

8 July 2021
Judge Nicolas Aubertin
RE: REPORT ON ISIL IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

Dear Judge Aubertin,

Attached please find a report on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) for inclusion in the criminal case file *Lafarge et al. – Syrian cement factory*. The report provides background information on the origins and presence of ISIL in Syria and Iraq. It also details the atrocities committed by ISIL from April 2013 to September 2014 in the regions under its control, including in the Aleppo governate where Lafarge Cement Syria was located. Many of these atrocities were widely reported and publicized while Lafarge Cement Syria was in operation.

The report is submitted by the Center for Justice and Accountability and was drafted by Sareta Ashraph, who served as the Chief Analyst on international crimes against the Yazidis for the U.N.'s Commission of Inquiry on Syria, as well as a Senior Analyst on the United Nations Investigative Team (UNITAD), which was established by the U.N. Security Council to seek accountability for international crimes committed by ISIL.

The body of the report has been translated into French from its original English, though the source documents are submitted in their original language as an annex.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, either directly or through our French legal counsel (Matteo Bonaglia at mbo@bonaglia.law) should you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration of the attached report.

Respectfully submitted,



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**ISIL in Syria and Iraq
April 2013 – September 2014**

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Summary and Methodology

In April 2013, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL; also known by its Arabic acronym, Da'esh) emerged visible from a nest of armed groups fighting in Syria's northern Raqqah governorate. In the weeks and months which followed, ISIL extended and solidified its control of territory across northern Syria, including large swathes of Aleppo governorate where Lafarge Cement Syria (LCS), a subsidiary of the French industrial company Lafarge S.A., operated a factory between 2010 and September 2014. Following ISIL's takeover of the territory surrounding the LCS factory, Lafarge S.A. is alleged to have entered into negotiations with ISIL for the purchase and sell of raw materials, as well as paid monetary fees to ISIL to secure passes allowing for transit to and from its factory.

Unique among the armed groups in Syria, ISIL's primary goal was not the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria. Rather, in its seizing of territory and the establishment of its self-described caliphate, ISIL set out to realize its political vision: to seize territorial control by military advance and then to consolidate and reinforce that control through the governing of Islamic state, as they conceived it to be.

ISIL's unmitigated brutality formed an intimate aspect of both the group's military campaigns and its governance over the civilian population who, often with little warning, found themselves living in ISIL's proto-state. Believing their campaigns of violence were legitimized by their ideology, neither ISIL's leadership nor its fighters on the ground made any effort to hide or reframe the horrors they perpetrated from their earliest days in Syria and Iraq. ISIL's violence, most often directed at the civilians in the territory under its control, was unabashed and notorious. As a result, starting in mid-2013, ISIL's campaign of violence was heavily documented by the international community, which quickly publicly acknowledged the scale and intensity of the atrocities as crimes against humanity and as war crimes.

This report examines ISIL's conduct in the territory under its control, stretching over Syria and Iraq, between April 2013 and September 19, 2014, during which period LCS's factory continued to operate in Jalabiya, approximately 150 kilometers from Aleppo city between Minbej, Raqqah city and Kobane, in the Syrian governorate of Aleppo. By August 2014, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic¹ had made a public determination that ISIL was engaged in a widespread and systematic attack directed against the civilian populations of Aleppo and Raqqah governorates, as part of which they were committing multiple crimes against humanity.²

This report's Section IV, in examining ISIL conduct –and, in particular, the public (and often publicized) serious human rights violations the group committed– relies primarily on sources that were available during the time in which LCS was operating. This includes documentation by the United Nations, and notably on the reports of the UN Syria Commission and the joint reports of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.³ Also relied upon is reporting by well-known international non-governmental organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as international media reports. All are public sources that would have been easily accessible to the management of LCS and/or its parent

¹ Hereinafter, the UN Syria Commission. In August 2011, as violence mounted, the UN Human Rights Council voted to establish a Commission of Inquiry on Syria, charged not only with determining where violations had occurred, but also with identifying, where possible, those responsible, 'with a view of ensuring that perpetrators of violations, including those that may constitute crimes against humanity, are held accountable.' In October 2012, the Commission's mandate was expanded to include the investigation of 'abuses and violations of international law.' As of May 2021, the Syria Commission has published over 30 reports and is continuing its investigations. It remains among the most credible sources of corroborated information concerning violations committed by belligerents in Syria, with its reports published at six-monthly intervals and receiving significant media attention, as well as dedicated public discussions at the Human Rights Council, on their release.

² UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, Executive Summary.

³ Hereinafter, the UNAMI-OHCHR reports. These include reports both on human rights violations as well as reports on the protection of civilians.

company, Lafarge S.A.⁴ Further, many of the documented ISIL atrocities committed prior to September 2014 were carried out in the Aleppo governorate near the LCS factory.

⁴ Information regarding ISIL violations published after the end of September 2014 has been included where it corroborates and deepens understandings of events that were reported within the period of LCS's operations in northern Syria.

I. Origins of ISIL

ISIL traces its origins to the late 1990s, when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (real name, Ahmad Fadil Nazal al-Khalayleh), a Jordanian national with limited education and prospects, travelled to Afghanistan⁵ and met with the then-ruling Taliban. Zarqawi, who had been imprisoned in Jordan between 1992 and 1997, was already immersed in the radical and violent ideas of Salafi-Jihadism, which centered on four principles: monotheism (*tawhid*), theocracy (*hakimiya*), association and disavowal (*al-wala wa al-bara*), and excommunication of apostates (*murtad*) to achieve the essential goal of removing deviant digressions from Islam, and returning to Islamic practice and governance as Zarqawi and later ISIL perceive to have existed between the seventh and ninth centuries.⁶

While in Afghanistan, Zarqawi pledged an oath of allegiance to the Taliban's Mullah Muhammad Umar. Zarqawi's group, mainly made up of Jordanian, Palestinian and Syrian recruits and known as 'Jund al-Sham' (Soldiers of the Levant), was allocated a training camp near the western Afghan city of Herat.⁷ Zarqawi frequently met with the Taliban leadership, and with Osama bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders in Kandahar.⁸ When the Taliban lost control over Herat in mid-November 2001, Zarqawi retreated with members of Jund al-Sham to Kandahar where they held out until 6 December 2001.⁹

As the Taliban fell in November 2001, many people fled from Afghanistan into Iran, one of whom was Zarqawi. There he joined a Kurdish Islamist group, 'Ansar al-Islam', which by December 2001 had resettled in northern Iraq near the Iranian border.¹⁰ In 2002, Zarqawi and other Arab fighters split from the majority Kurdish Ansar al-Islam and established their own group, 'Jama'at al-Tawhid Wa'al-Jihad' (JTJ, Community for Monotheism and Holy Struggle). By 2004, JTJ was one of scores of armed groups joining the burgeoning insurgency against American-led forces in Iraq which had, only months before, overthrown Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime.

In October 2004, following negotiations between JTJ and Al-Qaeda, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda and changed the group's name to 'Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn' (Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers). Known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the armed group launched waves of attacks, including suicide bombings that targeted security forces, government institutions, and civilians. As head of JTJ and later of AQI, Zarqawi welcomed a mass of foreign fighters into his forces,¹¹ a facet that would also be common to ISIL years later. AQI would become notorious for its sectarian attacks which ravaged Iraq after 2004,¹² and by late 2005, a split had developed between AQI and Al-Qaeda, over Zarqawi's brutal targeting of Shia Muslims.¹³

⁵ Sayf Al-Adl *Jihadist Biography of the Slaughtering Leader Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi* 2005]; Dominik Cziesche, Jürgen Dahlkamp und Holger Stark, *Aladdin of the Black Forest*, Der Spiegel, 15 August 2005 <https://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/syrian-terror-suspect-aladdin-of-the-black-forest-a-371214.html>; Joby Warrick, *The Black Flags*, New York, 2015, p. 47-61.

⁶ Jacob Olidort, *What is Salafism?*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 24 November 2015, in which Olidort states, "This view is based on a hadith, a statement of Muhammad's, in which he allegedly said that "the best of my community is my generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow them." By extension, anything that appeared after that -- and anything Muhammad did not explicitly condone -- is considered un-Islamic, an extremely broad category." <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/what-salafism>

⁷ Washington Post, *A Look at the Terror Group Jund Al-Sham*" 12 September 2006, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/12/AR2006091200844.html>

⁸ Ari R. Weisfus, *The Last Hope for the al-Qa'ida Old Guard? A Profile of Saif al-'Adl'*, CTC Sentinel, March 2016,

⁹ Mustafa Hamid, *al-Salib fi sama ala Qandahar* (The Cross in the Sky above Kandahar), n.d.

¹⁰ Cathy Scott-Clark & Adrian Levy, *The Exile – the flight of Osama Bin Laden*, London e.a. 2017, p. 152.

¹¹ Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al Qaeda's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 19 December 2007, at p. 8; Stanford University, *Mapping Militant Organizations: The Islamic State*, 14 April 2017), <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1>

¹² Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, Anchor Books, September 2016, p. 128 and 174-175; Abu Hanieh, Hassan and Abu Rumman, Mohammad, *The "Islamic State" Organization: The Sunni Crisis and the Struggle of Global Jihadism*, Friedric-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq (2015), p. 39 and 42 as cited in Emily Hawley, *ISIS crimes against the Shia: The Islamic State's Genocide Against Shia Muslims*, Genocide Studies International, 2018, p. 163.

¹³ William McCants, *How Al-Zawahiri Lost Al-Qaeda*, Brookings, 19 November 2013; Douglas Jehl, *Full Qaeda Letter to Iraq Ally Speaks of Group's Global Goal*, *New York Times*, 12 October 2005.

Zarwaqi was killed by United States forces in a targeted aerial bombardment in June 2006.¹⁴ His successor Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (Hamid Dawud Mohamed Khalil al-Zawi) merged AQI with several other smaller extremist groups and, in October 2006, renamed the group, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), though it would often still be referred to as AQI in media reporting. The new moniker reflected the group's ambition to seize and hold territory in service of the creation of a future theocratic state.¹⁵ The 2007 US surge in Iraq led to ISI's decline, with the group retaining only a fraction of its leaders, cells, and capabilities, which were concentrated in Mosul.¹⁶

Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was killed on 18 April 2010, during an aerial attack launched by American and Iraqi forces on a house near Tikrit, in central Iraq, where he and other ISI senior commanders were present.¹⁷ His successor was Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al-Badri al-Samarrai), a member of both JTI and AQI under Zarqawi. Like several men destined to form ISIL senior leadership, al-Baghdadi had been detained at the US-run prison, Camp Bucca, in southern Iraq. Records, containing one of the few photographs of Al-Baghdadi, indicate he was held there from February to December 2004.¹⁸

Al-Baghdadi's assumption of the leadership of ISI was made public in May 2010.¹⁹ He would go on to oversee the group's expansion in Syria, which led to its renaming as ISIL. In June 2014 within weeks of seizing the Iraqi city of Mosul, it would be al-Baghdadi who would proclaim the establishment of ISIL's "caliphate".²⁰

The desire to defeat ISIL was one of the few points in the Syrian conflict around which the international community would coalesce. Under the onslaught of attacks from a global coalition, ISIL began its decline in 2016, and by early December 2017, had lost control of its territory in Iraq.²¹ By March 2019, the group had been forced from its last stronghold, the town of Baghuz in eastern Syria.²² On 27 October 2019, al-Baghdadi killed himself and two children by detonating a suicide vest during a raid by US forces on a location in Idlib, northwest Syria.²³

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who led ISIL during the period April 2013– September 2014, was publicly listed by the United Nations Security Council Sanctions Committee on 5 October 2011.²⁴ The public narrative summary setting out the grounds for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's inclusion on the Sanctions Committee list was updated on 3 June 2014, as LCS continued to operate in ISIL-controlled Syria.

¹⁴ Dexter Filkins, John F. Burns, *At Site of Attack on Zarqawi, All That's Left Are Questions*, *New York Times*, 11 June 2006; Ellen Knickmeyer, Jonathan Finer, *Insurgent Leader Al-Zarqawi Killed in Iraq*, *Washington Post*, 8 June 2006.

¹⁵ Stephen Negus, *Call for Sunni state in Iraq*, *Financial Times*, 15 October 2006.

¹⁶ Wilson Center, *Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State*, 28 October 2019.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>

¹⁷ BBC News, *"Iraqi al-Qaeda leaders 'killed'"*, 19 April 2010.

