

Information on sectarian violence against Sunni Muslims

A January 2009 *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* news report states:

“Gunmen shot dead eight members of a family, six of them women, in an overnight raid on their home in Iraq's volatile northern Diyala Province.

The attackers then abducted two other family members, a man and woman, from the house in the village of Maamil near Balad Ruz, 90 kilometers north of Baghdad, Balad Ruz police Lieutenant Abdul Jabbar Raheem told Reuters.

He did not know who was behind it or why the family, all Arabs from the Sunni sect living in a largely Shi'ite neighborhood, were targeted a week before provincial elections seen as a key test of Iraq's growing stability.

The attack evoked memories of the tit-for-tat sectarian slaughter that nearly tore Iraq apart in 2006-2007 and which has only now begun to subside, almost six years after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (23 January 2009) - *Gunmen kill family, including six women, in Iraq*)

The *Human Rights Watch* 2009 World Report for Iraq, under the heading ‘Attacks on Civilians and Displacement’, states:

“Civilians remained the targets of attacks by Sunni and Shia armed groups across the country, though the number of such attacks fell after the US and Iraqi security offensive (“surge”) in 2007. In February 2008 Muqtada al-Sadr extended a freeze on the activities of his Jaysh al-Mahdi (Mahdi Army) militia; many Iraqis attributed the reduced level of violence in Iraq to the halt in the militia's armed activities in 2007 following bloody clashes with rival Shiite forces.

In Baghdad, twin bombings in a crowded commercial district on March 7, 2008, killed as many as 71 people, a June 18 truck bomb in a neighborhood where Sunnis have been displaced by Shiite militias killed as many as 63 people, a female suicide bomber targeting Shia pilgrims killed at least 32 people on July 28, and two separate waves of attacks before and during the Eid al-Fitr holiday in early October killed at least 48 people. A car bomb in Dujail, north of Baghdad, killed as many as 32 people on September 12. A second female suicide bomber on July 28 in Kirkuk killed about 25 people during a Kurdish protest over the provincial elections law.” (Human Rights Watch (14 January 2009) - *World Report 2009 – Iraq*)

Another January 2009 *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* news report states:

“A suicide bomber has struck a lunch gathering of Sunni Arab tribal leaders in a town south of Baghdad, killing at least 23 people and wounding 42 others, security spokesman Major General Qasim al-Musawi said.

The U.S. military said its initial reports said 21 were killed and 44 were wounded. An Iraqi security source said as many as 30 people died and more than 100 were hurt.

Al-Musawi said Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah Salih, a leader of the Sunni Al-Qaraghuli tribe, hosted the lunch for tribal leaders at his home.

The bomber, a relative of the host named Amin al-Qaraghuli, entered through the rear gate of the house and blew himself up among the guests, al-Musawi said. The sheikh was among the wounded.” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (02 January 2009) - *Iraqi suicide bomber kills 23 at tribal luncheon*)

Section II of the *United States Department of State* 2008 Report on International Religious Freedom for Iraq, under the heading ‘Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations’, states:

“Many individuals from various religious groups were targeted because of their religious identity or secular leanings. Acts committed against them included not only harassment and intimidation but also kidnapping and murder. The general lawlessness that permitted criminal gangs, terrorists, and insurgents to victimize citizens with impunity affected persons of all ethnicities and religious groups. The magnitude of sectarian attacks, while difficult to track, appeared to decline during the reporting period. While such incidents were progressively fewer, Shi'a in Sunni-dominated neighborhoods, Sunnis in Shi'a-dominated neighborhoods, and religious minorities in both Sunni- and Shi'a-dominated neighborhoods reported receiving death threat letters demanding that they leave their homes, and in many cases individuals either complied or were killed.” (United States Department of State (Bureau of Democracy, human rights and Labor) (19 September 2008) - *2008 Report on International Religious Freedom – Iraq*)

Section III of the same report, under the heading ‘Societal Abuses and Discrimination’, states:

“Sunni Muslims also continued to claim general discrimination during the reporting period, alleging that it was due to an ongoing campaign of revenge by the Shi'a majority for the Sunnis' presumed favored status and abuses of Shi'a under the former regime, and also because of the public's perception that the insurgency was composed primarily of Sunni extremists and former regime elements with whom the majority of the Sunni population supposedly sympathized. While some within the Sunni community supported and even assisted the insurgency, many Sunnis strongly denounced the insurgency.” (ibid.)

The *Amnesty International* 2008 Report for Iraq, under the heading ‘Killings by Iraqi security forces’, states:

“Iraqi security forces killed civilians unlawfully. In some cases, investigations were announced but their outcome was not known.

On 27 March gunmen wearing police uniforms killed 70 Sunni Arabs in the mixed town of Tal-'Afar near Mosul, apparently in reprisal for a suicide attack by a Sunni insurgent in a Shi'a district of the town. Survivors reportedly said that the gunmen dragged men from their homes, handcuffed and blindfolded them, and then

riddled them with bullets. Two days later, the government acknowledged that police had carried out the killings and 13 were reported to have been briefly detained. It was not clear whether any of them were brought to justice.” (Amnesty International (28 May 2008) - *Amnesty International Report 2008 – Iraq*)

Chapter 4, section A.1.a) ii) of a 2007 *UNHCR* report, under the heading ‘The Emergence of the Current Sectarian Violence’, states:

“After the bombing of the revered Shi’ite Al-Askari Shrine in the predominantly Sunni city of Samarra on 22 February 2006, allegedly by Sunni extremists, sectarian violence has escalated and “has become one of the most significant forms of human rights violation.” The attack spawned days of reprisals and set off a cycle of sectarian violence across Iraq, including violent clashes between Sunnis and Shi’ites, targeted kidnappings and assassinations as well as attacks on mosques. Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani urged his followers not to retaliate against Sunnis, but revenge killings have now become a daily occurrence. The moderating influence of Al-Sistani appears to be waning. Since the Samarra bombing, more Iraqis have died in execution-style sectarian killings than in terrorist attacks carried out by insurgents, which had previously been the major threat to security in Iraq.” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (August 2007) – *UNHCR’s Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, p.50)

References:

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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