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Republic of Iraq

Head of state: **Fuad Masum**

Head of government: **Haider al-Abadi**

The human rights situation continued to deteriorate. Government security forces, government-allied militias and the armed group Islamic State (IS) committed war crimes and human rights abuses. Government forces carried out indiscriminate attacks on areas under IS control, and committed extrajudicial executions. IS forces carried out mass execution-style killings and abductions, including abductions of women and girls for sexual slavery. Government authorities held thousands of detainees without trial; torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remained rife. Many trials did not meet international standards of fairness. Women and girls faced discrimination and sexual and other violence. Journalists operated in hazardous conditions. Courts continued to impose death sentences, mostly on terrorism charges; dozens of executions were carried out.

BACKGROUND

The armed conflict continued between government security forces and IS forces; the latter controlled predominantly Sunni areas north and east of the capital, Baghdad, including the city of Mosul. Government forces were supported by Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) composed mainly of Shi'a militias. In May, IS forces captured Ramadi, capital of Anbar province, causing thousands to flee to Baghdad and other cities, and massacred captive members of the security forces. In response to the IS advance, Prime Minister al-Abadi agreed to the deployment of PMUs to support a counter-offensive by government forces, despite the PMU's record of committing serious human rights violations against Sunni Muslims. At the end of the year, Mosul remained under IS control while Ramadi was recaptured by Iraqi security forces in December. Kurdish Peshmerga forces discovered mass graves in Sinjar after they recaptured the town from IS in November.

The conflict caused the deaths of some 6,520 civilians between January and October, according to the UN, and the forcible displacement of nearly 3.2 million people since January 2014,

exacerbating the existing humanitarian crisis. Many of those displaced sought refuge in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq.

All parties to the conflict committed war crimes, other violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses. Both PMUs and IS reportedly used child soldiers.

Parliament created a Human Rights Advisory board for NGOs in January to facilitate consultation with civil society groups over revising legislation to comply with human rights; however, no significant legal reforms had been made by the end of the year.

In August, an official investigation into the capture of Mosul by IS forces in June 2014 blamed former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and his officials for the security forces' abandonment of the city.

In September, President Masum ratified Law 36 of 2015, prohibiting political parties from having military wings or affiliating with armed groups, but a proposed amnesty law and draft laws on accountability and justice had not been enacted at the end of the year.

Prime Minister al-Abadi pledged to dismiss corrupt military officers. A draft National Guard Law to regulate armed militias and support greater local control of the security forces and police to reduce the marginalization of Sunnis and Kurds within the security forces proved particularly controversial; some members of Parliament said it threatened national security.

Several UN human rights bodies that conducted reviews of Iraq in 2015, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee against Torture and the Human Rights Committee, expressed concern about the deteriorating human rights situation.

INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT

Government forces and PMUs committed war crimes, other violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations, mostly against Sunni communities in areas under IS control. In Anbar, Ninevah and Salah al-Din provinces, indiscriminate air strikes by government forces killed and injured civilians and hit mosques and hospitals.

In areas they recaptured from IS, government security forces and allied militias carried out reprisal killings of local Sunnis suspected of supporting IS and burned homes and mosques. In one such case in January, security forces and allied Shi'a militias extrajudicially executed at least 56 Sunni Muslims in Barwana village, Diyala province, after rounding up local men ostensibly to check their identities. The victims were shot, mostly while handcuffed.

Also in January, members of a Yezidi militia attacked Jiri and Sibaya, two predominantly Sunni Arab villages in the northwestern Sinjar region. The militia carried out execution-style killings of 21 civilians, including children and elderly men and women, and abducted other civilians. Residents said that Kurdish Peshmerga and Asayish forces were present when the killings were perpetrated. The homes of Sunni Arabs were also looted and burned by Yezidi militias after Peshmerga forces recaptured Sinjar from IS in November.

US, UK, French and other foreign military forces carried out air strikes against IS in support of the Iraqi government; some of these attacks reportedly killed and injured civilians in areas controlled or contested by IS.

ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS

Armed groups killed and injured civilians throughout Iraq in suicide and car bomb attacks that were either indiscriminate or deliberately targeted civilians. IS fighters killed civilians in indiscriminate shelling and continued to abduct and kill civilians in areas where they gained control, including civilians who opposed their control. In March and November, media reported that IS forces used chlorine gas in bomb attacks. Some 500 people, including civilians, died during the fighting for control of Ramadi in May. IS forces that seized control of the city killed civilians and members of the security forces, throwing some bodies in the Euphrates River. The armed group also summarily killed some of its own fighters for fleeing.

IS enforced strict rules on dress, behaviour and movement on the inhabitants who remained in the areas they controlled, and severely punished infractions. Its fighters carried out execution-style public killings and other punishments, including after its "courts" condemned people for transgressing its rules or its interpretation of Islamic law. IS also summarily killed dozens of men they perceived to be gay, often throwing them to their deaths from high-rise buildings. In Mosul, IS forces controlled all movement into and out of the city and prevented people leaving to obtain medical care elsewhere unless they provided guarantors of their return; IS reportedly beheaded some guarantors when people they had allowed to leave failed to return.