¹⁸ Martin Chulov, *"Isis: the inside story"*. The Guardian (UK), 11 December 2014,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/sp-isis-the-inside-story>

¹⁹Anthony Shadid, *Iraqi insurgent group names new leaders*, *New York Times*, 16 May 2010,

<https://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/iraqi-insurgent-group-names-new-leaders>

²⁰ Adam Withnall, *Iraq crisis: Isis changes name and declares its territories a new Islamic state with 'restoration of caliphate' in Middle East*, *Independent* (UK), 30 June 2014; Charlie Caris, *The Islamic State announces caliphate*, Institute for the Study of War, 30 June, 2014, <http://iswvsyria.blogspot.com/2014/06/the-islamic-state-announces-caliphate.html>

²¹ BBC News, *Iraq declares war with Islamic State is over*, 9 December 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42291985>

²² Sarah El Deeb, *ISIS militants evacuate last stronghold in Syria following government offensive*, Associated Press, 9 November 2017. <https://apnews.com/article/syria-ap-top-news-middle-east-international-news-iraq-f25ce410a4144fd8b8c9c96bc70ea18d>

²³ White House Press Release, *"Statement from the President on the Death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi"*, 27 October 2019.

²⁴ United Nations Security Council Sanctions Committee established pursuant to Resolution 1267 (1999), Narrative Summary of Reasons for Listing "QDi.299 - Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai" 5 October 2011, amended 3 June 2014 and 3 February 2016. (https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/raq_sanctions_list/summaries/individual/ibrahim-awwad-ibrahim-ali-al-badri-al-samarrai). Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had joined Jama' al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad in 2004.

II. The Syrian Battlefield

The Syrian conflict began in March 2011 as an uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. In Aleppo governorate, where LCS's Jalabiya factory had begun to operate less than a year prior, mass protests first erupted in Aleppo city in August 2011 and were brutally suppressed by government forces.²⁵ By the fall of 2011, the number of defectors from the government's military and security forces was rising. Many began to organize themselves into the Free Syrian Army (FSA).²⁶

By November 2011, armed confrontations between government forces and the FSA intensified. As armed groups, many operating under the banner of the FSA, seized control of villages and neighborhoods in larger towns and cities, the government attacked with heavy weaponry, causing mass civilian casualties and the destruction of homes and infrastructure.²⁷ The intensity and duration of the armed confrontation, and the increased organization of the armed groups²⁸ led the UN Syria Commission and the International Committee of the Red Cross to independently declare that, by mid-February 2012, the unrest in Syria had crossed into a state of non-international armed conflict.²⁹

Syria's descent into war provided new opportunities for AQI/ISI, whose fighters could easily cross from Iraq into eastern Syria. ISI expanded across the border into Syria and gained access to recruits, money, and armaments.³⁰

By mid-2012, the collection of what had initially been predominantly secular anti-government armed groups had begun to weaken. Against a background of inconsistent support from international backers, the armed opposition to President Assad became riven by infighting. Radical groups espousing Salafi-jihadist ideology became more prominent as they made gains on the battlefield—a consequence of having experienced fighters, more strategic command, and larger amounts of funding.³¹ This included the Islamic Front, the al-Nusra Front (Front of the Supporters of the People of the Levant), and ISI fighters loyal to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

The most organized of the radical groups was the al-Nusra Front. It was headed by Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, believed to be from Syrian Golan Heights. Al-Jawlani, who moved to Iraq after 2003 to fight in the insurgency, was a member of AQI under Zarqawi. He was imprisoned in Camp Bucca in 2007, and on his release in 2008, joined ISI first under Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, and then under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, where he served as a senior commander in Ninewa governorate in northern Iraq.³² In July 2011, shortly after the Syrian uprising began, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi sent a number of ISI fighters into Syria where they formed the al-Nusra Front, to which al-Jawlani was named head in January 2012.³³ By December 2012, the US Department of State declared al-Nusra to be an officially designated terrorist organization, noting that it was simply a new alias for AQI.³⁴

²⁵ Martin Chulov and Nour Ali, [Syria violence spreads to commercial capital Aleppo](#), The Guardian (UK), 12 August 2011.

²⁶ Some defectors, in subsequent interviews with the Syria Commission, detailed State forces shooting indiscriminately at unarmed protestors, and confirmed that they had received orders to shoot at unarmed protestors without warning. UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/S-17-2/Add.1 (n 4), 23 November 2011, para. 41.

²⁷ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/19/69, 22 February 2012, paras. 39-46.

²⁸ International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), *Prosecutor v. Tadic*, 'Decision on the Defence Motion for Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction', IT-94-1-A, 2 October 1995, para. 70, for a summary of the factors which determine when a non-international armed conflict has come into being.

²⁹ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/21/50, 16 August 2012; BBC News, *Syria in civil war, Red Cross says*, 15 July 2012.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18849362>

³⁰ Letter dated 1 October 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning AQ and associated individuals and entities to the President of the Security Council containing the Team's twelfth report (S/2012/729) and Letter dated 31 December 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning AQ and associated individuals and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council containing the Team's thirteen report (S/2012/968).

³¹ David Ignatius, *How ISIS Spread in the Middle East...And how to stop it*, The Atlantic, 29 October 2015.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/how-isis-started-syria-iraq/412042/>

³² Times of Israel, ["Elusive Al-Qaeda leader in Syria stays in shadows"](#), 4 November 2013.

³³ Wilson Center, *Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State*, 28 October 2019.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>

³⁴ US State Department, ["Terrorist Designations of the al-Nusra Front as an Alias for al-Qa'ida in Iraq"](#).

Al-Nusra emphasized the Syrian, rather than global, nature of their jihad.³⁵ The group fought alongside the Syrian armed opposition against the Assad government in order to bolster its credibility and gain greater popular legitimacy.³⁶ It focused on building and maintaining relationships with local communities and other armed groups,³⁷ and declined to institute Sharia law where it faced opposition.³⁸ In this it ran counter to ISI's approach, which focused on gaining physical control of territory prior to gaining, or forcing, social acceptance.³⁹

On 8 April 2013, ISI released a recording of al-Baghdadi, in which he announced that al-Nusra was linked to ISI,⁴⁰ and that he was merging al-Nusra with ISI into a single group, ISIL, which would operate under his command.⁴¹ The following day, al-Jawlani denied the merger with ISI and affirmed al-Nusra's allegiance to Al-Qaeda, pledging allegiance to al-Zawahiri.⁴² Al-Nusra split, with some elements joining ISIL and other remaining with Al-Nusra.⁴³ The split put the two groups in competition, especially for recruits, and eventually resulted in open fighting. Clashes ensued,⁴⁴ with ISIL –reinforced by fighters crossing over from Iraq– eventually emerging ascendant in northern Syria by early 2014.

³⁵ Thomas Pierret, *External support and the Syrian insurgency*, Foreign Policy, 9 August 2013.

³⁶ Institute for the Study of War, *ISIS Governance in Syria*, July 2014, p. 10. <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/isis-governance-syria>

³⁷ The Times of Israel, ["With wary eye, Syrian rebels welcome Islamists into their ranks"](#), 25 October 2012; USA Today, ["Islamist groups gaining prominence in Syria fight"](#), 14 December 2012.

³⁸ Ben Hubbard, ["Al Qaeda Tries a New Tactic to Keep Power: Sharing It"](#). *The New York Times*, 9 June 2015.

³⁹ Institute for the Study of War, *ISIS Governance in Syria*, July 2014, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Agence France-Presse, ["Qaeda in Iraq confirms Syria's Nusra is part of network"](#), 9 April 2013.

⁴¹ MEMRI, ["ISI Confirms That Jabhat Al-Nusra Is Its Extension in Syria, Declares 'Islamic State of Iraq And Al-Sham' As New Name of Merged Group"](#), 8 April 2013.

⁴² Agence France-Presse, ["Al-Nusra Commits to al-Qaeda, Deny Iraq Branch 'Merger'"](#), 10 April 2013; BBC News, *Profile: Syria's al-Nusra Front*, 10 April 2013; Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) "Narrative Summary of reasons for Listing the Al-Nusra Front for the People of the Levant (QDe.137)" United Nations 14 May 2014 [states that the Al-Nusra Front is associated with AQ (QDe.004).]

⁴³ Richard Spencer, ["Syria: Jabhat al-Nusra split after leader's pledge of support for al-Qaeda"](#), The Telegraph (UK), 19 May 2013.

⁴⁴ Reuters, ["Factbox: Syria's rebel groups"](#), 9 January 2014. The fighting would continue at least until the summer of 2014. In February 2014, al-Nusra threatened to attack ISIL over its suspected role in the killing of senior Ahrar Al-Sham commander: Al Akhbar English, ["Syria: al-Nusra Front declares war on ISIS"](#). 26 February 2014; on 16 April 2014, ISIL killed al-Nusra's senior commander in Idlib Abu Mohammad al-Ansari together with his family: Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, ["Al-Nusra chief killed by rivals in Syria"](#), 16 April 2014; in May 2014, open fighting erupted between ISIL and al-Nusra in Syria's eastern Dayr Az-Zawr governorate, causing hundreds of casualties on both sides: Reuters, ["Hundreds killed as ISIL insurgents gain ground in east Syria"](#), 10 June 2014.

III. Overview of ISIL seizing of territory across Syria and Iraq, April 2013 – September 2014

On 6 March 2013, armed groups in Syria seized control over Raqqah city, the first provincial capital to fall from the government's grasp.⁴⁵ Leveraging the opportunities created by the war in Syria, ISIL began to entrench itself in the city, which lay approximately 90 kilometers from the LCS factory in Jalabiya. Amidst clashes with al-Nusra and other anti-government armed groups, ISIL set up its Raqqah headquarters in early June 2013.⁴⁶ By early November 2013, it had ousted other armed groups from Raqqah city, and after intense fighting, reasserted its control over the city and over the surrounding areas in mid-January 2014,⁴⁷ which it would continue to hold under mid-October 2017.⁴⁸

ISIL quickly began to open other fronts, seizing territory across northern Syria. By the late spring of 2013, the group had strongholds in northern Syria,⁴⁹ including in al-Bab, Jarablus, Atarib, and Minbej in northern Aleppo, and had started opening offices for outreach and proselytization (*Da'wah*) in each.⁵⁰ All lay within a short distance of Jalabiya, with Minbej being approximately 65 kilometers away. By the autumn of 2013, ISIL documents indicated that 2650 of its foreign fighters were stationed in Aleppo governorate.⁵¹

In January 2014, ISIL seized complete control of Minbej in northern Aleppo, which it held until June 2016. In April 2014, ISIL had moved into the eastern oil-rich governorate of Dayr Az-Zawr, which borders Iraq.⁵² ISIL was able to retain control relatively easily as, until late 2016, the Syrian government, and later Russia, directed the vast majority of their aerial attacks on areas held by anti-government armed groups, leaving the Syrian territory held by ISIL relatively untouched.⁵³

In Iraq, ISIL took power in Fallujah on 6 January 2014.⁵⁴ By June 2014, the group would control 70 per cent of Anbar governorate.⁵⁵ In the same month, using Syria as a launching pad, ISIL advanced into northern Iraq. On 10 June 2014, assisted by sleeper cells and the collapse of the Iraqi army, ISIL seized Mosul city, the second largest city in Iraq, and the area around Mosul.⁵⁶ As the Iraqi army retreated, ISIL surged forward, advancing southwards through Kirkuk and Diyala governorates.⁵⁷ On 11 June, ISIL seized Tikrit, the administrative center of the Salahuddin Governorate, and entered the town of Baiji (north of Tikrit on the Tigris river), where Iraq's largest oil refinery is located.⁵⁸ On 14 June, Tel Afar city in Ninewa governorate, populated by a mixed Sunni-Shia community and one of the main centers of the Turkman community, would fall to ISIL.⁵⁹ The group's advance was halted only 60 kilometers to the northern of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. On or around 22 June, ISIL took control of three towns in Anbar governorate: al-Qa'im on the border crossing with Syria, Rawa, and

⁴⁵ Fox News, "[Syrian activists say rebels seize security buildings in Raqqa, declare it 1st 'liberated' city](#)", 6 March 2013.

⁴⁶ The Telegraph (UK), "[Al-Qaeda sets up complaints department](#)", 2 June 2013.

⁴⁷ AsiaNews, "[Syria, anti-Assad rebel infighting leaves 700 dead, including civilians](#)", 13 January 2014.

⁴⁸ BBC News, "[Raqqa: IS 'capital' falls to US-backed Syrian forces](#)", 17 October 2017.

⁴⁹ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/24/46, 16 August 2013, para. 33.

⁵⁰ Christoph Reuter, *The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of the Islamic State*, Der Spiegel, 18 April 2015; The Atlantic, *Syrian Refugees Face an Increasingly Horrific Situation in Turkey*, 2 October 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/10/syrian-refugees-face-an-increasingly-horrific-situation-in-turkey/280207/>; NPR, *Small Syrian Border Town Magnifies Rift Between Rebel Groups*, 22 September 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2013/09/22/225120196/small-syrian-border-town-magnifies-rift-between-rebel-groups>

⁵¹ Christoph Reuter, *The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of the Islamic State*, Der Spiegel, 18 April 2015.

