



## GENOCIDE ALERT: THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

September 2014

In the Republic of Iraq, a genocide of religious minorities is underway in the northwest of the country, and conditions exist for a nationwide genocide of religious minority groups, including indigenous Christians, Yezidis, Mandaeans, and Shia Muslims from the Turkoman and Shabak ethnic groups.

On June 10, 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS, the “Islamic State,” or *da’ash*) overran Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, home to two million people. ISIL, an outgrowth of the al Qaida-linked Islamic State in Iraq formed during the U.S. occupation, combines an unyielding interpretation of Islamic *shari’a* law with extreme violence and intolerance for non-Muslims and non-Sunnis.

Approximately 500,000 people fled Mosul following ISIL’s takeover, including several thousand Christians,<sup>1</sup> comprising the fourth and penultimate mass exodus of Christians from Mosul since the U.S. invasion in 2003, when 75,000 Christians lived in the city.<sup>2</sup> ISIL reportedly refused to allow Christians, Yazidis and Shabaks to access humanitarian aid in the city.<sup>3</sup>

On July 17, 2014, ISIL distributed flyers in Mosul ordering the few remaining Christians to either convert to Islam, pay the traditional *jizya* tax, or “there will be nothing left for them but the sword.” The homes of Christians were marked with a red Arabic letter “N” for “Nazarene.”<sup>4</sup> The next day, after Christian clergymen refused to attend a meeting with ISIL to accept the terms, mosques in the city ordered Christians to leave the city or be killed. Around 500 Christian families fled in response, surrendering their property to armed ISIL fighters as they left.<sup>5</sup> All 45 churches and Christian institutions in Mosul have now been either destroyed or occupied by ISIL.<sup>6</sup> Mosul, for centuries a city inhabited by Christians, Jews, Shias, Sunnis, Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans, is now a religiously- and ethnically-cleansed city.

On August 7, 2014, ISIL overran and occupied the Nineveh Plain region, the historic homeland of Assyrian Christians, where many displaced Christians from Mosul, Baghdad and other areas of Iraq had fled to over the previous ten years. 200,000 Assyrian Christians fled their homes in a panic, most arriving in Erbil, Dohuk, Zakho and other already refugee-overwhelmed cities under the control of the Kurdish regional government.<sup>7</sup> U.S. and allied airstrikes prevented ISIL from driving all the way to Erbil, but large numbers of displaced Christians are sleeping in parks, on the streets, or in unfinished buildings. Deaths attributed to poor living conditions have been reported among the very young and elderly,<sup>8</sup> and should be expected to rise as the bitter Iraqi winter approaches. Scattered reports indicate that the few Christians who stayed behind in the ISIL-occupied cities have been subject to child abduction, forced displacement, starvation and targeted killing.<sup>9</sup>

ISIL began assassinating Yezidi civilians in May 2014,<sup>10</sup> and launched a major assault on the Yezidi-majority town of Sinjar, west of Mosul, on August 3, 2014. As many as 200,000 Yezidis fled their homes,<sup>11</sup> with some 50,000 becoming trapped by an ISIL siege on nearby Mt. Sinjar. Unknown numbers of Yezidis died of hunger, dehydration and exposure before U.S. and Kurdish military operations, beginning August 8, were able to help them escape into Kurdish territory.<sup>12</sup> Hundreds of Yezidis captured by ISIL were executed for refusing to convert to Islam, and hundreds of Yezidi women were abducted and enslaved at various locations within ISIL-held territory.<sup>13</sup> On August 17, ISIL attacked and captured the Yezidi town of Kocho. After the local religious leader refused to convert to Islam, ISIL reportedly executed at least 80 men and abducted and enslaved 100 women.<sup>14</sup>

