



Iraq: New Abuse, Execution Reports of Men Fleeing Mosul

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Allegations are emerging of [Iraqi](#) forces beating and unlawfully killing men and boys fleeing Mosul in the final phase of the battle against the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), Human Rights Watch said today.

Four witnesses told Human Rights Watch that they saw Iraqi forces beat unarmed men and boys fleeing the fighting within the last seven days, and said they also obtained information about Iraqi forces executing unarmed men during this time period.

"As Iraqi forces are poised to retake the entire city of Mosul, allegations of unlawful killings and beatings significantly raise concerns for the civilians there who have been living under ISIS control," said [Lama Fakih](#), deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Iraqi forces are promising liberation, but they need to find out what's happening now and stop any abuse."

One witness said that three Emergency Response Division and Iraqi Security Force (ISF) members on a key route for civilians fleeing the city boasted to him that they were executing captured unarmed men who were thought to be ISIS-affiliated instead of detaining them. The Emergency Response Division and ISF fighters, stationed three kilometers from the heaviest fighting in the Old City, said they made an exception for elderly men, the witness said.

Two other witnesses said they saw Iraqi uniformed soldiers pick at least six men and boys out of crowds of fleeing civilians at a checkpoint, beat them, and drive them away. They said they saw soldiers pick out another man, beat him, and then move him into a building they were using as a base. One of the witnesses said that soldiers later said they had killed him.

"I have heard of countless abuses and executions in this battle," one witness said. "But what's changed is that in this final phase fighters are no longer hiding what they are doing and are comfortable allowing us to witness the abuses first-hand."

The same witness said that earlier this week, he heard three screams coming from a building being used by the elite Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), after which fighters from the unit ushered him away. That afternoon in another neighborhood of west Mosul, the witness saw two CTS fighters take down the corpse of an alleged ISIS fighter that had

been strung up to an electrical pole, and stone the body before taking a few photos of each other posing with it.

That night, he said, a CTS fighter also showed him a video of a severely beaten man who the fighter said was an ISIS prisoner. In the video the CTS fighter shoots and kills the unarmed detainee, he said.

In the days before, the man said he saw five Iraqi soldiers at a checkpoint pick out at least 10 men over a period of an hour, beat them, and drag them toward a building the soldiers were using as a base. He said that one of the men the soldiers were beating was wounded and that he had arrived with his family from a front-line field hospital. The witness said that as he was leaving the area he saw the soldiers single out more and more men, beat them and take them away, but lost count of how many.

An [article](#) published in a Swedish outlet on June 28, 2017, by a Swedish journalist who was on the front-line says that a Federal Police officer boasted about decapitating at least 50 men with knives and beating others, with fellow officers watching, cheering, and sometimes filming. The article said the Federal Police backed up these claims with photos and videos.

Throughout the operation to retake Mosul, Human Rights Watch has documented Iraqi forces detaining and [holding](#) thousands of men and boys in inhumane conditions without charge, and in some cases [torturing](#) and [executing](#) them, under the guise of a screening them for ISIS-affiliation. In May 2016, Iraqi forces retook the city of Fallujah from ISIS, but in the operation committed horrific [abuses](#), including executions, torture, and the disappearance of over 600 men whose bodies have yet to be found.

Human Rights Watch has raised concerns regarding allegations of ill-treatment, torture, and executions numerous times in meetings with Iraqi officials in Baghdad as well as with representatives from US-led coalition member countries. Human Rights Watch does not know of a single transparent investigation into abuses by Iraqi armed forces, any instances of commanders being held accountable for abuse, or any victims of abuse receiving compensation.

Iraqi criminal justice authorities should investigate all alleged crimes, including unlawful killings and mutilation of corpses, committed by any party in the conflict in a prompt, transparent, and effective manner, up to the highest levels of responsibility. Those found criminally responsible should be appropriately prosecuted. Extrajudicial executions and torture during an armed conflict are war crimes. Despoiling dead bodies and other outrages on personal dignity are violations of the laws of armed conflict and may amount to war crimes.

"Reports of unlawful executions and beatings by Iraqi soldiers should be enough to raise concern among the highest ranks in Baghdad and among members of the international coalition combatting ISIS," Fakihi said. "Iraqi officials should translate that concern into accountability for war crimes."

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