



Iraq - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Tuesday 30 & Wednesday 31 January 2018

Treatment of atheists including by ISIS;

In January 2018 *Public Radio International* states:

“Iraq is a deeply religious country where atheism is rare. The country has seen secular rulers before, but the vast majority are adherents of Islam. Some 97 percent of the country is Muslim, according to the US State Department. The rest are Christians, Yazidis, Mandaean and a small number of Jews” (*Public Radio International* (17 January 2018) *ISIS turned this young Iraqi Christian into an atheist*).

A publication issued in August 2017 by the *United States Department of State* notes that:

“Shia Muslims, predominantly Arabs but including Turkmen, Farsi (Shia) Kurds, and others, constitute 55 to 60 percent of the population. Sunni Muslims make up approximately 40 percent of the population: approximately 15 percent of the total population are Sunni Kurds, while approximately 24 percent are Sunni Arabs, and the remaining 1 percent are Sunni Turkmen. Shia, although predominantly located in the south and east, comprise the majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the west, center, and the north of the country” (*United States Department of State* (15 August 2017) *2016 Report on International Religious Freedom – Iraq*, p.3).

This report also states:

“ISIS continued to target victims on the basis of their religious identity, killing and subjecting people of all faiths to violence, abductions, and intimidation” (*ibid*, p.15).

The *Washington Times* in August 2017 states:

“Atheism is not illegal in...Iraq, but officials often level blasphemy or other charges against atheists...” (*Washington Times* (1 August 2017) *Atheists in Muslim world: Silent, resentful and growing in number*, p3).

In July 2017 the *European Asylum Support Office* notes that:

“...Young people in Iraq are coming under many different influences and there are many older Iraqis who are not religious. I think as the country becomes more and more sectarian it is easy to assume everyone is becoming more religious, but this is not necessarily the case. There is a strong strain of communism in Iraq associated with a secularist outlook and that is still quite strong among Iraqi civil society. You have varying degrees of religious adherence, but that doesn't mean it is easy to identify as an atheist and it is rare that you would do that publicly. Sometimes people will say they are Muslim but privately are atheist” (*European Asylum Support Office* (July 2017) *EASO COI Meeting Report, Iraq Practical Cooperation Meeting 25-26 April 2017*, p.25).

In June 2017 the *Al-Monitor* notes that:

“In a country that has not seen a national census for three decades, it's not possible to provide official numbers for members of different faiths and beliefs. It is especially difficult to know the size of those communities that hold taboo beliefs in a conservative society such as Iraq, which views these outsiders with disdain and where they are threatened by military groups and political leaders, some of whom demand they be beaten "with an iron fist."...Many atheists have been forced to flee Iraq because of harassment and threats” (Al-Monitor (22 June 2017) *Islamic parties intimidate, fear atheists in Iraq*).

A report issued in June 2017 by the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia* notes that:

“...the perceived concentration of political power in the hands of the majority religious group (Shia) since the overthrow of the Ba'ath Party regime in 2003 has left ethnic and religious minorities (particularly Sunnis) feeling aggrieved, believing they suffer institutionalised prejudice, although Sunnis, Kurds and other ethnic and religious minorities hold a number of ministerial positions and are represented in the Parliament. The Shia-majority Government's failure to address these grievances has reinforced a sense of disenfranchisement, and set the conditions for the rise of ISIL. All religious communities in Iraq have been threatened by some level of violence in recent years, particularly since the emergence of ISIL...” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia (June 2017) *DFAT Country Information Report - Iraq (June 2017)*, p.12).

A document released by the *International Humanist and Ethical Union* in November 2016 states that:

“Being openly atheist is risky and rare, making estimates of irreligiosity extremely hard to make” (International Humanist and Ethical Union (November 2016) *The Freedom of Thought 2017: Iraq*, p.4).

No further information on this issue could be found among sources available to the RDC.

Information on current ISIS activity

A document published by *Reuters* in January 2018 notes that:

“The Iraqi government last month declared victory over Islamic State which had declared a “caliphate” over parts of Iraq and Syria in 2014. The group has morphed back into an underground insurgency and continues to carry out attacks” (Reuters (27 January 2018) *Friendly fire kills 11 in Iraq air strike: Iraqi security sources*).

A report issued by *BBC News* in January 2018 states that:

“It's more than a month since Iraq's prime minister declared victory in his country's fight against the militants of Islamic State. But in reality the battle is far from over, with attacks on Iraqi soldiers taking place on a daily basis. Much of the fighting occurs on the porous border with Syria, where IS fighters are able to take refuge” (BBC News (22 January 2018) *IS and how it continues to plague Iraq*).

In January 2018 *Airwars* states:

“By the end of 2017, almost all the territory so-called Islamic State (ISIS) had once controlled in Iraq and Syria had been captured...” (Airwars (18 January 2018) *Airwars annual assessment 2017: civilians paid a high price for major Coalition gains*, p.1).

In January 2018 the *United Nations Security Council* notes in a report that:

“Between 23 and 27 November, Iraqi security forces launched a military offensive in central northern Iraq, focused on clearing remnants of ISIL from the Jazirah desert expanse straddling the Governorates of Anbar, Salah al-Din and Ninawa. An area of 14,000 km² was cleared and 175 villages in the Jazirah and upper Euphrates areas were liberated. On 26 November, a separate operation began in the Wadi Hawran region in central Anbar, aimed at sealing off escape routes for ISIL from ongoing operations to the north. The conclusion of the larger Anbar military operation was announced on 9 December, although mopping-up operations continue in the north-west of Anbar. The declaration of victory was announced along with the liberation of large swathes of land in western Iraq. Overall, the Iraqi forces have liberated areas in which more than 4.5 million Iraqis live and over 135,200 km² of territory. The Government, however, continues to see the possibility of ISIL regrouping and an increase in asymmetric attacks as a major threat to the population” (United Nations Security Council (17 January 2018) *Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017) (January 2018)*, p.6).

A report issued in January 2018 by *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* states that:

“In December, Iraq's government announced the "end of the war" against IS after militants were expelled from the Baghdad region and from urban areas of Iraq that the group controlled. But some militants are still active north of Baghdad” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (15 January 2018) *At Least 38 Killed In Two Suicide Blasts In Baghdad*)

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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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