⁵² Le Point, "[Syrie : des rebelles islamistes repoussent un assaut djihadiste dans l'Est](#)", 11 April 2014.

⁵³ Aryn Baker, *Why Bashar Assad Won't Fight ISIS*, Time, 26 February 2015.

⁵⁴ Fox News, "[Al Qaeda-linked militants capture Fallujah during violent outbreak](#)", 4 January 2014.

⁵⁵ Chelsea J. Carter, Hamdi Alkshali and Susanna Capelouto, *Kerry assures Iraqis of U.S. support if they unite against militants*, CNN, 23 June 2014.

⁵⁶ UNAMI-OHCHR, *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014*, July 2014, p. 3. See also, Suadad Al-Salhy and Tim Arango, "[Sunni Militants Drive Iraqi Army Out of Mosul](#)", New York Times, 10 June 2014.

⁵⁷ The Daily Star, "[Jihadists seize areas in Iraq's Kirkuk province: police](#)", 10 June 2014.

⁵⁸ UNAMI-OHCHR, *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014*, July 2014, p. 4; Al Jazeera, [Iraq city of Tikrit falls to ISIS fighters](#)", 12 June 2014.

⁵⁹ Ziad Al-Sanjary and Ahmed Rasheed, "[Advancing Iraq rebels seize northwest town in heavy battle](#)", Reuters, 15 June 2014.

Anah (located on the Euphrates river north of Hit on the route to the Syrian border).⁶⁰ In the days prior, as they took control of the border area, ISIL fighters based in Syria brought bulldozers to destroy the sand berm that marked the border between Syria and Iraq, filming and publishing the destruction online.⁶¹

On 3 August 2014, ISIL seized control of the Sinjar region of Ninewa governorate, home to the majority of the world's Yazidis, a minority religious community.⁶² Three days later, the group advanced across the Ninewa Plains taking control of towns and villages inhabited by many of the Iraq's ethno-religious minorities, including Christians, Shabak and Kakais. It would advance to within 30 kilometers of the Iraqi Kurdish capital of Erbil, before being pushed back by American airstrikes.⁶³

By late August 2014, ISIL controlled approximately a third of Syria and 40 percent of Iraq.⁶⁴ In Jalabiya, where the LCS factory continued to function until 19 September 2014 when it was seized by ISIL, the group held territory between approximately March 2013 and 30 June 2017.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Michael Martinez, Mohammed Tawfeeq and Chelsea J. Carter, [4 western Iraqi towns fall to advancing ISIS militants](#), CNN, 22 June 2014.

⁶¹ Ian Black, [Isis breach of Iraq-Syria border merges two wars into one 'nightmarish reality'](#), The Guardian (UK), 18 June 2014.

⁶² BBC News, [UN Security Council condemns attacks by Iraqi jihadists](#), 7 August 2014; CNN, [Iraqi Yazidi lawmaker: Hundreds of my people are being slaughtered](#), 6 August 2014.

⁶³ Richard Spencer, [American air strikes help Kurdish forces reclaim towns from Islamic State](#), The Telegraph (UK), 10 August 2014.

⁶⁴ Wilson Center, [Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State](#), 28 October 2019.
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>

⁶⁵ Reuters, [Islamic State withdraws from last area of Aleppo province: war monitor](#), 30 June 2017.

IV. ISIL Violence in Syria and Iraq, April 2013 – September 2014

Violence was intrinsic both to ISIL's military campaigns and its governance of territory seized, which by the summer of 2014 encompassed tens of thousands of square miles in which millions of Syrians and Iraqis lived.⁶⁶ Attention often fixes on the brutality of ISIL's conduct – the mass executions, the beheadings and amputations, and the waves of atrocities against marginalized communities including women, religious and ethnic minorities, and sexual and gender minorities. ISIL leverages this to terrorize and amplify its dominance and brand, with its media arm producing and releasing sophisticated videos of scenes of egregious violence, often including executions.

It would, however, be inaccurate to consider ISIL to be mindlessly violent. ISIL –like ISI and AQI before it– is a Salafi-Jihadist movement, fixated on the “purification” of Islam after centuries of “deviant” digressions from the “true” Islam – digressions which, according to its practitioners, include Shi'ism, Sufism, and even non-Salafist Sunnism.⁶⁷ The group holds even its most grotesque acts as being sanctioned by the group's ideology and therefore under its interpretation of Sharia law: “According to the Islamic State, violence is only legitimate when justified by law.”⁶⁸

Two consequences stem from this. First, violence is ingrained into how ISIL controls territory and the civilian population living within. Second, as the armed group and its fighters believe that the violence they perpetrate is ideologically sanctioned and key to the establishment of what they perceive to be a truly Islamic state, they make no attempt to hide or reframe their behavior.

Syria

Throughout ISIL's seizing and solidifying control of territory in Syria and Iraq, there was contemporaneous detailed documentation of the violence and violations that it perpetrated. Information, including statements of civilians who fled or were still living within ISIL-held territory, was collected and analyzed by investigators and lawyers from the United Nations, international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and Syria civil society documentation groups. Journalists, international and national, took great risks to report on ISIL crimes; some of them paid with their lives. As detailed below, perhaps, the richest source of information came from ISIL itself which released photographs and videos of many of their atrocities over social media, and which for a time encouraged civilians to record its public executions, amputations, and floggings.

In its August 2014 report, the UN Syria Commission determined that, between January and July 2014, members of ISIL had “committed torture, murder, acts tantamount to enforced disappearance, and forcible displacement as part of an attack on the civilian population in Aleppo and Ar Raqqa governorates, amounting to crimes against humanity.”⁶⁹ The report also documents ISIL committing war crimes, including murder, execution without due process, torture, hostage-taking, violations of international humanitarian law tantamount to enforced disappearance, rape and sexual violence, recruiting and using children in hostilities, and attacking protected objects.⁷⁰ In the same month, the Arab League condemned ISIL for its commission of crimes against humanity against “civilians and minorities in Iraq”,⁷¹ and the White House would raise the spectre of ISIL committing genocide in its assault on the Yazidis of northern Iraq.⁷² In 2016, the UN Syria Commission would determine

⁶⁶ Andrew F. March and Mara Revkin, *Caliphate of Law*, Foreign Affairs, 15 April 2015.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-04-15/caliphate-law>

⁶⁷ Jacob Olidort, *What is Salafism?*, Foreign Affairs, 24 November 2015. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-11-24/what-salafism>

⁶⁸ Mara Revkin, *The Legal Foundations of the Islamic State*, Brookings Center for Middle East Policy, Analysis Paper No. 23, July 2016. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Mara-Revkin_Web.pdf

⁶⁹ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, Executive Summary.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Al-Arabiya News, *Arab League denounces ISIS attacks as “crimes against humanity”*, 11 August 2014, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2014/08/11/U-S-weighs-options-to-evacuate-trapped-Yazidis->

⁷² The White House, [Statement by the President](#), 7 August 2014.

that ISIL had committed genocide, as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes, in its attack on the Yazidis.⁷³

Unlawful Killings

Massacres

One of the earliest ISIL killings documented by United Nations investigators and published in their report dated 16 August 2013, was of a 14-year-old boy, Mohammed Qatta, who was executed by ISIL in June 2013 in Aleppo city, for blasphemy.⁷⁴ He was shot in the head and neck with an automatic rifle in front of a crowd that included his mother and father, with the ISIL fighters announcing before shooting him, that cursing the Prophet was a terrible vice and that others who did so would be similarly punished.⁷⁵

On 26 June 2013, ISIL abducted two 15-year-old boys near Nubul (Aleppo governorate); the boys were executed on 11 August 2013 in the nearby village of Mayer. Their corpses were mutilated, almost beyond recognition and ISIL posted a video of the execution on the Internet shortly afterwards.⁷⁶

In Raqqah city, between March and July 2013, hundreds of people were abducted; in some cases, their bodies were later found.⁷⁷ On 17 October 2013, ISIL called a meeting of approximately 300 members of civil society in Raqqah city. Two people spoke out about the kidnappings and the murders committed by ISIL. One of them, Muhannad Habayebna, was a civil rights activist and journalist. His body was found five days later, tied up and with a gunshot wound to his head.⁷⁸

In May 2014, ISIL executed 15 civilians in al-Taliliya village, near Ras al-‘Ayn, in al-Hasakah governorate.⁷⁹ The victims, among which were several children, were Syrian Arabs who had fled Aleppo governorate.

On 17 July 2014, ISIL killed 270 Syrians, including national guard members, security guards and employees, after attacking and seizing the al Shaer gas field in Homs governorate, with another 90 security guards and employees missing.⁸⁰

In early August 2014, ISIL executed 700 members of the al-Sheitat tribe, which resides in the eastern Syrian governorate of Dayr Az-Zawr, and which was resisting ISIL attempts to solidify its control of the area.⁸¹ Most, approximately 600, were civilians; many were beheaded after capture.

On 24 August 2014, ISIL overran the Tabqa military airport in Raqqah governorate. The group captured approximately 160 Syrian soldiers, stripped them to their underwear and marched them into the desert where they videoed their execution.⁸² ISIL uploaded the video of the execution to YouTube as well as distributing it across via its media platforms.⁸³

⁷³ UN Syria Commission, “[They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis](#),” A/HRC/32/CRP.2, 16 June 2016 (“UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy”).

⁷⁴ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/24/46, 16 August 2013, para. 45.

⁷⁵ Hunter Stewart, *Muhammad al-Qatta, 15-Year-Old Boy, Reportedly Executed By Syrian Rebel Group For Blasphemy*, Huffington Post, 10 June 2013. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/muhammad-al-qatta-15-year-old-syria-rebels_n_3415901

⁷⁶ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 25.

⁷⁷ Christoph Reuter, *The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of the Islamic State*, Der Spiegel, 18 April 2015. <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html>

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Syria: ISIS Summarily Killed Civilians - At Least 15 Dead in Northern Village*, 14 June 2014.

⁸⁰ Shelby Lin Erdman, Mohammed Tawfeeq and Hamdi Alkhshali, *Islamic extremists kill 270 in attack on a gas field in central Syria*, report says, CNN, 19 July 2014.

⁸¹ Al Jazeera, *Islamic State group ‘executes 700’ in Syria*, 17 August 2014.

⁸² BBC News, *Syria conflict: IS ‘kills dozens of Assad soldiers’*, 28 August 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28965959>; Al Jazeera, *Islamic State group executes Syrian soldiers*, 28 August 2014. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/8/28/islamic-state-group-executes-syrian-soldiers>

⁸³ Sylvia Westall and Mariam Karouny, *Video shows Islamic State executes scores of Syrian soldiers*, Reuters, 28 August 2014. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-idUSKBN0GS10020140828>

Public Executions

By 2014, more information about ISIL conduct in northern Syria, including graphic images of multiple atrocities, made its way into United Nations and NGO reporting, as well as into the international media. In its 13 August 2014 report, which covered the period 1 January – 30 June 2014, the UN Syria Commission reported that,

Executions in public spaces have become a common spectacle on Fridays in Ar Raqqah and ISIS-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate. ISIS informs residents beforehand and encourages them to attend. In some cases, ISIS forces passers-by to attend. Children have been present at the executions, which take the form of beheading or shooting in the head at close range. Before executions, ISIS fighters announce the victims' crimes. Bodies are placed on public display, often on crucifixes, for up to three days, serving as a warning to local residents.⁸⁴

The report details the public killings committed by ISIL in Raqqah and Aleppo governorates. In Raqqah city, “dozens [of executions] have been documented”, including the killing of seven people, five under the age of 18, in El-Naim square in downtown Raqqah city in late April.⁸⁵ Three of the bodies were placed on crucifixes and displayed for three days. In July 2014, an ISIL-sanction mob stoned two women to death in Raqqah governorate.⁸⁶

The UN Syria Commission also detailed ISIL executions taking place in Aleppo governorate, in towns only tens of kilometers away from where the LCS factory was still operating:

As ISIS has expanded its control of areas in eastern Aleppo governorate, it has publicly executed people in Minbij, Al Bab and Jarabulus. In Minbij, ISIS uses a parking lot as its execution site. Most executions are beheadings. In February, a 15-year-old boy was beheaded, ostensibly for committing rape. Children were present. Several of those interviewed believed that he had been executed for being a member of another armed group. The body was left on the ground for two days. In April, ISIS fighters beheaded two men. Their bodies were displayed on crucifixes for two days.

