

United Nations Investigators Accuse ISIS of Genocide Over Attacks on Yazidis

By NICK CUMMING-BRUCE

MARCH 19, 2015

New York Times

GENEVA — United Nations human rights investigators on Thursday leveled accusations of genocide and war crimes at the Islamic State, citing evidence that the extremist group's fighters had sought to wipe out the Yazidi minority in Iraq.

The investigators reported that the pattern of attacks against the Yazidis, a religious minority living mostly in northern Iraq, pointed to the intention of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, "to destroy the Yazidi as a group."

Although the report states cautiously that the extremists "may have committed" genocide, one of the most serious international crimes, Hanny Megally, a senior United Nations rights official, told reporters in Geneva that "all the information points in that direction."

Iraqi government forces and affiliated militia groups also appear to have committed war crimes, the United Nations said, pointing to what it called credible accounts of scores of summary killings, torture, abductions and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including the use of barrel bombs.

In their advance across Iraq last year, Islamic State fighters rounded up hundreds of Yazidi men over the age of 14, led them to nearby ditches and summarily executed them, the United Nations said. The report included the testimony of men who had survived massacres by shielding themselves behind the bodies of other victims.

"It was quite clear the attacks against them were not just spontaneous or happened out of the blue; they were clearly orchestrated," said Suki Nagra, who led a team of investigators that compiled the report.

Witnesses "consistently reported that orders were coming through, by telephone in many cases, about what to do with them," she said.

Islamic State fighters forced other religious minorities to convert or flee their villages, Ms. Nagra said, but in many instances, even Yazidis who agreed to convert were taken away and executed on orders from more senior figures in the militant group. "There was a clear chain of command," she said.

Evidence provided by witnesses also suggested that "a huge number of foreign fighters were involved" and that they had come from at least 10 countries, including from the West, Ms. Nagra said.

Yazidi women and girls were abducted and sold or given into sexual slavery as spoils of war, said witnesses who also cited the rape by extremist fighters of two girls, ages 6 and 9. A pregnant married woman, 19, told investigators that she was raped repeatedly over two and a half months by an Islamic State militant claiming to be a doctor, and that he had deliberately sat on her stomach, telling her, "This baby should die because it is an infidel."

Yazidi boys as young as 8 were forced to convert to Islam, to undergo training in the use of weapons and to watch videos of beheadings, children who escaped captivity told the United Nations team.

“There are reports of hundreds, if not thousands, of these young boys who were forcibly taken,” Ms. Nagra said.

The investigators also detailed politically motivated violence, reporting that the Islamic State had killed at least 602 members of the Albu Nimr tribe in Anbar Province in Iraq and 1,500 to 1,700 Iraqi service members it had captured at a military base. Some were shot, and others were beheaded, Ms. Nagra said, citing a witness who recounted that the extremists had been “kicking heads around like footballs.”

The investigators also reported numerous accounts of killings, abductions and torture by the Iraqi military and militias. As the fight against the Islamic State gathered momentum last summer, the militias seemed “to operate with total impunity, leaving a trail of death and destruction in their wake,” the investigators reported.

Security forces summarily executed 43 prisoners at a police station in June and killed at least 70 Sunni civilians in Diyala Province in January, according to the United Nations team. The investigators also said they had received multiple reports of militia groups running detention facilities and conducting routine torture at a government air base.

A version of this article appears in print on March 20, 2015, on page A14 of the New York edition with the headline: U.N. Investigators Accuse Islamic State of Genocide Over Attacks on Yazidis.