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REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

Head of State	Jalal Talabani
Head of government	Nuri al-Maliki
Death penalty	retentionist
Population	30.3 million
Life expectancy	57.7 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f)	109/102 per 1,000
Adult literacy	74.1 per cent

Thousands of civilians, including children, were killed or injured amid continuing sectarian and other violence. All sides involved in the fighting committed gross human rights violations, some of which amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Many civilians died as a result of bomb attacks by groups opposed to the Iraqi government and the US-led Multinational Force (MNF), while others were victims of sectarian killings by Shi'a and Sunni armed groups. Hundreds of people were abducted, tortured and murdered, with their bodies left in the street or found by their families at morgues. The increasingly sectarian nature of the violence caused hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes, swelling the growing numbers of Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan and other states to 2 million and increasing the number of those internally displaced within Iraq to more than 2 million. This added to the growing humanitarian crisis. Iraqi security forces also committed gross human rights violations, including unlawful killings, rape and other torture, and arbitrary arrests and detentions. The MNF killed civilians and held more than 25,000 detainees without charge or trial, including some who had been held for several years. Civilians were also killed by guards employed by private military and security companies who had immunity against prosecution in Iraq until October. The death penalty was used extensively and 33 people were executed, some after grossly unfair trials.

Background

In January, US President George W. Bush announced that 20,000 more US troops would be deployed as part of a military “surge” to improve security, especially in the Baghdad area, and help the Iraqi government to gain greater control. The “surge” was accompanied by economic and political initiatives, including reconstruction and job creation, the holding of provincial elections, and finalizing contentious legislation such as the draft oil law. However, only limited progress was achieved in these areas.

Despite the “surge”, violence remained widespread and severe, although it was reported to have decreased towards the end of the year. The government and parliament were hampered by political divisions and a boycott by members of parliament representing political parties opposed to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

In April, UNHCR convened an international conference in Switzerland in response to the growing humanitarian crisis caused by the exodus of Iraqi refugees and internal displacement within Iraq.

In August, Shi'a religious leader Moqtada al-Sadr announced that the Mahdi Army composed of his followers would cease attacks for up to six months and co-operate with Iraqi security forces.

The same month, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1770 which, among other things, authorizes the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), at the request of the Iraqi government, to promote political talks among the country's ethnic and religious groups as well as regional negotiations on issues relating to Iraq's border security, energy and humanitarian crisis. The resolution failed adequately to address the grave human rights situation in the country.

In December, UK forces handed over control of Basra province to Iraqi government forces.

Abuses by armed groups

Armed groups, including Islamist and nationalist groups fighting against the US-led forces and the Iraqi government, as well as al-Qa'ida and militias affiliated to Shi'a religious groups, committed gross human rights abuses. Many of the abuses were committed in the course of sectarian violence between Shi'a and Sunni armed groups, who sought to clear mixed neighbourhoods of Sunni and Shi'a respectively, abducting people from their homes or in the streets and murdering them. Often, bodies were dumped bearing evidence of mutilation or torture. Members of other religious and ethnic minorities were also targeted for such abuses, including Yezidis, Christians, Sabeans and Palestinians, as were women, human rights defenders, judges, medical doctors and other professionals.

- On 18 April at least 140 people were killed by a car bomb detonated at the market in al-Sadriya, a predominantly Shi'a district of Baghdad.
- On 12 May Dr Adib Ibrahim al-Jalabi, a medical doctor and a leading figure in the Islamic Organization for Human Rights (Mosul), was assassinated by armed men, believed to be from al-Qa'ida, after leaving his clinic in Mosul.
- On 3 June Chaldean priest, Fr Ragheed Ganni, and three deacons were shot dead by unknown assailants in Mosul.
- On 7 July some 150 people were killed and more than 265 injured in a suicide car bomb attack at the marketplace in Amerli, a predominantly Shi'a Turkmen village in Salahuddin governorate.
- In August, Mostafa Ahmad, a taxi driver and Palestinian refugee, was abducted by armed men apparently from the Mahdi Army. Two days later his abductors used his mobile phone to tell his family to collect his body from the morgue; he had been tortured with a drill, his teeth had been ripped out, and he had been shot six times.
- On 14 August, more than 400 people were killed and at least 300 injured by four suicide bombers who blew up fuel tanks in al-Qahtaniya, al-Jazeera and Tal Uzair, all villages near the Syrian border inhabited mostly by members of the minority Yezidi religious sect. Many children were among the victims.
- On 28 October Shehab Mohammad al-Hiti, a Sunni and editor of the weekly Baghdad al-Youm newspaper, was abducted in al-Jamia, Baghdad. He was later found shot dead.

Killings by Iraqi security forces

Iraqi security forces killed civilians unlawfully. In some cases, investigations were announced but their outcome was not known.