In April, ISIS beheaded two men in Al-Bza'a, outside Al Bab. Several hundred people were gathered to watch, including children. The first execution was improperly carried out, as the knife was insufficiently sharp. In February, in Jarabulus, ISIS beheaded three captured fighters from another armed group, one of whom was 17 years.⁸⁷

Months prior to the publication of the UN Syria Commission's August 2014, international news was reporting on ISIL executions and its practice of placing bodies on crucifixes and leaving them for days in central public areas.⁸⁸

On 2 May 2014, CNN published an article online, “Death and desecration in Syria: Jihadist group 'crucifies' bodies to send message”, describing masked men dragging “the bloodied body of a man across a public square”.⁸⁹ Across to the eyewitness interviewed by the news organization, the body was tied to a makeshift crucifix, with green string holding “the body's arms outstretched across a wood plank as blood oozes from the gunshot wound to his head.” The article was accompanied by six graphic photos of the bodies of executed males tied to crucifixes on a roundabout in Raqqah city. The eye-witness, who took the photographs and provided them to CNN, stated, “[i]t is like a waterfall

⁸⁴ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 30.

⁸⁵ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 32.

⁸⁶ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 31.

⁸⁷ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, paras. 33-34.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Olivia Becker, *Islamist rebels are allegedly Crucifying People in Syria*, VICE News, 30 April 2014, <https://news.vice.com/article/islamist-rebels-are-allegedly-crucifying-people-in-syria/>; Jonathan Spyer and Aymenn Al-Tamimi, *Butchers: Syria's ISIS Crucifying opponents, justifying horror with Quran Passages*, Middle East Forum, 27 May 2014, <https://www.meforum.org/3833/syria-islamist-crucifixion>

⁸⁹ CNN, *Death and desecration in Syria: Jihadist group 'crucifies' bodies to send message*, 2 May 2014. <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/01/world/meast/syria-bodies-crucifixions/index.html>

of blood. There are more and more executions and now the children watch like they are used to it. It is a strange and exciting scene and they are not afraid to look." ⁹⁰

On 8 May 2014, BBC News published a report about ISIL's public executions and its displaying of bodies on crucifixes.⁹¹ In June 2014, the Telegraph (UK) reported on ISIL's crucifixion of nine people in Syria.⁹² In July 2014, France Inter published an article about ISIL executions in Syria, writing

270 personnes ont été tuées, la plupart exécutées par balles, lors de la prise d'un gisement de gaz par les djihadistes de l'Etat Islamique. Ce groupe islamiste, plus radical qu'Al Qu'Aïda, sème la terreur en Syrie et en Irak: crucifixion, lapidation des femmes, exécutions sommaires.⁹³

Also in mid-July 2014, French news outlet, La Croix, published its article "La crucifixion existe aujourd'hui en Syrie."⁹⁴

In mid-August 2014, Vice News released a documentary about ISIL, the armed group having allowed a reporter to report within its territory under its supervision. The documentary was uploaded on to YouTube in five parts between 7 and 12 August 2014, where it received millions of views. In part four of the uploaded documentary, which is subtitled in French, the crucified body is shown in a square in Raqqah city, surrounded by children, many of whom are taking photographs and videos of the scene.⁹⁵

On 19 August 2014, ISIL uploaded a video to YouTube entitled "A Message to America". While it was quickly taken down, the video continued to circulate online. The video, which starts with U.S. President Obama's announcement of the first U.S. airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq, shows journalist James Foley kneeling in the desert next to a masked ISIL militant, who condemned U.S. airstrikes and threatened that any aggression by America would "result in the bloodshed of your people." The video then cuts to showing Foley's decapitated body.⁹⁶ The executioner warns that ISIL is holding another American journalist, Time magazine contributor Steven Sotloff, and that he would be killed if President Obama failed to halt air strikes against ISIL. A video showing the beheading of Sotloff was released on 22 September 2014.⁹⁷

Amputations and floggings

The UN Syria Commission also described ISIL's harsh punishment for offences against Sharia law, as the group interprets it, stating, "[p]ublic squares have become the scene of amputations, lashings and mock crucifixion in Ar Raqqah governorate, as well as in Minbij (Aleppo)."⁹⁸ In May 2014, ISIL amputated the hand of a man in a public square in Raqqah city.⁹⁹

⁹⁰ CNN, *Death and desecration in Syria: Jihadist group 'crucifies' bodies to send message*, 2 May 2014.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/01/world/mideast/syria-bodies-crucifixions/index.html>

⁹¹ Alison Gee, *Crucifixion from ancient Rome to modern Syria*, BBC News, 8 May 2014.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27245852>

⁹² Harriet Alexander, *ISIS crucifies nine people in Syrian villages*, The Telegraph (UK), 29 June 2014.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10933851/Isis-crucifies-nine-people-in-Syrian-villages.html>

⁹³ France Inter, *Atrocités en Syrie : les Djihadistes tuent 270 personnes*, 19 July 2014.

<https://www.franceinter.fr/info/atrocites-en-syrie-les-djihadistes-tuent-270-personnes>

⁹⁴ Samuel Lieven, *La crucifixion existe aujourd'hui en Syrie*, Le Croix, 17 July 2014.

<https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/Monde/La-crucifixion-existe-aujourd-hui-en-Syrie-2014-07-17-1180369>

⁹⁵ Vice News, *The Islamic State: Episode 4*, uploaded 11 August 2014, (timestamp: 2:02)

https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=cGQwTOsh_0&list=PLw613M86o5o7ELT6LKyJFKawB6gUsZSf7&index=3

⁹⁶ Rukmini Callimachi, *"Militant Group Says It Killed American Journalist in Syria"*, New York Times, 19 August 2014;

Chelsea J. Carter, *"Video shows ISIS beheading U.S. journalist James Foley"*, CNN, 20 August 2014.

⁹⁷ Michael Wilner, *"Islamic State claims murder of Jewish-American journalist in latest beheading video"*, Jerusalem Post, 2 September 2014.

⁹⁸ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 65.

⁹⁹ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 66.

Not only were the amputations covered in international media throughout the first half of 2014, but in many cases, ISIL publicized the executions and amputation itself. In late February 2014, ISIL live-tweeted its amputation of a man's hand in a public square in the northern Aleppo village of Maskaneh. The Washington Post introduced the story, writing, "[t]he extremist Syrian group deemed too radical even for al-Qaeda performed what may have been a Twitter first Friday: live-tweeting the amputation of a hand."¹⁰⁰ The tweets were accompanied by photographs of the amputation, the last of which was too graphic to be shown in the international media reporting.

On 31 October 2013, a school headmistress was publicly lashed by ISIL in Raqqah city for not wearing a hijab.¹⁰¹ In April 2014, a man and his wife were publicly flogged in Raqqah city as his wife's face was uncovered.¹⁰² The Commission noted that it had received "multiple accounts were received of women who had appeared in public with their faces uncovered being beaten with sticks by patrolling ISIS fighters."¹⁰³ ISIL also flogged men for publicly accompanying an "improperly dressed" female relative.¹⁰⁴

The World, reporting on ISIL's public executions, amputations, and flogging, wrote in June 2014, "ISIL is considered so extreme that core Al Qaeda moved to distance itself from it earlier this year, suggesting the group is too violent."¹⁰⁵

Torture

In its August 2013 report, the UN Syria Commission stated that it had documented ISIL holding several hundred prisoners, including community activists and women, in Raqqah.¹⁰⁶ Four months later, Amnesty International released a briefing paper describing "harrowing torture and summary killings" in seven secret ISIS detention centers across Raqqah and Aleppo governorates.¹⁰⁷ In the December 2013 publication, Amnesty interviewed former detainees of ISIL prisons who recounted "a shocking catalogue of abuses in which they or others were flogged with rubber generator belts or cables, tortured with electric shocks or forced to adopt a painful stress position known as *aqrab* (scorpion), in which a detainee's wrists are secured together over one shoulder."¹⁰⁸ The report underscored that children were among the detained and tortured:

On one occasion, an anguished father had to endure screams of pain as ISIS captors tormented his son in a nearby room. Two detainees related how they witnessed a child of about 14 receive a flogging of more than 90 lashes during interrogation at Sadd al-Ba'ath, an ISIS prison in al-Raqqah governorate. Another child of about 14 who ISIS accused of stealing a motorbike was repeatedly flogged over several days.¹⁰⁹

In October 2013, the United Nations reported on the torture by ISIL of a 26-year-old man detained on suspicion that he was gay.¹¹⁰

Also documented in the UN Syria Commission's August 2014 report was the continued torture of persons detained by ISIL in Raqqah and Aleppo governorates, including the whipping of detainees with cables.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁰ Liz Sly and Ahmad Ramadan, *Syrian extremists amputated a man's hand and live-tweeted it*, Washington Post, 28 February 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/02/28/syrian-extremists-amputated-a-mans-hand-and-live-tweeted-it/>

¹⁰¹ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 70.

¹⁰² UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 67.

¹⁰³ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 68.

¹⁰⁴ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 67.

¹⁰⁵ Allison Jackson, *The militant group taking over Iraq and Syria right now is seriously scary*, The World, 13 June 2014, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-06-13/militant-group-taking-over-iraq-and-syria-right-now-seriously-scary>

¹⁰⁶ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/24/46, 16 August 2013, para. 61.

¹⁰⁷ Amnesty International, *Rule of fear: ISIS abuses in detention in northern Syria*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Amnesty International, *Rule of fear: ISIS abuses in detention in northern Syria*, 19 December 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Amnesty International, *Rule of fear: ISIS abuses in detention in northern Syria*, 19 December 2013.

¹¹⁰ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 70.

¹¹¹ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 69.

Targeted Attacks

ISIL was notorious for its attacks on Syrian civilians by virtue of their ethnic, racial, religious backgrounds, political (and perceived political) views, gender, sexual orientation, and professional background.

Even prior to ISIL solidifying its control of Raqqah and Aleppo, the group focused attacks on **Christian clergy, adherents, and on Christian sites**. On 22 April 2013, the Syriac-Orthodox Archbishop Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim and the Greek-Orthodox Archbishop Boulos Yazigi, were abducted on the road between Aleppo and the Turkish border.¹¹² While ISIL was not initially identified as the perpetrators, it is believed they were held by ISIL and a reward is currently being offered for information concerning the ISIL network involved in their disappearance.¹¹³ Their fates remain unknown. In July 2013 in Raqqah city, ISIL abducted Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit priest and peace activist, causing international outcry.¹¹⁴ While there have been reports of his execution,¹¹⁵ his fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

In September 2013, ISIL desecrated two Catholic churches in Raqqah city, the Greek Catholic Church of the Annunciation and the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs,¹¹⁶ the latter of which it turned into the headquarters of its morality police (*Al-Hisbah*) and a Da'wah office.¹¹⁷ Most of Raqqah's Christian community, estimated to be as much as 10% of the total population before the civil war began, fled.¹¹⁸ After the attack on the churches, Raqqah residents –who were not Christian– protested ISIL's treatment of the Christians and were met with violence. In a November 2013 BBC report, activists from Raqqah who had fled to Turkey recounted that many of them had been arrested, beaten or kidnapped by ISIS in retaliation.¹¹⁹

On 26 February 2014, ISIL formally placed restrictions on Christians and Christian life under its areas of control in Syria. In addition to being prohibited from repairing or building new houses of worship, Christians could not display any aspect of their religion outside churches; were prohibited from displaying any religious symbols in public places; and would be punished if they were perceived to be disparaging Islam in any way.¹²⁰ They were also ordered to pay *jizya*, a form of taxation on non-Muslims, twice per year, in order to be permitted to live inside ISIL territory.

In July and August 2013, ISIL abducted hundreds of **Kurdish civilians**, targeted by virtue of their ethnicity.¹²¹ This includes the group's taking several hundred Kurdish men hostage during the ISIL attack on Tal Abyad (Raqqah governorate) in order to effect a prisoner exchange for a ISIL commander captured by the Syria Kurdish armed group, the People's Protection Units (better known by their Kurdish acronym, the YPG).¹²² In late July, the YPG was fighting with ISIL and al-Nusra in the Kurdish enclaves of Tal Aran and Tal Hasel, in Aleppo governorate. In Tal Hasel, fighters conducted raids on Kurdish houses, abducting fighting-age men. Using mosque loudspeakers, the groups called Kurds "unbelievers", declaring that "swords are between us and those who decide to stay in Tal Hasel". According to the UN Syria Commission, reporting in February 2014, specific

¹¹² The Huffington Post, "[A Plea To Free Archbishop Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim and Archbishop Boulos Yazigi Who Were Kidnapped One Year Ago Today](#)", [date].

¹¹³ Aymenn Al-Tamimi, *The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham's dhimmi pact for the Christians of Raqqah province*, Syria Comment blog, 26 February 2014, <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/islamic-state-iraq-ash-shams-dhimmi-pact-christians-raqqah-province/>.

¹¹⁴ Khaled Oweis, "[Al Qaeda group kidnaps Italian Jesuit Paolo Dall'Oglio in Syria: activists](#)". Reuters, 29 July 2013; Sara Manisera, *What became of the Italian priest kidnapped by ISIS in Raqqah?*, National News, 1 August 2018.

