accounts from area residents.

In September, a Human Rights Watch researcher saw a convoy of 10 to 12 cars filled with militiamen carrying heavy weapons and new-model M-16s in Baghdad. The militiamen pointed their weapons at traffic to force other cars to the side to let them pass, and drove through a federal police checkpoint without being stopped.

"Iraq's international allies cannot allow the fight against the abusive extremists of ISIS to be carte blanche for the Iraqi government's allies to callously kill civilians who happen to be Sunnis," Stork said.

Witness Accounts of the Attack on the Musab Bin Omair Mosque

Four witnesses said they heard the imam's Friday speech, which was broadcast over the mosque loudspeaker from the center of the town, interrupted by shooting and screaming at about 12:10 p.m. One witness said he immediately ran toward the mosque:

When I first heard the shooting, I ran to the mosque because my brother was there. I live about 200 meters away, and by the time I got there the shooting had stopped. As I was running to the mosque I saw armed men from Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq and local police, there were 8 of them altogether, leaving the mosque.

Another witness who arrived at the mosque between the first and second shooting described the scene:

I found a massacre. My father was lying there missing both of his arms. I found my oldest brother next. He had an enormous bullet wound that had entered in the back right side of his neck and exited through his mouth. He was still alive. Then the armed men came back, and I had to run to save my life. After they left, my family was dead. My oldest brother had two new gunshot wounds, one on the right side of chest and another on the left side of his stomach.

The attack survivor said he survived because a large man, around 50 years old, shielded him:

I was located opposite a shooter. When he was firing I was on the ground, stuck between the wall and [the man's] heavy body. I could feel the bullets penetrating him, and coming towards me. But, alhamdulillah [praise be to God], my wounds were not heavy.

The survivor said that seven of his nine family members who were at the mosque at the time died, four on the spot and the others later in the hospital. Only he and a cousin survived, he said. The survivor said he recognized the shooter as his neighbor, and named him.

One of the witnesses who had carried his brother to the mosque garden said he ran to a nearby house as the second group of attackers approached. From there he watched the rest of the scene:

I was scared to stand on the balcony for fear they would see me because I was so close by - the mosque is surrounded by houses and I was in one of the houses right next to it. But I stood there long enough to see [name withheld] entering with about 20 other men. I recognized them all, their faces were uncovered and I've known them for decades - we've lived together for more than 30 years. They were carrying PKs and AK-47s. I heard them shooting for 15 minutes, not continuously. After I saw them leave I went back into the mosque, and almost all the people who were injured before were now dead.

Human Rights Watch viewed photos and videos witnesses said they took several hours after the attacks.

They showed large bullet holes above the mosque minbar, or pulpit, in all of the walls of the mosque, and large blood stains throughout the mosque. Many of the bloodstains were concentrated in the corners of the mosque, indicating that people huddled in corners to avoid being shot.

One witness and a relative of some of those killed who is a high-ranking member of the Beni Weiss tribe said that militiamen shot another witness to the shooting 10 days later after he crossed a checkpoint in the Imam Weiss area. Neither saw the shooting, but said two female relatives, who were in the car with the witness, described how four men in a black Mercedes followed them through the checkpoint, drove up beside their car and shot the witness point blank. He died immediately, they said.

The witnesses said forensic authorities initially refused to issue death certificates for some of their relatives among the dead. "At first they didn't want to release the total number killed," one witness said.

Human Rights Watch reviewed the 34 death certificates. The names and ages corresponded to those of the victims the witnesses named. All listed the date of death as August 22 and the cause of death as "bullet wounds," but 28 had been issued on August 23 and 6 on August 27.

The witnesses and survivors, who have remained in Imam Weiss, told Human Rights Watch they fear for their lives but that they have no place to go. They said that Ra'id Dahlaqy, a member of parliament, and two Interior Ministry representatives came to Imam Weiss in the days following the attack to investigate, but that they had refused to release results to family members, saying the investigation was secret. The four witnesses and relatives of the victims filed a court case against the 20 to 30 men they saw carrying out the attack, but no date has been set for a hearing, they said.

List of the Dead

- Nadir Chelub Shatab, 45
- Ahmed Mohamed Khalil, 30
- Qahlan Mizher Mehdi, 25
- Ali Mehdi Saleh, 45 (imam)
- Bashir Abed Hussein, 25
- Adnan Abdelwahhab, 45
- Abdelwahhab Alsaoud Abbas, 50
- Husseib Hussein Maher, 70
- Ali Jawwad Aidan, 30-35
- Abbas Mohsen Faisal, 40
- Adnan Mohsen Khudhair Faisal, 43
- Abdelsammad Ali Mehdi, 25
- Faisal Mizher Mehdi, 27
- Aysab Abbas Mohsen, 40
- Mizher Mehdi Saleh, 55

Adnan Lafta Faisal, 52

Qahtan Khalaf Karkas, 25

Abelrahman Najim Abdullah, 25

Ali Ibrahim Lafta, 33

Habiba Abdelkarim Majid, 41

Abdullah Lafta Faisal, 50

Ammar Ahmed Qawwad, 38

Alwan Nasser Hussein, 46

Yousif Mohsen Faisal, 38

Hussein Saleh Bati, 58

Qassem Hashim Abdullah, 45

Ghazy Mizher Mehdi, 40

Suleiman Dawoud Mahmoud, 48

Othman Najim Abdullah, 17

Sabbar Abbas Mohsen, 21

Alaa Abbas Mohsen, 19

Aws Abdlukarim Murad, 36

Mohamed Qawwad Manaa, 56

Ayyoub Abbas Mohsen, 25

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