- On 27 March gunmen wearing police uniforms killed 70 Sunni Arabs in the mixed town of Tal-'Afar near Mosul, apparently in reprisal for a suicide attack by a Sunni insurgent in a Shi'a district of the town. Survivors reportedly said that the gunmen dragged men from their homes, handcuffed and blindfolded them, and then riddled them with bullets. Two days later, the government acknowledged that police had carried out the killings and 13 were reported to have been briefly detained. It was not clear whether any of them were brought to justice.

Killings and other violations by the Multinational Force

US forces committed gross human rights violations, including unlawful killings of civilians, arbitrary arrests, destruction of property and violent house searches. A few US and UK soldiers were tried and found guilty of human rights violations in previous years.

- On 28 September, US forces launched an air raid at night targeting a building in the predominantly Sunni neighbourhood of al-Saha, in south-western Baghdad. At least 10 men, women and children were killed.
- After heavy clashes on 21 October between US forces and gunmen belonging to the Mahdi Army in al-Sadr City in Baghdad, US forces used helicopters to reportedly target a man suspected of abducting MNF soldiers. During the raid, according to Iraqi police, 13 civilians, including two children, were killed and others injured. A US military official said a committee was reviewing the incident.
- In August a US soldier was sentenced to 110 years' imprisonment with the possibility of parole for raping and killing 'Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi, a 14-year-old girl, and murdering three of her relatives in Mahmoudiya in March 2006. A military court in Kentucky found the soldier guilty of "rape, conspiracy to commit rape and housebreaking with the intent to commit rape and four counts of felony murder". Two other soldiers, who had earlier admitted raping the girl, received life sentences in February.

Arbitrary arrests and detention

The MNF and Iraqi security forces were holding some 60,000 prisoners as of November, according to the ICRC. Most were detained indefinitely without charge or trial as security internees. In October the MNF Commander of Detainee Operations said the MNF was holding some 25,000 detainees at Camp Bucca in the south, Camp Victory and Camp Cropper near Baghdad International Airport, and other places, including 840 juveniles and 280 foreign nationals, mostly from Arab countries. Shortly before, the MNF began releasing detainees and by December several thousand detainees had been released on condition that they would not pose a security threat and after providing a family guarantee of good conduct.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Reports of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees, including minors, by Iraqi security forces, particularly Interior Ministry forces, were common. Thousands of prisoners were held in hugely overcrowded Iraqi-run prisons, police stations and detention camps, many without access to a lawyer, conditions that facilitate torture. In May, former detainees who had been held at a facility in Baghdad's predominantly Shi'a neighbourhood of al-Kadhimiya told a UN official that they had been subjected to "routine beatings, suspension by limbs for long periods, electric shock treatment to sensitive parts of the body, threats of ill-treatment of close relatives". As in previous years, the

government announced investigations into specific allegations of abuses by Iraqi security forces, but failed to make public the outcome, adding to concerns that impunity was widespread.

- On 4 March British and Iraqi troops found some 30 prisoners, including some who reportedly showed signs of having been tortured, when they stormed the headquarters of a government intelligence agency in Basra.
- In October, the Prisoners' Association for Justice, an Iraqi human rights NGO, said it had interviewed five children aged between 13 and 17 who had been tortured by Iraqi security forces who suspected them of assisting insurgents and militia.

Death penalty

The death penalty was used extensively, although the Human Rights Minister told the UN Human Rights Council in March that the government was working towards abolition.

At least 199 men and women were sentenced to death and at least 33 prisoners were executed. Most death sentences were passed after unfair trials by the Central Criminal Court of Iraq (CCCI). Defendants complained that confessions extracted under torture were used as evidence against them and that they were not able to choose their own lawyer.

- In February the Court of Cassation upheld the death sentences for aggravated murder passed against two women. Samar Sa'ad 'Abdullah and Wassan Talib were, respectively, sentenced to death by the Criminal Court of al-Karkh in August 2005, and the CCCI in Baghdad in August 2006.
- In May, six men – Moazzea Abdul-Khazal, Hussain Jihad Hassan, 'Abdel-Qader Qasim Jameel, Mostafa Mahmoud Isma'il, Qais Habib Aslem and Islam Mostafa 'Abdel-Sattar – were sentenced to death by the CCCI for the abduction and killing of a man in the Baghdad district of al-Adhamiya. It was not known if they were executed.

Abuses by private military and security guards

Foreign armed guards employed by private military and security firms killed civilians. Security firms were immune from prosecution according to Order 17 issued in 2004 by Paul Bremer, then head of the Coalition Provisional Authority. However, following a major incident in September involving the US-based Blackwater company, the Iraqi government introduced draft legislation that would revoke Order 17.

- On 16 September, 17 Iraqi civilians were killed and 27 injured when Blackwater security guards opened fire at a busy crossroads in Baghdad's al-Mansour district. The company said that its guards had fired in self-defence but witnesses and the Iraqi government alleged that the guards had fired first. Both the Iraqi authorities and the US State Department announced that they were conducting investigations and in November the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) concluded that the shooting had been unjustified. The company said that any of its guards guilty of wrongdoing would be held to account. The Iraqi government demanded that Blackwater pay US\$8 million in compensation to each of the families of the 17 people killed.