¹¹⁵ Umberto Bacchi, *Syria: 'Pro-Rebel Jesuit Priest Paolo Dall'Oglio Executed'*, International Business Times, 1 July 2014.

¹¹⁶ Asia News, [As jihadist rebels burn two Catholic churches in al-Raqqah, Assad's enemies openly split](#), 27 September 2013; Syria Newsdesk, "[Islamic State torches churches in Al-Raqqah](#)", 26 September 2013.

¹¹⁷ Ben Hubbard and Anonymous, "[Life in a Jihadist Capital: Order With a Darker Side](#)". New York Times, 23 July 2014.

¹¹⁸ BBC News, [Syria crisis: ISIS imposes rules on Christians in Raqqah](#), 27 February 2014.

¹¹⁹ BBC News, [Syrian activists flee abuse in al-Qaeda-run Raqqah](#), 13 November 2013.

¹²⁰ BBC News, [Syria crisis: ISIS imposes rules on Christians in Raqqah](#), 27 February 2014.

¹²¹ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 40.

¹²² UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 46.

threats were directed against Kurdish women and children, saying that those who remained would be considered “halal for the mujahideen”.¹²³

Also documented were ISIL executions of members of **the Alawite community** in Raqqah.¹²⁴ ISIL released two videos online, both described by the New York Times in an article published in October 2013. The first showed scores of well-armed fighters, some speaking broken Arabic, riding off to battle and singing, “For slaughter we came for you, O Alawites.” The second was described as showing a group of fighters stopping three truck drivers on a highway believed to be across the Iraqi border and interrogating them for the number of times they bow in prayer, a marker of determining whether they were both observant and Sunni. The three drivers, who were Alawites, guessed incorrectly. The video then shows the ISIL fighters pronouncing them to be infidels, making them kneel by the side of the road and executing them, following which one fighter throws a Molotov cocktail into one of the trucks, setting it on fire.¹²⁵

Women and girls suffered immensely under ISIL’s yoke. The UN Syria Commission found that,

Since ISIS emerged as a force in early 2013, cases of women being stoned to death have been documented. Often accused of having committed adultery, it appears that many were executed for assisting fighters of other groups or for continuing professional activities. In so doing, women came into contact with men to whom they were not related.¹²⁶

Reports emerged of ISIL forcing Sunni women and girls to marry its fighters, with some victims suffering horrific physical and sexual abuse during the coerced marriage.¹²⁷

ISIL removed women and girls from public life and placed them entirely under the control of male relatives.¹²⁸ Women and girls over the age of 10 were prohibited from appearing publicly without being entirely covered, and could not travel without a close male relative.¹²⁹

Journalists were also targeted by ISIL. On 24 July 2013, ISIL fighters attacked a media center in Saraqib (Idlib governorate), assaulting its staff and kidnapping a foreign journalist, who reportedly escaped in October and left the country.¹³⁰ On 4 December 2013, Yasser Al-Jumaili, a veteran freelance cameraman from Iraq was executed in Idlib; in his last conversation with Al Jazeera, he stated he was being held by ISIL.¹³¹ In February 2014, the United Nations reported that journalists working in Aleppo and Raqqah governments received “direct threats to their safety” from ISIL.¹³²

Much of the international media reporting on ISIL’s conduct in Syria was facilitated by an underground citizen journalist group named Raqqah Is Being Silently Slaughtered (RBSS) which documented ISIL violence in Raqqah city in contemporaneous posts which were widely-distributed over its over social media, mainly via Facebook, and on its website.¹³³ In its posts, RBSS reported on life under ISIL and posted photographs of the public violence perpetrated against those living in ISIL-controlled areas of Syria. The group became a fixation of ISIL, which made continual threats

¹²³ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 149.

¹²⁴ Ben Hubbard, *Qaeda Branch in Syria Pursues Its Own Agenda*, New York Times, 1 October 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/02/world/middleeast/in-pushing-its-own-agenda-for-syria-a-qaeda-franchise-turns-rebels-into-enemies.html>

¹²⁵ Ben Hubbard, *Qaeda Branch in Syria Pursues Its Own Agenda*, New York Times, 1 October 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/02/world/middleeast/in-pushing-its-own-agenda-for-syria-a-qaeda-franchise-turns-rebels-into-enemies.html>

¹²⁶ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/30/48, 13 August 2015, para. 58. By October 2014, ISIL would release a video of the stoning of a woman in Hama governorate for the crime of adultery. See, Al-Arabiya, *Video shows ISIS stoning woman in front of her father*, 21 October 2014; CBS News, *Execution shows ISIS's harsh treatment of women*, 28 October 2014.

¹²⁷ Al-Monitor, *Syrian girls forced to marry ISIS fighters*, 13 May 2014. See also, UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/30/48, 13 August 2015, para. 59.

¹²⁸ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/30/48, 13 August 2015, para. 60.

¹²⁹ Kathy Gilsinan, *The ISIS Crackdown on Women, by Women*, 25 July 2014.

¹³⁰ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 125.

¹³¹ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 124.

¹³² UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 123.

¹³³ Raqqah Is Being Silently Slaughtered. <https://www.raqqah-sl.com/en/>

against them, including during sermons at Friday prayers.¹³⁴ Several members of RBSS were tortured and executed by ISIL, including during the time that LCS was operating in Syria. On 4 May 2014, Al-Moutaz Bellah Ibrahim was kidnapped in Tel Abyad (northern Raqqah governorate) by ISIL and murdered.¹³⁵ In a 2016 interview with BBC News, the RBSS spokesman, said “[w]hen we chose to work together against Daesh, documenting its abuses, we understood there would be casualties. However, it’s been worse than we expected. It is an inevitable price to be paid. So far we have lost 14 people – four group members and 10 friends and family members. Currently we have 18 inside Raqqah and 10 outside Raqqah.” In 2015, the Committee to Protect Journalists awarded RBSS the International Press Freedom award.

Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers

Throughout its lifetime, ISIL was particularly concerned with indoctrinating and recruiting children to ensure the next generation of its “caliphate”. Not only were children encouraged to watch public executions, amputations, and floggings, but ISIL set up training camps to recruit and train children to join its fighting forces.

By late 2013, ISIL’s use of child soldiers had been documented in multiple locations in Raqqah and Aleppo governorates. According to the February 2014 report of UN Syria Commission, “minors were seen at ISIS checkpoints in Ar Raqqah and at Saddam Hussein Battalion checkpoints in Aleppo.” during the July -December 2013 reporting period.¹³⁶ In September 2013, ISIL was using a school in Al Bab (Aleppo governorate), within driving distance of the LSC factory in Jalabiya, as a military training camp for boys.¹³⁷

In June 2014, Human Rights Watch released a report on the recruitment and use of children by armed groups in Syria.¹³⁸ In its section on ISIL, Human Rights Watch’s investigations indicated that ISIL was actively recruiting children to send to their military training camps and used them in military operations, including suicide bombing missions.¹³⁹ Two people interviewed said they had seen boys as young as 13 years old at a training base in Aleppo governorate. A former child soldier told Human Rights Watch that he had gone to the ISIL training base aged 16, and that the head of the camp said that he “liked the younger ones better.”¹⁴⁰ A fighter from an armed group battling ISIL around Minbej – approximately 65 km from the LCS factory – in late 2013, told Human Rights Watch that his unit would regularly see children fighting as part of ISIL forces. He stated that “his battalion detained 30 children ages 13 to 15 fighting with ISIS after a battle with ISIS in Manbej in late 2013.”¹⁴¹ Two medical care providers recounted giving medical treatment to children as young as 12 who had been injured while fighting for ISIL.¹⁴²

In August 2014, the UN Syria Commission reported that at one training camp in Al-Bab in northern Aleppo, ISIL “actively recruited children from the ages of 14 or 15 to undergo the same training as adults, offering financial rewards. At the camps, the children recruited received weapons training and religious education... Subsequently, they were deployed in active combat during military operations,

¹³⁴ Alice Speri, ["Raqqah Is Being Slaughtered Silently, And These Guys Are Risking Their Lives To Document It"](#), Vice News, 25 September 2014.

¹³⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Al-Moutaz Bellah Ibrahim Killed*, <https://cpj.org/data/people/al-moutaz-bellah-ibrahim/>; David Rennick, *The Death of Two Syrian Journalists*, The New Yorker, 30 October 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-two-syrian-journalists>

¹³⁶ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 80.

¹³⁷ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014, para. 80.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch, *"Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die": Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria*, June 2014. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria0614_crd_ForUpload.pdf

¹³⁹ Human Rights Watch, *"Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die": Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria*, June 2014. p. 20.

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, *"Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die": Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria*, June 2014. p. 21.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, *"Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die": Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria*, June 2014. p. 23.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch, *"Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die": Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria*, June 2014. pp. 22, 23

including suicide-bombing missions”¹⁴³ The recruitment of boys aged 10 year and older was documented at a training base in Raqqah governorate.¹⁴⁴

In a 2014 Vice News documentary, children appeared in multiple episodes, parroting ISIL propaganda. Episode two, uploaded to YouTube on 8 August 2014, focuses on ISIL’s indoctrination of children and is titled “Grooming Children for Jihad: The Islamic State”. In its opening scene, a member of ISIL questions his young son on camera: “Why do we kill the infidels?” Later in the episode, he asks his son, “What do you want to be: a jihadist or to execute a martyrdom [suicide] operation?” The son replies softly, “a jihadist”.¹⁴⁵ Another boy, interviewed by Vice News on the bank of the Euphrates river in Raqqah and who says he is nine years old, tells the journalist that after Ramadan he will go to a camp to be trained to fight for ISIL, to learn how to use a Kalashnikov to fight the infidels.¹⁴⁶ Another boy, aged 14 years, says, “I’d like to join ISIL and kill with them because they fight infidels and apostates.”¹⁴⁷ The episode also shows a celebration of the establishment of the caliphate, with armed boys wearing quasi-military garb.¹⁴⁸

Iraq

As the defenses of the Iraqi army collapsed, Mosul fell to ISIL on 10 June 2014.¹⁴⁹ This allowed the group to gain access to millions of dollars held in Mosul banks and seize control of military assets, many of which had been provided to the Iraqi armed forces by the United States. By late June 2014, many of these military assets were brought by ISIL into Syria, where the group paraded tanks and armored personnel carriers captured in Mosul through the streets of Raqqah city.¹⁵⁰

Although ISIL took control of Fallujah (Anbar governorate) in January 2014, reporting focused sharply on ISIL’s advance and seizing of territory in Anbar, Ninewa, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salahuddin governorates in June 2014. As it had accomplished in Syria, ISIL turned the entirety of the area it seized in Iraq into a crime scene. This report focuses on the violence perpetrated by ISIL that was widely reported during the period of LCS operation and of which there is a reasonable expectation that individuals both inside and outside of the affected areas would have been aware.

On 7 August 2014, UNAMI issued a press statement, in which the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Iraq, Gyorgy Busztin, stated

The UN continues to receive reports that members of minority communities are being subjected to serious human rights violations by ISIL including murder, kidnappings, forced conversions, physical and sexual assault, and the looting and destruction of property and places of religious and cultural significance, in what appears to be a widespread and systematic policy aimed at cleansing non Sunni ethnic and religious communities from areas under its control.

On the same day, the UN Security Council issued a statement, expressing “deep outrage about the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis — many of them from vulnerable minority communities, especially Yezidis and Christians — displaced by ISIL’s attacks and in urgent need of humanitarian

¹⁴³ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 95.

¹⁴⁴ UN Syria Commission, A/HRC/27/60, 13 Aug 2014, para. 95.

¹⁴⁵ Vice News, *The Islamic State: Episode 2*, uploaded 8 August 2014, (timestamp: 4:14).

<https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=jzCAPJDAnQA&list=PLw613M86o5o7ELT6LKyJFKawB6gUsZSf7&index=1>

¹⁴⁶ Vice News, *The Islamic State: Episode 2*, uploaded 8 August 2014, (timestamp: 5:34).

<https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=jzCAPJDAnQA&list=PLw613M86o5o7ELT6LKyJFKawB6gUsZSf7&index=1>

¹⁴⁷ Vice News, *The Islamic State: Episode 2*, uploaded 8 August 2014, (timestamp: 7:39).

<https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=jzCAPJDAnQA&list=PLw613M86o5o7ELT6LKyJFKawB6gUsZSf7&index=1>

¹⁴⁸ Vice News, *The Islamic State: Episode 2*, uploaded 8 August 2014, (timestamp: 7:55, 8:03, 8:37, 9:10).

