

**Iraq: Attacks Amount to Crimes Against Humanity
Authorities Should End Draconian Responses
By Human Rights Watch
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(Baghdad) - Militants who carried out a series of bomb attacks in [Iraq](#) on July 29, 2013, deliberately killing more than 60 people committed crimes against humanity, Human Rights Watch said today. Crimes against humanity are some of the most serious crimes under international law.

The Islamic State of Iraq, as Al-Qaeda in Iraq now calls itself, has [claimed](#) responsibility, saying publicly that it organized and committed the July 29 attacks and a series of others over the last four months. Al-Qaeda in Iraq has issued statements claiming responsibility for numerous lethal suicide, car bomb, and other attacks in Iraq that, taken together, amount to an ongoing and systematic policy of killing civilians in gross breach of international law. On August 6 and August 10, another series of car bombs targeted busy markets, shopping streets, and parks where families were celebrating the end of Ramadan in and around Baghdad, killing at least 130 people, though no one has claimed responsibility.



Residents gather at the site of a car bomb attack in Baghdad.
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"The July 29 attacks, coming on top of other horrific attacks in recent months, provide clear evidence that Al-Qaeda in Iraq is guilty of crimes against humanity," said [Joe Stork](#), deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "No political goal or grievance can possibly justify this widespread and organized murder campaign, which is wreaking terrible suffering on Iraqis."

The July 29 attacks were some of the deadliest of 2013. The car bomb explosions, predominantly in Shia neighborhoods in Baghdad, killed more than 60 people and injured hundreds more, including many civilians. They were part of a surge of bomb attacks by al-Qaeda and other militant groups during Ramadan in both Shia and Sunni areas. Attacks also targeted state institutions and military installations.

Together, these attacks made July the bloodiest month in over five years according to the United Nations. On August 1, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) released [figures](#) showing that acts of terrorism and violence in July claimed the lives of 1,057 Iraqis and wounded 2,326 others. The dead included 204 police officers and 129 members of the Iraqi Security Forces.

The acting special representative for Iraq of the United Nations Secretary-General, Gyorgy Busztin, issued a statement on August 1 warning that the past months' violence may herald a return to an era "when the blind rage of sectarian strife ... inflicted ... deep wounds upon this country."

According to a [report](#) from the Institute for the Study of War, an independent research organization based in Washington, DC, Al-Qaeda in Iraq has repeatedly carried out attacks with vehicle-borne improvised

explosive devices during a recent 12-month period. The report said these attacks - as many as eight bombings a day - "became more frequent and lethal" in spring 2013," sometimes occurring twice a week.

The Islamic State of Iraq [claimed](#) responsibility on July 30 for the July 29 bombings. On July 23, the group issued a statement [claiming](#) responsibility for attacks two days earlier on two Baghdad-area prisons, Abu Ghraib and al-Tajji, which led to a mass escape of prisoners. According to a Justice Ministry [statement](#), the attack on Abu Ghraib killed at least 68 members of the security forces and an unknown number of prisoners. Between 500 and 1,000 detainees escaped.

In claiming responsibility for the prison attacks, the group said that attack, and others during the previous four months, were retaliation for an [attack](#) by government security forces on a Sunni protest camp in Hawija on April 23 that killed 51 people.

On August 6, car bombs in northern, eastern, and southern Baghdad targeted areas crowded with shoppers and worshipers near a mosque, mainly in Shia neighborhoods. A bombing at a football field on June 30 killed 12 people, mostly boys under 16. In another, on July 12, 10 people died when a car bomb explosion at a Shia funeral in Moqdadeya, west of Baghdad, was followed by a suicide bomber's attack on emergency services workers going to assist the first set of casualties. Other attacks have targeted cafes in a busy Shia neighborhood of Baghdad, government security installations, and both Sunni and Shia mosques. Other armed groups, including Shia militias, have also carried out numerous suicide and car bomb attacks, as well as targeted assassinations. Residents of Moqdadeya town told Human Rights Watch that at least 100 families fled their homes after the Shia militia group Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq distributed flyers threatening to kill Sunni residents who failed to vacate the area. One local man told Human Rights Watch that he believed that the militia group had issued the threats in reprisal for the attack on the funeral procession. Neither Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq nor Iraqi Hezbollah, another Shia militia, have claimed responsibility for attacks, but the threatening flyers, which Human Rights Watch saw, clearly bear the logo of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq. A third Shia militia, the Moqtar Army, has claimed responsibility for several recent attacks, including repeated attacks on Camp Liberty, where members of an Iranian dissident group are currently accommodated.

Crimes against humanity are crimes of universal jurisdiction, meaning that those responsible, including those complicit in such crimes, can be prosecuted anywhere in the world. As a matter of customary international law, the term "crimes against humanity" includes a range of serious human rights abuses, including murder, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack by a government or organized non-state group against a civilian population.

Those who commit crimes against humanity, order, or are otherwise complicit, should be held individually criminally responsible for their actions, Human Rights Watch said.

The Iraqi authorities' failure to hold anyone accountable for security force violence against Sunni protesters, their widespread use of torture to extract confessions from detainees, regardless of their sect, and the courts' reliance on secret informant testimony that the defense cannot see and coerced confessions to issue arrest warrants and obtain convictions may constitute a failure to take the necessary steps to prevent and prosecute crimes against humanity.

Iraqi authorities need to take all possible measures to protect the right to life through ending these attacks. They should identify, arrest, and prosecute those responsible, and others complicit in assisting the attacks. To do that, Iraqi authorities should undertake urgently needed criminal justice reforms, including revising the Draconian anti-terror law.

Iraqi authorities should also repeal criminal procedure code articles that allow the use of secret informant testimony and coerced confessions that taint court proceedings. Judges and security officials should base convictions on evidence, not on confessions, which may be coerced. The government should put into effect a zero-tolerance policy for bribery, which permeates much of the justice system, ranging from

detention officials who seek bribes to release detainees to security forces who bribe judges for false or after-the-fact arrest warrant.

In the past 12 months, Human Rights Watch has spoken to at least 20 current and former detainees who allege that police, army, or other security forces that answer directly to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki held them in prolonged incommunicado detention due to corrupt relations between those holding them and judges who issue detention orders or to coerce them to confess. Some detainees' families told Human Rights Watch that security forces demanded sums of over US\$6,000 to release their relatives.

Since the prison breakout on July 21, reports from members of parliament and local activists suggest that the security forces have carried out mass arrests in the Sunni areas, to which they believe the escapees have fled. A member of the parliament's security and defense committee told Human Rights Watch that Abu Ghraib and Tajji residents told him that security forces had conducted numerous mass arrest operations in these areas, detaining several of their family members at a time, but that he had been unable to verify them because of a security forces clampdown in the areas.

A Ramadi lawyer told Human Rights Watch that, according to Anbar residents, the security forces had arrested "entire families" of escaped prisoners to coerce the escapees to surrender. The two prisons remain "on lockdown," Ali Shubbar, a member of the parliament's Human Rights Committee, [told](#) local media. He said that he and other members of an official investigation into the prisoner escapes and allegations that guards shot prisoners during the attack could not yet visit either prison.

"In the current climate, attacks are committed by all sides - Sunni insurgent groups, Shia militias, and government security forces - and each invokes the others' violence as a justification for their own," Stork said. "Rather than responding with increased brutality and resorting to torture, forced confessions, mass arrests, and unfair trials, the government needs to take the lead to end this brutal cycle."

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