

Statement by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the Situation in Iraq
25 August 2014

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Iraqi civilians suffering “horrific” widespread and systematic persecution – Pillay

GENEVA (25 August 2014) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay on Monday condemned the appalling, widespread and systematic deprivation of human rights in Iraq by ISIL (the self-proclaimed “Islamic State”) and associated forces. The violations include targeted killings, forced conversions, abductions, trafficking, slavery, sexual abuse, destruction of places of religious and cultural significance, and the besieging of entire communities because of ethnic, religious or sectarian affiliation. Among those directly targeted have been Christians, Yezidi, Shabaks, Turkomen, Kaka’e and Sabaeans.

“Grave, horrific human rights violations are being committed daily by ISIL and associated armed groups,” Pillay said. “They are systematically targeting men, women and children based on their ethnic, religious or sectarian affiliation and are ruthlessly carrying out widespread ethnic and religious cleansing in the areas under their control. Such persecution would amount to crimes against humanity.”

In Nineveh Governorate, hundreds of mostly Yezidi individuals were reported killed and up to 2,500 kidnapped at the beginning of August. The abductees were reportedly being held in various locations in Tal Afar and Mosul. Individuals who agreed to convert are being held under ISIL guard. Of those who refused to convert, witnesses report that the men were executed while the women and their children were taken as slaves and either handed over to ISIL fighters as slaves or threatened with being sold.

Similarly, in Cotcho village in Southern Sinjar, ISIL killed and abducted hundreds of Yezidis on 15 August. Reports indicate, again, that the male villagers were killed while women and children were taken away to unknown locations. Inhabitants of a number of other villages in Sinjar, which remain besieged by ISIL and associated armed groups, are at serious risk.

“UN staff members in Iraq have been receiving harrowing phone calls from besieged civilians who are surviving in terrible conditions, with little or no access to humanitarian aid,” Pillay said. “One of the women abducted by ISIL managed to call our staff, and told them that her teenage son and daughter were among the many who had been raped and sexually assaulted by ISIL gunmen. Another said her son had been raped at a checkpoint.”

Pillay also stressed the urgent need for humanitarian assistance to individuals displaced by the conflict and those besieged in ISIL-controlled areas.

At least 13,000 members of the Shia Turkmen community in Amirli in Salah al-Din Governorate, among them 10,000 women and children, have been besieged by ISIL and associated armed groups since 15 June. Residents are enduring harsh living conditions with severe food and water shortages, and a complete absence of medical services – and there are fears of a possible imminent massacre.

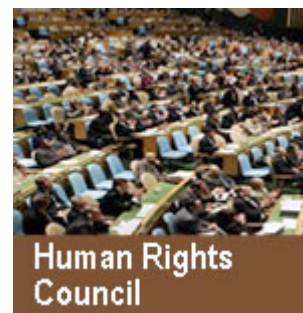
The High Commissioner echoed the urgent call by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq for the international community to work with the authorities to prevent a humanitarian and human rights tragedy.

The displacement of thousands of Christians and members of the Turkmen and Shabak communities who fled Mosul and

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the Turkmen and Shabak communities, who fled Mosul and other cities in Nineveh that are under ISIL control, is also of serious concern. Having fled their homes fearing reprisals and executions, many of the displaced people are living in dire conditions within the Kurdistan region and in other locations in the country.

“The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and the international community must take all necessary measures and spare no effort to protect members of ethnic and religious communities, who are particularly vulnerable, and to secure their return to their places of origin in safety and dignity,” said Pillay.

The effect of the ongoing conflict on children is catastrophic. According to interviews by UN human rights monitors with displaced families, ISIL is forcibly recruiting boys aged 15 and above. ISIL has also reportedly been deliberately positioning the boys at the front-line in battle situations, as human shields.

The Human Rights Office of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq has also verified reports of a massacre of prisoners and detainees in Mosul’s Badoush Prison on 10 June. According to interviews with 20 survivors and 16 witnesses of the massacre, ISIL gunmen loaded between 1,000 and 1,500 prisoners onto trucks and transported them to a nearby uninhabited area.

There, armed men asked the Sunnis to separate themselves from the others. Around 100 prisoners who joined the Sunni group were suspected by ISIL not to be Sunni and were subjected to individual checks based on how they prayed and their place of origin. Sunni inmates were ordered back on the trucks and left the scene. ISIL gunmen then yelled insults at the remaining prisoners, lined them up in four rows, ordered them to kneel and opened fire. Up to 670 prisoners were reportedly killed.

“Such cold-blooded, systematic and intentional killings of civilians, after singling them out for their religious affiliation may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity,” the High Commissioner said.

In other areas of the country, there are increasing reports of killings targeting civilians. In Basra, 19 members of the Sunni community were killed, some of them after they were kidnapped by unknown assailants. Last Friday, dozens of Sunni worshippers were killed in an attack on a mosque in Diyala Province. In Baghdad, medical sources indicate that at least 15 bodies are found in the city on a daily basis – all appear to have been bound and executed. Civilians have also been killed in airstrikes by the Iraqi Security Forces in Anbar and Nineveh Governorates.

“All parties to the conflict in Iraq have the responsibility not to target civilians or civilian objects, to take all feasible precautions to spare civilians from the effects of hostilities, and to respect, protect and meet the basic humanitarian needs of the civilian population,” Pillay stressed. “According to international law, the severe deprivation of fundamental rights by reason of the identity of a group or collectivity amounts to the crime against humanity of persecution.”

“I urge the international community to ensure that the perpetrators of these vicious crimes do not enjoy impunity. Any individual committing, or assisting in the commission of international crimes, must be held accountable according to law.”

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