<https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=jzCAPJDAnQA&list=PLw613M86o5o7ELT6LKyJFKawB6gUsZSf7&index=1>

¹⁴⁹ Suadad Al-Salhy and Tim Arango, *Sunni Militants Drive Iraqi Army Out of Mosul*, New York Times, 10 June 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/11/world/middleeast/militants-in-mosul.html>

¹⁵⁰ Vice News, *The Islamic State: Episode 2*, uploaded 8 August 2014, (timestamp: 0:35).

<https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=jzCAPJDAnQA&list=PLw613M86o5o7ELT6LKyJFKawB6gUsZSf7&index=1>

assistance.”¹⁵¹ The members of the Security Council condemned “in the strongest terms the systematic persecution of individuals from minority populations and those who refuse the extremist ideology of ISIL and associated armed groups.” On 11 August, the Arab League’s Chief, Nabil al-Arabi, was reported as having “strongly denounced the crimes, killings, dispossession carried out by the terrorist (ISIS) against civilians and minorities in Iraq that have affected Christians in Mosul and Yazidis.”¹⁵²

By the end of August 2014, multiple entities had determined that ISIL had committed crimes which may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes. In its 27 August report, UNAMI stated that it had “documented systematic and egregious violations perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)”¹⁵³ and concluded that “indiscriminate and systematic attacks by ISIL and associated armed groups against civilians may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.”¹⁵⁴

Also in August, Special Advisers of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, stated that acts perpetrated by ISIL—referring to the reported execution of 500 Yazidis in and around Sinjar and abduction of 1,500 Yazidi, Christian and Shabak women and girls—“constitute grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity”, adding that the reports they had received “may also point to the risk of genocide”.¹⁵⁵

On 15 August 2014, the UN Security Council met to discuss ISIL’s attacks in Iraq, and unanimously adopted resolution 2170 (2014), under the binding Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, condemning in the strongest terms what it called “gross, systematic and widespread abuse” of human rights by ISIL.¹⁵⁶ In the resolution, the UN Security Council called upon Member States to act to suppress the flow of foreign fighters, financing and other support to Islamist extremist groups in Iraq and Syria.¹⁵⁷

In 2017, the UN Security Council established the UN Investigative Team to promote Accountability for the Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) with a mandate to “support domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable by collecting preserving, and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed by ISIL in Iraq”.

Unlawful Killings

Throughout the summer of 2014, ISIL killed hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians and captured soldiers. In many cases, victims were killed because of their religious and/or ethnic background, gender, political or perceived political views, and their real or perceived opposition to ISIL.

In a UNAMI-OHCHR report, released in late July 2014 and covering the period 5 June – 4 July 2014, detailed ISIL committing killings across the city, with civilians who had worked for the police and

¹⁵¹ United Nations, *Security Council Press Statement on Iraq (7 August 2014)*, 7 August 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/security-council-press-statement-iraq-7-august-2014>

¹⁵² Al-Arabiya News, Arab League denounces ISIS attacks as “crimes against humanity”, 11 August 2014, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2014/08/11/U-S-weighs-options-to-evacuate-trapped-Yazidis->

¹⁵³ UNAMI-OHCHR, *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014*, 27 August 2014, Executive Summary, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC%20Report_FINAL_18July2014A.pdf

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Conclusions and Recommendations.

¹⁵⁵ Statement by Adama Dieng, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and Jennifer Welsh, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, on the situation in Iraq, 12 August 2014, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/media/statements/2014/English/2014-08-12.Statement%20of%20the%20Special%20Advisers%20on%20Iraq.pdf>

¹⁵⁶ United Nations, *Security Council Adopts Resolution 2170 (2014) Condemning Gross, Widespread Abuse of Human Rights by Extremist Groups in Iraq, Syria*, SC/11520, 15 August 2014, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11520.doc.htm>

¹⁵⁷ United Nations, *Security Council Adopts Resolution 2170 (2014) Condemning Gross, Widespread Abuse of Human Rights by Extremist Groups in Iraq, Syria*, SC/11520, 15 August 2014, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11520.doc.htm>

the courts appearing to be targeted for execution.¹⁵⁸ On 12 and 14 June 2014, ISIL executed 14 Sunni Imams, including Muhammad Al-Mansuri, the Imam of the Grand Mosque in Mosul, for refusing to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.¹⁵⁹

As ISIL solidified control of Mosul city, at least one unit of ISIL fighters moved towards Badush prison, approximately 10 kilometers northwest of the city. As reported by UNAMI-OHCHR in late July 2014, ISIL took control of the prison, separating Shia from Sunni prisoners before taking the Shia prisoners a short distance from the prison, lining them up and executing them.¹⁶⁰ The report referenced that the Iraqi Minister of Human Rights issued a press statement on 22 June claiming that ISIL had killed 480 Shi'a prisoners from Badush prison. By 25 August 2014, more information had been gathered, with the United Nations High Commissioner, Navi Pillay, stating that up to 670 prisoners from Badush prison had been executed by ISIL in the 10 June 2014 attack.¹⁶¹ "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," said Pillay.¹⁶²

Subsequent documentation confirmed these initial reports published when the LCS factory was operating in northern Syria. In October 2014, Human Rights Watch published the findings of its own investigation, in which it detailed ISIL's systematic killing of approximately 600 inmates from Badush prison on 10 June 2014.¹⁶³ Interviews with survivors indicated that the ISIL fighters had separated out Sunni and Christian prisoners before executing mostly Shia and some Yazidi prisoners in locations near the prison.¹⁶⁴

ISIL advanced into Salahuddin governorate, taking control of **Tikrit** on 12 June 2014. In late July, UNAMI-OHCHR reported the execution of 40 captured policemen on 11 June.¹⁶⁵ International attention quickly focused on the mass killing of army cadets captured from Camp Speicher near Tikrit. This owed to the fact that photographs and video footage of the killings were uploaded on to social media by ISIL on the days following the massacre, with the group releasing additional footage in 2015.¹⁶⁶ The photos showed several ditches in which approximately 20-50 men, many with hands tied behind their backs, had been laid face down and who were then systematically executed. The Iraqi army's chief spokesperson, Qassim al-Moussawi, stated that the photos were authentic.¹⁶⁷ ISIL

¹⁵⁸ UNAMI-OHCHR, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014](#), July 2014, p. 9, the relevant section of which reads, "On 11 June, 17 civilians who worked for the police were executed on Street 60, close to the airport in southern Mosul, Ninewa. On the same day a civilian court employee was executed in the Dawasa area (the central area) of Mosul. Another 12 unarmed men, who were believed to have been serving with ISF or the Iraqi police, were executed in Dawasa area, Ninewa."

¹⁵⁹ UNAMI-OHCHR, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014](#), July 2014, pp. 10-11; John Zarocostas, *Imam of Mosul mosque executed before 'caliph' gave sermon*, Sydney Morning Herald, 8 July 2014, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/imam-of-mosul-mosque-executed-before-caliph-gave-sermon-20140708-zszqtq.html>; ; John Zarocostas, *U.N.: Islamic State executed imam of mosque where Baghdadi preached*, Miami Herald, <https://www.miamiherald.com/latest-news/article1974485.html>

¹⁶⁰ UNAMI-OHCHR, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014](#), July 2014, p. 10.

¹⁶¹ Stephanie Nebehay and Ahmed Rasheed, *U.N. accuses Islamic State of mass killings*, Reuters, 25 August 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-iraq-security-idUKKBN0GP0L220140825?edition-redirect=uk>; Luke Harding and Fazel Hawramy, *Isis accused of ethnic cleansing as story of Shia prison massacre emerges*, The Guardian (UK), 25 August 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/25/isis-ethnic-cleansing-shia-prisoners-iraq-mosul>

¹⁶² Stephanie Nebehay and Ahmed Rasheed, *U.N. accuses Islamic State of mass killings*, Reuters, 25 August 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-iraq-security-idUKKBN0GP0L220140825?edition-redirect=uk>; Luke Harding and Fazel Hawramy, *Isis accused of ethnic cleansing as story of Shia prison massacre emerges*, The Guardian (UK), 25 August 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/25/isis-ethnic-cleansing-shia-prisoners-iraq-mosul>

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch, *Iraq: ISIS Executed Hundreds of Prison Inmates*, October 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/30/iraq-isis-executed-hundreds-prison-inmates>

¹⁶⁴ BBC News, *Mosul IS battle: Mass grave found at Badoush prison, Iraqi forces say*, 11 March 2017.

¹⁶⁵ UNAMI-OHCHR, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014](#), July 2014, p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ UNAMI-OHCHR, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014](#), July 2014, p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ UNAMI-OHCHR, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014](#), July 2014, p. 10.

videos showed its fighters shooting at hundreds of men inside mass graves dug into the desert.¹⁶⁸ In an interview conducted by the New York Times with a survivor of the attack, published on September 3, 2014, the survivor described ISIL fighters videoing the massacre, and on finding a survivor who had been shot but who had not yet died, heard one ISIL militant say “Just let him suffer... He’s an infidel Shia. Let him suffer. Let him bleed.”¹⁶⁹

It is estimated that between 1600 and 1700 men were executed in the Camp Speicher massacre; the incident remains the second most deadly single act of terrorism, after the attacks on United States on 11 September 2001.¹⁷⁰

Attacks on Christians

By July 2014, ISIL’s assault on the Christian community of Mosul was being more widely reported. In mid-July, ISIL read out a statement over mosque loudspeakers telling Christians in the city to comply with its ultimatum by midday on 19 July or face death unless they left the city.¹⁷¹ BBC News reported the ISIL statement as saying “[w]e offer them three choices: Islam; the dhimma contract - involving payment of jizya;¹⁷² if they refuse this they will have nothing but the sword.”¹⁷³ Christians fled the city en masse, marking the end of nearly 2000 years of continuous Christian presence in Mosul.¹⁷⁴ ISIL later took over property owned by Christians, marking it with the Arabic letter for ‘N’, referring to “Nasrani,” from Nazrene, a word often used to refer to Christians.¹⁷⁵ Subsequent research indicated that ISIL took possession of the property, ensconcing fighters and their families in them or renting them out.¹⁷⁶

ISIL filmed themselves destroying various Christian sites in and around Mosul. Videos uploaded on to YouTube showed ISIL fighters taking sledgehammers to the tomb of Jonah.¹⁷⁷ Fighters also removed the cross from St. Ephrem’s Cathedral, the seat of the Syriac Orthodox archdiocese in Mosul, and put up the black ISIS flag in its place.¹⁷⁸

On 6 August 2014, while its fighters were besieging Yazidis on Mount Sinjar, other units of ISIL advanced across the Ninewa plains, seizing control of Christian villages such as Qaraqosh and Bartella. News articles, published contemporaneously, describe as many as 100,000 people fleeing the ISIL advance.¹⁷⁹ Pope Francis has made an impassioned appeal to the international community to do much more to address the crisis. A Vatican statement said the Pope had appealed for “all necessary help” to be given to those forced to flee their homes, “whose fate depends entirely on the solidarity of others”.¹⁸⁰ In his traditional Sunday blessing on 10 August 2014, the Pope deplored reports of “thousands of people, including many Christians, driven from their homes in a brutal

¹⁶⁸ Tim Arango, [“Escaping Death in Northern Iraq”](#), The New York Times, 3 September 2014; Al Arabiya, [“ISIS releases footage of Tikrit massacre”](#), 12 July 2015.

¹⁶⁹ Tim Arango, [“Escaping Death in Northern Iraq”](#), The New York Times, 3 September 2014.

¹⁷⁰ Rod Nordland and Alissa Rubin, [“Massacre Claim Shakes Iraq”](#), The New York Times, 15 June 2014.

¹⁷¹ Reuters, [“Convert, pay tax, or die, Islamic State warns Christians”](#), 18 July 2014; Kelly Phillips Erb, [“Islamic State Warns Christians: Convert, Pay Tax, Leave Or Die”](#), Forbes, 19 July 2014.

¹⁷² *Jizya* is a *de facto* tax levied on specified non-Muslim subjects who are permitted to live in a state governed by Islamic law. It is paid as a sign of submission and provides legal protection in return.

¹⁷³ BBC News, [Iraqi Christians flee after Isis issue Mosul ultimatum](#), 18 July 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28381455>

¹⁷⁴ Catholic World Report, [“For the first time in 1,600 years, no Masses said in Mosul”](#), 30 June 2014.