Violence against women

Violence against women increased and many were forced to leave their jobs after receiving death threats or to seek refuge abroad. In Basra, some 42 women were reportedly killed between July and September by Shi'a armed

groups vying for control of the area. In most governorates women were increasingly threatened by armed men if they failed to observe a strict dress code. Reportedly, domestic violence and “honour killings” were on the rise and increasing sectarianism put at risk women married to men from another sect.

- In February, local tribal leaders complained after four Iraqi soldiers reportedly raped a woman belonging to the Turkmen minority after entering her home at Tal-‘Afar, near Mosul. A senior Iraqi military official stated that four men had confessed to the rape, but it was not clear whether any action was taken against them.
- On or around 7 April, Du’a Khalil Aswad, a 17-year-old Yazidi girl, was stoned to death in front of a large crowd in the town of Bashika near Mosul. The victim of an “honour crime”, she was killed by a group of eight or nine Yazidi men, including relatives, who accused her of having a relationship with a Sunni Muslim boy. Her death by stoning, lasting for 30 minutes, was recorded on video and posted on the internet. Members of the local security forces were present but failed to intervene.

Refugees and internally displaced people

At least 4.2 million Iraqis were displaced. These included 2.2 million who were displaced within Iraq and some 2 million refugees, mostly in Syria (around 1.4 million) and Jordan (around half a million). In the last months of the year both these neighbouring states, struggling to meet the health, education and other needs of the Iraqi refugees already present, introduced visa requirements that impeded the entry of Iraqis seeking refuge. Within Iraq, most governorates barred entry to Iraqis fleeing sectarian violence elsewhere.

Trials of former officials

The Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal (SICT) continued to try former senior party, army, security and government officials associated with the previous Ba’ath administration headed by Saddam Hussain for gross human rights violations committed during his rule. Several defendants were sentenced to death after grossly unfair trials and three, sentenced in 2006, were executed. Political interference continued to undermine the independence and impartiality of the SICT.

- In February the SICT Appeals Chamber changed the life sentence previously imposed on former Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan to death, and he was executed on 20 March. Two co-defendants, Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti and ‘Awad Hamad al-Bandar, were hanged on 15 January.
- The trial of those allegedly responsible for abuses committed during the so-called Anfal campaign of 1988, which caused the deaths of some 180,000 Iraqi Kurds, concluded on 24 June. Three of the six defendants – ‘Ali Hassan al-Majid, Sultan Hashim Ahmad al-Ta’i and Hussain Rashid al-Tikri – were sentenced to death for war crimes and crimes against humanity. ‘Ali Hassan al-Majid was also convicted of genocide. The SICT Appeals Chamber confirmed the death sentences on 4 September and the three were expected to be executed within 30 days. However, the US military refused to transfer the three to Iraqi custody because of a legal wrangle between Prime Minister al-Maliki and the Presidential Council.

Northern Iraq

Human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture and executions, were reported in the areas under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq. Violence against women was widespread.

- Mohammad Siyassi Ashkani, a journalist from Sulaimaniya, was arrested in January by Asayish (Security) officials and detained without charge or trial for almost six months. He was held in solitary confinement for the first 55 days before being allowed weekly visits from his family, and was denied access to a lawyer. He was released on 19 July.
- On 29 May, Heman Mohamed, 'Othman Abdel-Karim, Sherwan Ahmed and Qaraman Rasul were executed in Erbil. They had been convicted in June 2006 of participating in a bomb attack in Erbil a year earlier.
- Three Turkish men – Metir Demir, Mustafa Egilli and Hasip Yokus – members of the Turkey-based NGO Association for the Rights of Freedom of Thought and Education who had been arrested in June 2006, remained in detention without charge or trial until 12 September, when they were returned to Turkey. One of them told Amnesty International that they had been detained in the Asayish building in Erbil, denied access to lawyers and that two of them had been tortured and held in solitary confinement for six months. Methods of torture included beatings on the body and on the soles of the feet (falaqa) and electric shocks.
- In November, the KRG Human Rights Minister stated that 27 women had been killed in “honour killings” between August and November, but provided no information on any arrests and prosecutions related to these deaths.

Amnesty International reports

- Iraq: A deepening refugee crisis – media briefing (MDE 14/021/2007)
- Iraq: Unjust and unfair – the death penalty in Iraq (MDE 14/014/2007)
- Iraq: The situation of Iraqi refugees in Syria (MDE 14/036/2007)
- Iraq: Millions in flight – the Iraqi refugee crisis (MDE 14/041/2007)
- Iraq: Human rights abuses against Palestinian refugees (MDE 14/030/2007)