According to Human Rights Watch, ISIL abducted and presumably killed at least 83 Shia Shabaks between June 10 and July 13.<sup>15</sup> Shia Turkoman refugee families interviewed by CSI teams in northern Iraq in June 2014 reported that ISIL fighters had executed 35 Shias and abducted 18 more in the town of Shrikhan, near Mosul, after checking residents' IDs for Shia names. The refugees also reported that ISIL fighters dynamited the Shia mosque in their town, while leaving the Sunni mosques unscathed. Similarly, ISIL massacred at least 40 Shia Turkoman, including at least 15 children, in villages near Kirkuk in northeast Iraq.<sup>16</sup> The Shia Turkoman village of Amerli, south of Kirkuk, has been under siege by ISIL since June 13, with more than 50 children, sick people and elderly people dying as a result of the siege conditions.<sup>17</sup>

With ISIL's July 2014 declaration of an "Islamic State" in the vast swathes of territory it controls in Syria and Iraq, Iraq is now effectively divided into a Shia state, a Sunni state and a Kurdish state, all relying on their most radical elements for support. As in the past eleven years in Iraq, the weakest religious minorities will suffer disproportionately from this renewed bout of sectarianism. From June to August, the new fighting displaced approximately one million Iraqis<sup>18</sup> and killed at least 4,600 civilians – probably many more.<sup>19</sup>

ISIL's new offensive comes after more than a decade of systematic religious cleansing of Christians, Mandaean and Yezidis in Iraq, carried out by both Sunni and Shia extremist militias. Hundreds of Christians were killed in a campaign of church bombings, abductions and assassinations that only intensified after the peak of the Sunni-Shia sectarian crisis in 2006-2007. On October 31, 2010, the Islamic State in Iraq murdered 58 Christians at mass at Our Lady of Salvation Syrian Catholic Church in Baghdad, declaring after the fact that all Christians were "legitimate targets."<sup>20</sup> On August 14, 2007, as many as 500 Yezidis were massacred by al Qaeda in Iraq in possibly the single worst confirmed act of violence in the post-2003 conflict.<sup>21</sup> Hundreds of Mandaean were abducted, tortured and killed by extremists in the same period.

Eleven years of violence has taken a devastating toll on these communities. As many as 85% of Iraq's prewar Mandaean population has been killed or fled the country.<sup>22</sup> The Yezidi population has decreased to about 500,000 from 700,000,<sup>23</sup> and the Christian population is down from as many as 1.5 million in 2003 to around 400,000.<sup>24</sup> At current rates of emigration, the patriarch of

Iraq's Chaldean Catholic church estimates that "in ten years there will perhaps be 50,000 Christians left" in Iraq.<sup>25</sup> These estimates all predate ISIL's assault on Sinjar and the Nineveh Plain.

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<sup>2</sup> "State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013 – Iraq," *Minority Rights Group International*, September 24, 2013  
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<sup>7</sup> "200,000 Assyrians Have Fled the Nineveh Plain in the Last 24 Hours," *AINA*, August 7, 2014  
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<sup>9</sup> "ISIS Abduct 3 Year-old Assyrian Girl From Fleeing Family; Father and Son Starve to Death," *Assyrian International News Agency*, August 25, 2014  
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<sup>10</sup> "Syria: ISIS summarily killed civilians," *Human Rights Watch*, June 14, 2014  
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<sup>11</sup> Julian Borger, "Iraq humanitarian crisis has reached highest level, UN aid officials warn," *The Guardian*, August 14, 2014

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<sup>12</sup> Haroon Siddique, "20,000 Iraqis besieged by Isis escape from mountain after US air strikes," *The Guardian*, August 10, 2014

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<sup>13</sup> Adam Withnall, "Iraq crisis: Islamic militants 'buried alive Yazidi women and children in attack that killed 500,'" *The Independent*, August 10, 2014

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/>

<sup>20</sup> Taylor Barnes, "Al Qaeda ally in Iraq says all Christians 'legitimate targets,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, November 3, 2010

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<sup>23</sup> 2013 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), April 30, 2013

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