¹⁷⁵ Alissa Rubin, [ISIS Forces Last Iraqi Christians to Flee Mosul](#), New York Times, 19 July 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/world/middleeast/isis-forces-last-iraqi-christians-to-flee-mosul.html>

¹⁷⁶ Aymenn al-Tamimi, [The Islamic State's Real Estate Department: Documents and Analysis](#), The ISIS Files, George Washington University, June 2020, <https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/concern/reports/8336h188j?locale=en>

¹⁷⁷ Alissa Rubin, [ISIS Forces Last Iraqi Christians to Flee Mosul](#), New York Times, 19 July 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/world/middleeast/isis-forces-last-iraqi-christians-to-flee-mosul.html>

¹⁷⁸ Alissa Rubin, [ISIS Forces Last Iraqi Christians to Flee Mosul](#), New York Times, 19 July 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/world/middleeast/isis-forces-last-iraqi-christians-to-flee-mosul.html>

¹⁷⁹ BBC News, [Iraq Christians flee as Islamic State takes Qaraqosh](#), 7 August 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28686998>

¹⁸⁰ BBC News, [Iraq Christians flee as Islamic State takes Qaraqosh](#), 7 August 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28686998>

manner; children dying of thirst and hunger in their flight; women kidnapped; people massacred; [and] violence of every kind."¹⁸¹

In late July 2014, the French government announced that it was prepared to offer asylum to Iraqi Christians forced by ISIL to flee from Mosul.¹⁸² By mid-August, France had accepted 40 Iraqi Christian refugees, which it had flown from the Iraqi Kurdish regional capital of Erbil to Paris, where they were met by Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who greeted them at the airport and said several hundred more Iraqi Christians would be flown to France in the coming weeks.¹⁸³ The French Foreign Minister would later say that several thousand Iraqi Christians might receive asylum in France.¹⁸⁴

Attack on Yazidis

In the early hours of 3 August 2014, ISIL launched its attack on the Sinjar region (Ninewa governorate), home to the majority of the world's Yazidi population. Facing little resistance following the withdrawal of the Peshmerga (Iraqi Kurdish forces) from Sinjar, ISIL fighters focused their efforts on capturing Yazidis. ISIL, weaponizing misconceptions of the faith long present in Iraqi society, publicly (and inaccurately) reviled the Yazidis as *mushrikūn*, polytheists and idol worshippers, whose continued existence –in the group's warped ideology– could not be countenanced.¹⁸⁵

The attack on the Yazidis of Sinjar was widely reported as it occurred. This was in large part because of the images of Yazidis fleeing to the upper slopes of Mount Sinjar, an arid 100-kilometre-long mountain range cutting across the Sinjar region, where they were then besieged by ISIL.

On 7 August 2014, U.S. President Obama made a statement from the podium of the White House briefing room, detailing what was known about events in Sinjar as of 7 August 2014:

[C]hilling reports describe ISIL militants rounding up families, conducting mass executions, and enslaving Yezidi women.

In recent days, Yezidi women, men and children from the area of Sinjar have fled for their lives. And thousands – perhaps tens of thousands – are now hiding high up on the mountain, with little but the clothes on their backs. They're without food, they're without water. People are starving. And children are dying of thirst. Meanwhile, ISIL forces below have called for the systematic destruction of the entire Yezidi people, which would constitute genocide. So these innocent families are faced with a horrible choice: descend the mountain and be slaughtered, or stay and slowly die of thirst and hunger.

President Obama announced that, at the request of the Iraqi government, America would take military action to help the Yazidis trapped on Mount Sinjar, stating that "[w]e can act, carefully and responsibly, to prevent a potential act of genocide."¹⁸⁶

American, Iraqi, British, French, and Australian forces were involved in airdrops of water and other supplies to the besieged Yazidis.¹⁸⁷ ISIL fighters shot at planes airdropping aid, and at helicopters

¹⁸¹ John Hooper, *Pope Francis: Isis violence against minorities in Iraq must be stopped*, The Guardian (UK), 10 August 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/10/pope-francis-iraq-isis-islamic-state-religious-minorities-violence>

¹⁸² BBC News, *France offers Iraq Christians asylum after Mosul threat*, 28 July 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28521778>; France 24, *France offers asylum to Iraqi Christians*, 28 July 2014, <https://www.france24.com/en/20140728-france-iraq-support-christians-mosul-notre-dame-paris-rally-asylum>

¹⁸³ BBC News, *Iraqi Christians reach France after fleeing Islamists*, 22 August 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28893596>

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ International Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, "[They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis](#)," A/HRC/32/CRP.2, 16 June 2016 ("UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy").

¹⁸⁶ The White House, [Statement by the President](#), 7 August 2014.

¹⁸⁷ BBC News, [Thousands of Yazidis 'still trapped' on Iraq mountain](#), 12 August 2014; Helene Cooper, Mark Landler, and Alissa Rubin, *Obama Allows Limited Airstrikes on ISIS*, New York Times, 7 August 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/08/world/middleeast/obama-weighs-military-strikes-to-aid-trapped-iraqis-officials-say.html>

attempting to evacuate the most vulnerable Yazidis. A 2017 peer-reviewed demographic analysis determined that approximately 1700 Yazidis died on Mount Sinjar, 93 per cent of whom were children.¹⁸⁸ Between 10 and 14 August, the Syrian Kurdish forces, the YPG, were able to open a corridor from Syria to Mount Sinjar.¹⁸⁹ This allowed thousands besieged on the mountain to be moved to safety, while the YPG battled ISIL which sought to re-establish its siege.¹⁹⁰

On 12 August 2014, the UN Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Walsh, released a joint statement on the situation in Iraq, condemned “in the strongest terms the reported execution of some 500 members of the Yazidi community in Sinjar and surrounding areas in northern Iraq by members of the so-called Islamic State.”¹⁹¹ They also expressed alarm at reports of the abduction of around 1,500 Yazidi, Christian and Shabak women and girls. The Special Advisers stated that “These reports are shocking in the extreme. They show, in very clear terms, the complete absence of humanity of the perpetrators of these crimes.. and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The reports we have received of acts committed by the “Islamic State” may also point to the risk of genocide”.¹⁹²

On 18 August 2014, Amnesty International published “Testimonies from Kocho: The village ISIS tried to wipe off the map”, in which survivors recounted ISIL’s attack on Kocho village in southern Sinjar.¹⁹³ The village had been encircled on 3 August, and was emptied by ISIL on 15 August 2014 at which time ISIL ordered the villagers to gather in the village school, with men and adolescent boys kept on the first floor, while women and the remaining children were held upstairs. After the Yazidi males refused to convert to Islam, ISIL fighters took their valuables from them and took them out in groups to various locations in and around Kocho, where they executed them.¹⁹⁴ After ISIL was ousted from Kocho in May 2017, at least eleven mass graves holding the remains of men and adolescent boys have been discovered inside the village’s perimeter.¹⁹⁵ In mid-March 2019, the Government of Iraq, together with the International Commission for Missing Persons and the UN Investigative Team for the Promotion of Accountability for the Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL began the process of excavating Kocho’s mass graves, and of forensically analyzing and identifying the remains of those buried within.¹⁹⁶

One survivor, whose account was published by Amnesty International, described what happened:

[T]hey opened fire at us from behind us. I was hit in the left knee, but the bullet only grazed my knee... I let myself fall forward, as if I were dead, and I stayed there face down without moving. When the shooting stopped I kept still and after they left, I ran away. Five or six others were also alive and they also ran from the place. The rest were all killed... I was too scared to look around, I couldn’t focus. I don’t know what

¹⁸⁸ Cetorelli et al., *Mortality and kidnapping estimates for the Yazidi population in the area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A retrospective household survey*, PLOS Medicine, 9 May 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297>

¹⁸⁹ Alissa Rubin, *Scrambling Down an Iraqi Mountain, Yazidi Families Search for Missing*, New York Times, 10 August 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/world/middleeast/scrambling-down-an-iraqi-mountain-yazidi-families-search-for-missing.html>

¹⁹⁰ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 28; Ruth Sherlock, Carol Malouf, *At least 300 people, mostly children, died on Mount Sinjar, say doctors*, Telegraph (UK), 15 August 2014; Helene Cooper and Michael D. Shear, ‘*Militants’ Siege on Mountain in Iraq Is Over, Pentagon Says*’, The New York Times, 13 August 2014.

¹⁹¹ Statement by Adama Dieng, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and Jennifer Walsh, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, on the situation in Iraq, 12 August 2014. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/media/statements/2014/English/2014-08-12.Statement%20of%20the%20Special%20Advisers%20on%20Iraq.pdf>

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Amnesty International, *Testimonies from Kocho: The village ISIS tried to wipe off the map*, 18 August 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/08/testimonies-from-kocho-the-village-isis-tried-to-wipe-off-the-map/>

¹⁹⁴ For a detailed description of ISIL’s attack on the Yazidis of Kocho village, see Cetorelli and Ashraph, *A Demographic Documentation of ISIS’s Attack on the Yazidi Village of Kocho*, London School of Economics Middle East Centre, June 2019. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/101098/1/Cetorelli_Demographic_documentation_ISIS_attack.pdf

¹⁹⁵ Güley Bor et al, *Working Against the Clock: Documenting Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State*, Yazda, 2018. https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/92f016_b2c5d9bdf3994c1e8994e72c571d107d.pdf

¹⁹⁶ France 24, *UN exhumes Yazidi mass graves from Islamic State massacre in northern Iraq*, 13 April 2019. <https://www.france24.com/en/20190413-un-yazidi-mass-grave-islamic-state-massacre-northern-iraqi-kocho>

happened to my family, my wife, my seven children, my son's wife and their two children; I don't know if they are dead or alive or where they are.¹⁹⁷

ISIL fighters executed approximately 500 men and adolescent boys in and around the village.¹⁹⁸ Only nineteen survived the execution, and made their way, often gravely wounded, to places of safety.¹⁹⁹

Over the months that followed, a more detailed picture of ISIL crimes against the Yazidis emerged. Regardless of where Yazidis were captured, fighters swiftly ordered the separation of males and females, with the exception of boys who had not reached puberty, who were allowed to remain with their mothers.²⁰⁰ Following this separation, fighters executed men and older boys. Most of those killed were executed by gunshots to the head; others had their throats cut. ISIL fighters carried out executions of male Yazidis in the streets of towns and villages, at makeshift checkpoints, on roadsides, as well as on the lower sections of the roads ascending Mount Sinjar. Other captives, including family members, were often forced to witness the killings. In some villages, ISIL brought in bulldozers to push soil over the bodies. In other places, bodies were left in situ. Surviving Yazidi women and children, captured and forcibly transferred to Mosul and Tel Afar in the days following the attack, described to the UN Syria Commission being driven along roads, the sides of which were "littered with corpses".²⁰¹

Those who survived capture –mainly women and young children– were forcibly transferred to temporary holding sites, usually inside the Sinjar region. In some instances, women deemed to be past child-bearing age were executed. In the early hours of 16 August 2014, ISIL executed older women from Kocho at the Solagh Technical Institute, where the women and children had been moved after the men had been killed inside Kocho village.²⁰² In 2016, a mass grave holding their remains was discovered in the grounds.²⁰³

At the primary holding sites, ISIL fighters separated married females from unmarried females (presumed to be virgins). Quickly surmising that the greatest danger lay in being placed in the latter group, unmarried women and girls pretended their younger siblings or nephews or nieces were their own children. However, some later recounted that Sunni Arabs from Sinjar had assisted ISIL by identifying those who were pretending to be married.²⁰⁴ Within 24 hours, ISIL moved the Yazidi women and children to secondary holding sites, including schools in Tel Afar, a wedding hall in Mosul, and Badoush prison. There, women and girls over nine were registered, with fighters recording in each case their name; age; the village they came from; whether they were married or not; and if they were married, how many children they had. Each site held hundreds, sometimes thousands, of Yazidi women and children.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁷ Amnesty International, *Testimonies from Kocho: The village ISIS tried to wipe off the map*, 18 August 2014,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/08/testimonies-from-kocho-the-village-isis-tried-to-wipe-off-the-map/>

¹⁹⁸ Cetorelli & Ashraph - Demographic Documentation of ISIL Kocho Attack, pp. 15-19; United Nations, *Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups*, A/HRC/28/18, 13 March 2015.

¹⁹⁹ For detailed testimonies of male survivors from Kocho, see Amnesty International, *Testimonies from Kocho: The village ISIS tried to wipe off the map*, 18 August 2014.

²⁰⁰ Whether a boy had reached puberty was assessed in various ways by ISIL fighters across Sinjar. The fighters in Kocho village, for example, inspected Yazidi boys to see if they had any underarm hair. Fighters in other locations made snap judgments based on height and weight. In general, boys aged 12 years and above were grouped with the Yazidi men, though this was not uniformly the case.

²⁰¹ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 35.

²⁰² UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 48; Cetorelli & Ashraph, "Demographic Documentation", p. 12.

²⁰³ Yazda, *Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014*, 28 January 2016, p. 10.

²⁰⁴ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 45.

²⁰⁵ "While individual incidents of rape committed by ISIS fighters at the holding sites in Tel Afar and Mosul were reported, mass rape of Yazidi women and girls did not occur. This was despite the fact that hundreds of women and girls were held captive at the sites, surrounded by dozens of young, armed men. This serves to emphasize the rigid system and ideology governing ISIS's handling of Yazidi women and girls as chattel, as well as the control it exerted over the majority of its fighters. The sexual violence, including the sexual slavery, being committed against Yazidi women and girls is tightly controlled by ISIS, occurs in a manner prescribed and authorised." UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 54.

