

Exploring the atrocities of DAESH in Iraq: mass graves, gender violence, cultural destruction, and legal responses.

The rise of Daesh, also known as ISIL, in Iraq has led to a series of grievous crimes that have left an indelible mark on the country and its people. From mass graves to gender-based violence, the impact of Daesh's actions has been far-reaching and devastating. This article delves into various aspects of Daesh's crimes in Iraq, examining the evidence collection, human rights violations, the involvement of foreign fighters, cultural destruction, and the legal and humanitarian responses to these atrocities.

Mass Graves and Evidence Collection

The discovery and excavation of mass graves in Iraq have been a crucial step in uncovering the atrocities committed by Daesh. **This has been possible thanks to the close cooperation between the UNITAD team and the Iraqi authorities**, as well as the brave and unwavering commitment of survivors to give their accounts and document the atrocities that occurred.

Excavation of Mass Graves

The process of excavating mass graves involves several critical steps, including victim identification, archiving and digitization, digital forensics, witness protection, and psychosocial support. The importance of maintaining, preserving, and managing the archives of the evidence collected by UNITAD cannot be overstated. These records must remain protected and accessible for future judicial proceedings.

Digitization of ISIL Records

An essential part of the evidence collection process has been the digitization of ISIL records. The [UN investigative team in Iraq digitized 18 million pages of Daesh documents](#). This monumental task ensures that the evidence is preserved and can be used in future prosecutions. Additionally, data has been extracted from a significant number of seized ISIL digital devices.

International Cooperation

International cooperation has been vital in the efforts to collect and preserve evidence of Daesh crimes. To date, 20 third-States have requested assistance from UNITAD. Of the 246 requests overall, 67 remain ongoing. Increased cooperation with the Iraqi authorities during the drawdown period is essential to ensure that the work of UNITAD is not lost and continues to support future judicial proceedings.

Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights Violations

Persecution of Minorities

The persecution of minorities under DAESH was systematic and brutal. **Human rights abuse and war crime findings** indicate that Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims were particularly targeted. The violence against these groups included mass executions, forced conversions, and other forms of persecution. The international community has labelled some of these acts as genocide, highlighting the severity of the crimes committed.

Sexual Violence

[Sexual violence](#) was rampant under DAESH control, affecting women, men, and children. Reports indicate that sexual violence was used as a weapon of war, with victims as young as 15. The **perpetrator-centred investigations** have revealed the extent of these atrocities. The international community has called for accountability and justice for the victims.

UNITAD Efforts

The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) has been instrumental in collecting evidence and supporting prosecutions. Their **survivor-centred approach** ensures that the voices of the victims are heard and that justice is pursued. UNITAD efforts are critical in holding DAESH members accountable for their crimes.

Cultural Destruction and Historical Impact

Destruction of Cultural Sites

The **destruction of cultural sites** by DAESH in Iraq has been catastrophic. [Ancient artifacts and buildings in Mosul](#), including what was once Nineveh, the ancient Assyrian capital, were systematically destroyed. This deliberate obliteration of heritage sites was not just an attack on physical structures but an assault on the cultural identity of the Iraqi people.

Impact on Iraqi Heritage

The loss of these cultural treasures has had a profound impact on Iraqi heritage. The erasure of historical landmarks has deprived future generations of their cultural legacy. The destruction has also had a psychological impact, as these sites were symbols of national pride and historical continuity.

Legal and Judicial Responses

International Trials

The United Nations team investigating atrocity crimes committed in Iraq by ISIL/Da'esh has [laid the groundwork for future](#) international trials. **These trials aim to bring justice to the victims and hold perpetrators accountable.** The International Criminal Court (ICC) plays a crucial role in this process, although its jurisdictional basis can sometimes be narrow.

Iraqi Judicial Efforts

Iraq has made significant strides in prosecuting Daesh members through its judicial system. The country has established specialized courts to handle terrorism-related cases, ensuring that justice is served swiftly and fairly. However, challenges remain, particularly in gathering sufficient evidence and ensuring fair trials.

Challenges in Prosecution

Prosecuting Daesh members is fraught with challenges. These include:

- **Evidence Collection:** Gathering reliable evidence in conflict zones is extremely difficult.
- **Witness Protection:** Ensuring the safety of witnesses who testify against Daesh members.
- **International Cooperation:** Coordinating efforts between different countries and international bodies.

The path to justice is complex and requires a concerted effort from both national and international entities.

Despite these challenges, the commitment to bringing Daesh members to justice remains unwavering.



Civilian Casualties and Humanitarian Impact

Death Toll Statistics

The **death toll** from the conflict involving DAESH in Iraq has been staggering. According to the [Iraq Body Count database](#), thousands of civilians have lost their lives due to air strikes, artillery, and ground combat. The UK-based monitoring group Airwars reported that the air

strikes and artillery of the US-led coalition killed as many as 6,000 civilians in Iraq and Syria by the end of 2017.

Displacement and Refugee Crisis

The humanitarian impact extends beyond the immediate loss of life. Millions of Iraqis have been displaced, with the International Organization for Migration estimating that the number of internally displaced persons could exceed 10 million. Many of these individuals were already displaced from previous conflicts, exacerbating the crisis.

The deliberate targeting of civilians and the blocking of humanitarian aid have worsened the situation, making it difficult for aid organizations to provide necessary relief.

Humanitarian Aid Efforts

Humanitarian aid efforts have been crucial in mitigating the impact of the conflict. Organizations like UNICEF have called for an end to attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, urging all parties to abide by international law. Despite these efforts, challenges remain, including starvation and acute hunger affecting millions, particularly children.

Conclusion

The atrocities committed by Daesh in Iraq have left an indelible mark on the nation's history and its people. From the genocide against the Yazidis to the persecution of Christians and Shia Muslims, Daesh's reign of terror has been characterized by extreme violence and human rights violations. The efforts of UNITAD and the Iraqi government to excavate mass graves, digitize records, and bring perpetrators to justice are crucial steps towards healing and accountability. However, the journey towards meaningful justice is far from over. It is imperative that the international community continues to support Iraq in its quest for justice, ensuring that the voices of survivors are heard and that the crimes of Daesh are not forgotten. Only through collective effort can we hope to bring an end to the cycle of violence and build a future based on peace and justice.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is UNITAD and what role does it play in addressing Daesh crimes?

UNITAD, or the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIL, works in cooperation with Iraqi authorities to excavate mass graves, digitize ISIL records, and assist in prosecuting Daesh members for their crimes.

How many mass graves have been excavated in Iraq related to Daesh crimes?

Over the past six years, UNITAD and Iraqi authorities have excavated 67 mass graves related to Daesh crimes.

What types of human rights violations has Daesh committed?

Daesh has committed numerous human rights violations, including genocide against Yazidis, persecution of Christians and Shia Muslims, sexual violence, and publicized executions of soldiers, journalists, and aid workers.

How has Daesh used media and propaganda to further its goals?

Daesh has extensively used social media, propaganda videos, and psychological warfare to recruit fighters, spread its ideology, and instill fear in both local populations and the international community.

What efforts have been made to prosecute Daesh members internationally?

International trials and cooperation have been ongoing, with countries like Portugal convicting Daesh members. UNITAD also assists in the legal and factual assessment of crimes committed by Daesh to support international prosecution efforts.

What is the impact of Daesh's actions on Iraqi heritage and cultural sites?

Daesh has destroyed numerous cultural sites, significantly impacting Iraqi heritage. This destruction has drawn global reactions and efforts to preserve and restore affected historical sites.