IS fighters burned or destroyed Shi'a, Yezidi and other religious shrines and cultural artefacts, as well as homes vacated by government officials and members of the security forces.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Women and girls faced discrimination in law and in practice, and were inadequately protected against sexual and other violence. They were subjected to acute abuses in IS-controlled areas, where women and girls were reportedly sold as slaves, forced to become wives of IS fighters or killed for refusing. In March, IS forces reportedly killed at least nine Shi'a women belonging to the Turkmen minority for refusing to marry IS fighters after IS forces killed their husbands.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Security forces carried out arrests without judicial warrants and without informing those they arrested or their families of any charges. Detainees, particularly terrorism suspects, were held incommunicado for weeks or months following arrest, often in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance and in secret prisons controlled by the Ministries of the Interior and Defence that were not open to inspection by the Office of the Public Prosecution or any monitoring bodies. In May, the Minister of the Interior denied that his ministry operated secret detention facilities, in response to complaints of enforced disappearances by detainees' families. Many detainees were released without charge but thousands of others continued to be held in harsh conditions, including at Nassiriyah Prison, south of Baghdad, which was mostly used to hold Sunni men convicted of or facing trial on terrorism charges, and where prisoners were reportedly abused.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment remained common and widespread in prisons and detention centres and was committed with impunity. Interrogators tortured detainees to extract information and "confessions" for use against them at trial; some detainees reportedly died as a result of torture. In April, a member of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee said that detainees continued to face torture and the use of forced confessions. The UN Committee against Torture criticized the government's failure to investigate torture allegations and called for increased safeguards against torture.

UNFAIR TRIALS

The criminal justice system remained critically flawed and the judiciary lacked independence. Trials, particularly of defendants facing terrorism charges and possible death sentences, were systematically unfair with courts often admitting torture-tainted "confessions" as evidence, including "confessions" broadcast by state-controlled television channels before suspects were referred to trial.

Lawyers representing terrorism suspects faced threats and intimidation by security officials and were physically attacked by members of militias. Judges, lawyers and court officials continued to be attacked and killed by IS and other armed groups.

In July, the Central Criminal Court of Iraq in Baghdad sentenced 24 alleged IS members to death after it convicted them of unlawfully killing at least 1,700 military cadets from the "Speicher" Military Camp, near Tikrit in Salah al-Din governorate, in June 2014. Four other men were acquitted. The trial, which was completed in a few hours, was based mainly on "confessions", which the defendants said they had been forced to make under torture in pre-trial detention, and video footage of the massacre previously circulated by IS. The defendants all denied involvement in the killings, with some denying that they had been present in Tikrit at the time of the crime. None of the defendants had legal counsel of their own choosing but were represented by court-appointed lawyers, who requested leniency but did not dispute the evidence or the admissibility of the "confessions".

FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

The authorities restricted the right to freedom of expression, including media freedom. In June the government introduced a new law to regulate media networks; the official Independent High Commission for Human Rights said it was overly restrictive.

In July and August, thousands of people took to the streets in Baghdad, Basra and other cities to protest against official corruption, electricity cuts, water shortages and the authorities' failure to provide other basic services. At least five people were killed when the security forces used unnecessary force to disperse the protests. In the weeks that followed, several protest leaders were killed by unidentified assailants in Baghdad, Nassiriyah and Basra. The Minister of the Interior claimed that the killings were unconnected to the protests but it was unclear to what extent they were investigated by the authorities.

The situation for journalists remained hazardous. They were subject to threats and violence by the security forces and abduction and killing by IS and other armed groups. In April, the Minister of the Interior claimed that negative media reporting about the security forces was hampering the fight against IS.

In February, several journalists were assaulted by a senior security official's bodyguards at a press conference in Baghdad. In April, Reuters news agency's Baghdad bureau chief, Ned Parker, left Iraq because of threats he received from Shi'a militia. The threats came after he reported that PMUs had committed abuses and looting after they recaptured Tikrit from IS.

In May, Raed al-Juburi, an outspoken journalist at al-Rasheed television channel and columnist for *Azzaman* newspaper, was found dead at his home in Baghdad with bullet wounds to his chest. The outcome of the investigation into his death remained undisclosed at the end of the year.

REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

Iraq continued to host some 244,527 refugees from Syria. Fighting between government forces and IS caused nearly 3.2 million people, mostly from Anbar, Ninevah and Salah al-Din provinces, to flee their homes and become internally displaced. Many fled to the Kurdistan region or other

governorates. Some were forcibly displaced more than once. Some 500,000 people fled Anbar province in May when IS forces captured Ramadi; many were denied entry to Baghdad by the authorities. Humanitarian conditions for internally displaced people remained harsh; they often lacked access to basic services and some were reportedly attacked and injured by local residents in the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah. Others who fled to the Kurdistan region were arrested for suspected links to IS.

KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

Political tensions rose in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, amid efforts by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to extend KDP leader Massoud Barzani's term of office as President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG); a move that other political parties opposed. In October, hundreds of public sector employees protested in Sulaimaniyah and other eastern cities to demand payment of overdue salaries. In October, KDP militia forces fired at protesters in Qaladze and Kalar, killing at least five and injuring others. The KDP said investigations were opened into the burning of its headquarters but did not specify that the investigations would cover killings by its militias.

The KRG authorities arrested and detained people suspected of supporting or having links to IS but did not disclose their number.

DEATH PENALTY

The authorities continued to impose the death penalty extensively and carried out dozens of executions. Most of those sentenced to death were Sunni men convicted under the 2005 Anti-Terrorism Law. In June, the Cabinet agreed to amend the Code of Criminal Procedures to allow the Minister of Justice to ratify execution orders if the President fails to act on them within 30 days. The following month, President Masum ratified at least 21 death sentences.

In September, a court in Baghdad sentenced three brothers – Ali, Shakir and Abdel-Wehab Mahmoud Hameed al-'Akla – to death on terrorism charges for beheading a man in 2010. All three alleged that security officials tortured them during months of incommunicado detention and forced them to "confess" to killing people unknown to them.

In August, the KRG authorities hanged Farhad Jaafar Mahmood and his wives Berivan Haider Karim and Khuncha Hassan Ismaeil, ending a seven-year hiatus on executions in the region. A court in Dohuk had sentenced the three to death in April 2014 after convicting them on abduction and murder charges.

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