Captured Yazidi women and girls were deemed property of the 'Islamic State', and referred to as *sabaya* or slaves.²⁰⁶ ISIL made eighty percent of the women and girls available to its fighters for individual purchase, this apportioning being drawn directly from a religious interpretation.²⁰⁷ ISIL would sell Yazidi women and girls in slave markets, or as individual purchases to fighters who come to the holding centers. In some instances, an ISIL fighter would buy a group of Yazidi females in order to take them into rural areas without slave markets where he could sell them individually at a higher price. The remaining twenty percent were held as collective property of the terrorist group and were distributed to its bases, oil fields, and ministries throughout ISIL-controlled areas of Iraq and Syria.

"Slaves" were only available for purchase to ISIL fighters. It was forbidden, on pain of death, to sell them to anyone outside of the terrorist group.²⁰⁸ It was intended that Yazidi women and girls, captured and enslaved, would eventually die while still the property of the so-called caliphate and its adherents.²⁰⁹ It was also likely, given the Yazidi community's focus – common in the region, irrespective of religion – on female virginity as symbolizing the honor of the family and community, that ISIL believed that any woman or girl who did manage to escape would be excommunicated, and risked being killed, by her own community.²¹⁰

ISIL transferred a significant number of enslaved Yazidi women and girls into Syria, where they were held and sold. The UN Syria Commission found that,

ISIS has forcibly transferred multiple groups of between 50 and 300 Yazidi women and girls into Syria by bus for sale to its fighters there. The first corroborated account of ISIS taking Yazidi females into Syria indicated that this occurred on 17 August 2014, though it is considered likely that convoys had left earlier than this.²¹¹

At the time of its June 2016 publication, the UN Syria Commission estimated that at least 3,200 Yazidi women and girls remain captives of ISIS, “the majority of them held inside ISIS-controlled areas of Syria.”²¹²

Almost immediately, fighters came to the holding sites to select and purchase Yazidi women and girls. Yazidi women and girls began to scratch and bloody themselves in an attempt to make themselves unattractive to potential buyers. Some committed suicide at holding sites.²¹³ Girls under the age of nine, and boys under the age of seven, were sold as a package with their mothers. One woman, interviewed by the UN Syria Commission, described a Syrian fighter who paid for her at a slave auction in Syria in 2015, telling her, “You are like a sheep. I have bought you.”²¹⁴

The UN Syria Commission also highlighted that Yazidi women and girls were being held at oil fields in Syria for use by ISIL fighters:

One Yazidi girl, aged 18 and unmarried at the time of capture, was bought by a Libyan fighter and held in an oil field compound in Dayr Az-Zawr. She was raped daily throughout her time with this fighter, and described being forced to take pills every day. Held in ISIS captivity for over a year, she was sold eight times and raped hundreds of times, before being sold back to her family for over 20,000 US dollars.²¹⁵

²⁰⁶ For invaluable insights into ISIL policies concerning sexual violence, including as against Yazidi women and girls, see Mara Redlich Revkin and Elisabeth Wood, *The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices*, *The Journal of Global Security Studies*, 2020.

²⁰⁷ *Dabiq*, “The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour”, Issue 4, 2014, (“*Dabiq* article”), p. 15.

²⁰⁸ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 60.

²⁰⁹ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 76: “The financial incentive for an individual fighter to break this rule, however, was significant. Whereas Yazidi women and children were sold between fighters for between USD 200 and USD 1,500, they were generally sold back to their families for between USD 10,000 and 40,000.”

²¹⁰ Gina Vale (2020), *Liberated, not free: Yazidi women after Islamic State captivity*, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 515.

²¹¹ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 56.

²¹² UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 6.

²¹³ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 53.

²¹⁴ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 76.

²¹⁵ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 69.

While in captivity, Yazidi women and girls –some as young as nine– were subjected to sustained sexual violence. Most of those interviewed by the UN Syria Commission reported violent daily rapes by their fighter-owners.²¹⁶ While ISIL did not embark on a campaign of forced impregnation (in part because pregnancies would limit fighters’ ability to resell Yazidi females on to other fighters), the group nonetheless considered any resulting offspring as children of the Islamic State. In an article published in a September 2014 issue of its magazine *Dabiq*, ISIL presented its adherence to a theory of patrilineage, stating “the slave girl gives birth to her master.”²¹⁷

Some Yazidi women and girls were so traumatized by the sexual violence they had suffered that, according to the Syria Commission report, they “did not want to marry, or to contemplate relationships with men now or in the future. This was compounded by a sense that they had lost their honour.”²¹⁸ While much international attention has focus on sexual enslavement, Yazidi women and girls suffered a far broader range of violations at the hands of both the fighters and their families. They were often forced into domestic servitude in fighters' homes, where they suffered beatings and were denied adequate food and medical care.²¹⁹ From the moment of capture, through the various holding sites and while being bought and raped, Yazidi women and girls were routinely verbally abused. Insults were specifically directed at their Yazidi faith, saying that they “worshipped stones” and referring to them as “dirty *kuffar*” (infidels) and “devil-worshippers.”²²⁰

When Yazidi boys reached the age of seven, ISIL took them away from their mothers, making no attempt to mask why the boys were being taken away. Women interviewed by the UN Syria Commission recounted ISIL fighters telling them that they were taking their sons to teach them to be Muslims and to train them to fight. One woman recalled a fighter showing her a video of boys being trained, saying “we are training them to kill *kuffar* like you.”²²¹ The separation of Yazidi boys aged seven years and above was systematic. ISIL forcibly transferred the boys to training centers or military camps in Syria and Iraq. There, the boys were registered and given Islamic names. From then on, the boys were called only by their new names, and were treated as ISIL recruits. A new identity was forcibly imposed. In this way, Yazidi boys were transferred out of their own community, and through indoctrination and violence, into ISIL.

Propaganda videos published on ISIL channels in 2016 showed Yazidi boys from Sinjar being made to carry out executions of captives.²²² When ISIL was forced from its last stronghold, the town of Baghuz in eastern Syria, in March 2019,²²³ several Yazidi boys from Sinjar were rescued.²²⁴ Some of the boys, and some of the girls and young women rescued from sexual enslavement in the later years of the “caliphate”, had been heavily indoctrinated in ISIL ideology.²²⁵

During the August 2014 attack and in the weeks that followed, ISIL destroyed Yazidi shrines and temples, demolishing them through use of explosives.²²⁶ In one incident during the attack, fighters executed 14 elderly men inside the shrine of Sheikh Mand in Jiddala village at the base of Mount Sinjar, before blowing up the shrine with the bodies still inside.²²⁷

²¹⁶ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 64.

²¹⁷ *Dabiq* article, Issue 4, 2014, p. 16.

²¹⁸ UN Syria Commission - They Came to Destroy, para. 145.

²¹⁹ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, paras. 66, 72-73.

²²⁰ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 74.

²²¹ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, para. 93.

²²² ISIL, *To the Sons of the Jews*, 9 December 2015; ISIL, *Repent and You Will Have Safety*, 19 November 2016.

²²³ Sarah El Deeb, “ISIS militants evacuate last stronghold in Syria following government offensive,” *The Star*, 9 November 2017.

²²⁴ Jane Arraf, [Freed From ISIS, Few Yazidis Return To Suffering Families, Many Remain Missing](#), National Public Radio (US), 14 March 2019.

²²⁵ Dominique Soguel, [Surviving ISIS: Young Yazidi conscripts begin long path to healing](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 April 2019.

²²⁶ For a detailed analysis of ISIL's attack on Yazidi religious sites, see, Rashid International, Yazda, and Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa, *Destroying the Soul of the Yazidis: Cultural Heritage Destruction during the Islamic State's Genocide Against the Yazidis*, August 2019.

²²⁷ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report on the protection of civilians in the armed conflict in Iraq, 6 July–10 September 2014*, September 2014, p. 15.

In November 2015, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum issued a report, whose factual and legal analysis concluded that ISIL had committed genocide against the Yazidis of Sinjar.²²⁸ In June 2016, the UN Syria Commission published a detailed report following its own independent investigation, which also determined that ISIL had committed the crime of genocide, as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes.²²⁹ Its Executive Summary read

ISIS has sought to destroy the Yazidis through killings; sexual slavery, enslavement, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment and forcible transfer causing serious bodily and mental harm; the infliction of conditions of life that bring about a slow death; the imposition of measures to prevent Yazidi children from being born, including forced conversion of adults, the separation of Yazidi men and women, and mental trauma; and the transfer of Yazidi children from their own families and placing them with ISIS fighters, thereby cutting them off from beliefs and practices of their own religious community, and erasing their identity as Yazidis. The public statements and conduct of ISIS and its fighters clearly demonstrate that ISIS intended to destroy the Yazidis of Sinjar, composing the majority of the world's Yazidi population, in whole or in part.²³⁰

In May 2021, Karim Khan, Special Adviser and Head of UNITAD stated that his Team's investigation had determined that ISIL had committed the crime of genocide against the Yazidis of Sinjar.²³¹

²²⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "[Our Generation is Gone: The Islamic State's Targeting of Iraqi Minorities in Ninewa](#)", p. 20. This stands as the first legal analysis of whether ISIS had committed the crime of genocide in its attack on the Yazidis. However, a number of political entities had issued statements referring to ISIL's attack on the Yazidis as 'genocide'. See, e.g., European Parliament, [Resolution of 4 February 2016 on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'](#), 2016/2529 (RSP), 4 February 2016.

²²⁹ UN Syria Commission – They Came to Destroy, Executive Summary.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Associated Press, [UN Experts: ISIL Has Committed Genocide Against the Yazidis](#), 10 May 2021; United Nations, [ISIL Crimes Against the Yazidis Constitute Genocide, UN Investigation Team Finds](#), 10 May 2021.

V. Conclusion

The LCS factory, located in the northern Syrian governorate of Aleppo, commenced operations less than a year before violence erupted in Syria. It was still operating in April 2013, when ISIL emerged out of the nest of armed groups operating in Raqqah governorate, northern Syria. By the time, ISIL seized the factory on September 19, 2014, the armed group had taken control of a third of Syria, 40 percent of the territory of Iraq, and announced the establishment of a caliphate, a proto-state governed by the group's own interpretation of Islamic belief and practice.

ISIL's unmitigated brutality formed an intimate aspect of both its military campaigns and its governance of the territory it seized. Believing their campaigns of violence were legitimized by their ideology, neither ISIL's leadership nor its fighters on the ground made any effort to hide or reframe the horrors they perpetrated from their earliest days in Syria and Iraq.

Between April 2013 and September 2014, there accumulated a mass of public, contemporaneous documentation of the ISIL's horrific and terrifying attacks on people, predominantly civilians, who found themselves trapped in the territory ISIL was advancing into, or which it was governing. The violence and violated were documented by the United Nations, international and national NGOs, and journalists. ISIL too was a significant publisher of information about its own crimes, released videos and photographs of killings and mutilation across social media, where they were amplified across international media. Many of ISIL's violent attacks were directed against civilians. Marginalized communities, including women, children, and ethno-religious minorities, were targeted by ISIL. The group also killed and tortured *hors de combat* soldiers, also in violation of international law.

By August 2014, the UN Syria Commission, which had collected and analyzed information about ISIL and reported on the group's violations of international law since it emerged in Raqqah in April 2013, reached a legal determination that ISIL had committed murder, torture, acts tantamount to enforced disappearance, and forcible displacement as part of an attack on the civilian population in Aleppo and Raqqah governorates, amounting to crimes against humanity. It further found that ISIL had committed the war crimes of murder, execution without due process, torture, hostage-taking, violations of international humanitarian law tantamount to enforced disappearance, rape and sexual violence, recruiting and using children in hostilities, and attacking protected objects.

Also in August, the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq stated that it had documented "systematic and egregious violations" perpetrated by ISIL, concluding that the group's attack on civilians may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Members of the UN Security Council condemned "in the strongest terms the systematic persecution of individuals from minority populations and those who refuse the extremist ideology of ISIL and associated armed groups."

In early August, the Special Advisers of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, indicated that ISIL's attacks on the Yazidis, Christians and Shabak not only may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, but "may also point to the risk of genocide". US President Obama would independently raise the spectre of ISIL committing genocide in its assault on the Yazidis of northern Iraq.

ISIL's crimes were manifest and unabashed. Many of the documented ISIL atrocities committed prior to September 2014 were carried out in the Aleppo governorate near the LCS factory. The crimes, in Aleppo and across ISIL-controlled territory were widely reported in a variety of public sources that were easily available to the management of LCS and Lafarge S.A.