

ISIL's 'legacy of terror' in Iraq: UN verifies over 200 mass graves

Investigators have uncovered more than 200 mass graves containing thousands of bodies in areas of Iraq formerly controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), according to a United Nations human rights report out on Tuesday.

The [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR) and the [UN Assistance Mission in Iraq](#) (UNAMI) [said](#) the 202 mass grave sites were found in governorates of Nineveh, Kirkuk, Salahuddin and Anbar in the north and western parts of the country – but there may be many more.

In the joint report, *Unearthing Atrocities*, the UN entities said the evidence gathered from the sites “will be central to ensuring credible investigations, prosecutions and convictions” in accordance with international due process standards.

Ján Kubiš, the top UN official in Iraq and the head of UNAMI, [said](#) that the mass grave sites “are a testament to harrowing human loss, profound suffering and shocking cruelty.”

“Determining the circumstances surrounding the significant loss of life will be an important step in the mourning process for families and their journey to secure their rights to truth and justice,” he added.

These graves contain the remains of those mercilessly killed for not conforming to ISIL's twisted ideology and rule, including ethnic and religious minorities – *UN rights chief Bachelet*

Between June 2014 and December 2017, ISIL seized large areas of Iraq, leading a campaign of widespread and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, “acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possible genocide,” the report states.

Traumatized families have the 'right to know'

The UNAMI-OHCHR report also documents the “significant challenges” families of the missing face in trying to find the fate of their loved ones.

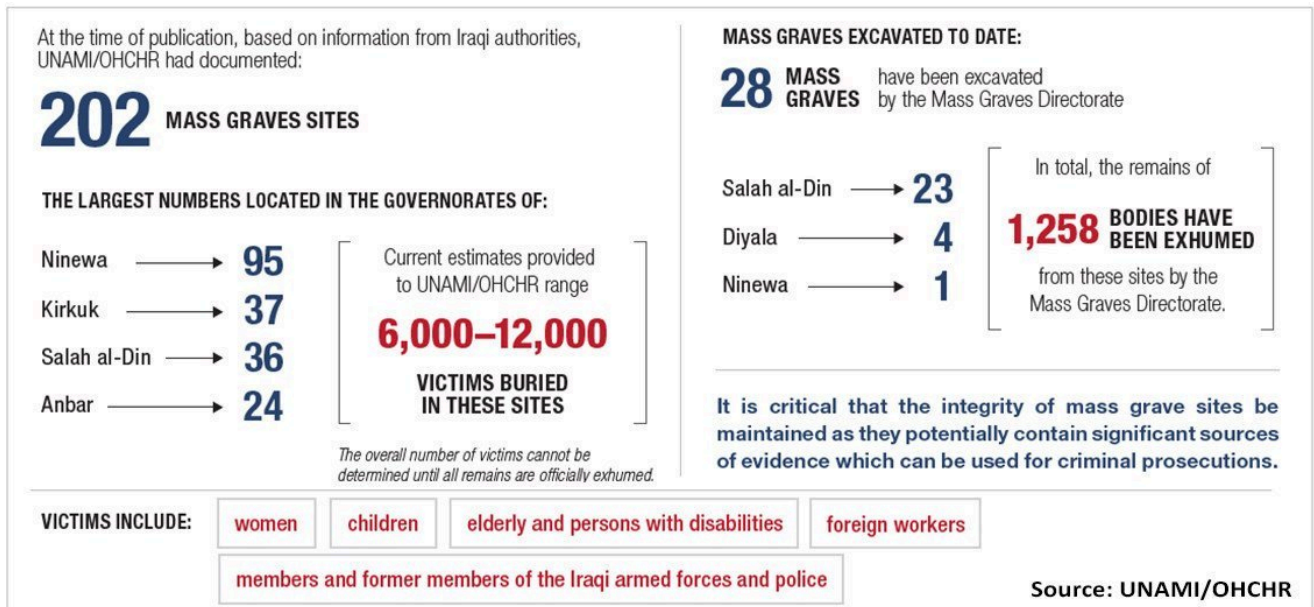
At present, they must report to more than five separate authorities, a process that is both time-consuming and frustrating for traumatized families.

Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [underscored](#) that the families “have the right to know.”

“ISIL's horrific crimes in Iraq have left the headlines but the trauma of the

victims' families endures, with thousands of women, men and children still unaccounted for," she said.

"Their families have the right to know what happened to their loved ones. Truth, justice and reparations are critical to ensuring a full reckoning for the atrocities committed by ISIL."



Source: UNAMI-OHCHR report

The report documents 202 mass grave sites across Iraq, amid fears that there could be more.

Victim-centred approach needed

Among its recommendations, the report calls for a victim-centred approach and a transitional justice process that is established in consultation with, and accepted by, Iraqis, particularly those from affected communities.

It also urges a multidisciplinary approach to the recovery operations, with the participation of experienced specialists, including weapons contamination and explosives experts and crime scene investigators.

Alongside, it also calls on the international community to provide resources and technical support to efforts related to the exhumation, collection, transportation, storage and return of human remains to families, as well as their identification, particularly by helping strengthen the national Mass Graves Directorate.