



ICRC

Civilians without protection

Ongoing conflict claims the lives of hundreds every month

There is a common perception that the armed conflict in Iraq is largely over. However, widespread violence and a lack of respect for human life continue to affect the Iraqi people. Despite the decrease in the number of deaths and injuries this year compared with 2006 and 2007, violence remains a feature of everyday life. Now the concern is that people in Iraq and elsewhere may come to accept this high level of insecurity as somehow "normal" and unavoidable.

Currently, about 500 people are killed on average every month and 2,000 wounded in mass explosions and indiscriminate attacks occurring mainly in Baghdad, Ninewa and Diyala governorates. Civilians are the primary victims of these incidents, which create a general sense of insecurity as anyone could be hit simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Women fear for themselves and their families every time they leave their homes to go to the market or accompany their children to school. Businesses are regularly destroyed or severely damaged in indiscriminate attacks, often leaving many families without their only source of income.

International humanitarian law is designed to limit the effects of armed conflict and to protect those who are not or no longer participating in the fighting – an aim central to the four international treaties known as the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, which were adopted exactly 60 years ago today. This anniversary is an occasion to remember that a distinction must always be drawn between combatants and those taking no part in hostilities.

Through the testimonies presented here Iraqi men and women explain how recent events have affected them and their families. These harrowing stories show that the current security situation and the resulting humanitarian needs still leave many Iraqi men and women uncertain about their future.

We would like to seize the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions to stress that the basic rules of the law of armed conflict remain as important as ever and that Iraqi civilians must be spared the effects of hostilities. If that were to happen, there would be much less suffering.

Juan-Pedro Schaerer
Head of Delegation



Kirkuk : An Iraqi woman flees the scene of a truck bomb

Ninewa governorate, northern Iraq, Hamdaniya

"Taken from us too soon"

Ramy, our youngest son was just four years old when he was killed. I will never forget the phone call telling me that he was injured and lying in the emergency room. How could this have happened? At the time of the blast, I was working at the hospital and, as far as I knew, my son was playing with his cousin at his grandfather's. I rushed to the emergency room. I cannot describe what it feels like to see your child lying unconscious with shrapnel in the back of his head. The doctors tried to stabilize him but it was too late. We had just moved near Hamdaniya Hospital so I could be close to work. We were so happy and thankful to God for our new house. Ramy was coming home with his uncle on a motorcycle and when they reached the hospital area, a car exploded just 50 meters away from them. People told me later that Ramy just fell down suddenly; his uncle suffered minor injuries. Now my wife and I are afraid to let our daughters go out. I do not know what awaits them and we cannot bear to lose another beloved child.

Najah Yousif Nouh, father



Baghdad : Family members grieve as they collect the bodies of loved ones the morning after a car bomb

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Kirkuk : A man suffering from burns is wheeled into the emergency room of the local hospital following a suicide attack

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Dr. Rashid Abdullah, father of five

I am still coming to terms with what happened to my husband. He was just driving his car! He burnt to death inside his car, because the bomb exploded next to him. He was a doctor, a paediatrician at the General Hospital. How can somebody like that be gone? He was no threat to anyone. I keep asking myself why he was killed. Since he is gone, we have no more money and three of my children have quit school to work and help our family. When I go out, I do my best to avoid cars; I see so many things in a different light now. I try to be very fast and come back home immediately. The fear of the unexpected hangs over all of us, after all my husband was just going to lunch when he was killed."

Ghaliya Rashid Hussain, wife

Kirkuk governorate, northern Iraq, Taza

"A generation gone in a blink of an eye"

Four of my sons were killed. My seven grandsons and granddaughters were also killed. Can that even be possible? My whole family is gone. My house was completely destroyed and now I must live with my relatives. There is nothing left for me in this life. I am a 50 year old widow. My grandchildren were everything to me. In my mind, I simply cannot make sense of any of this... My family were innocent victims, how can my grandchildren have deserved this? What did any of us have to do with this explosion?

Jeeran Tawfeeq Ahmed,
mother and grandmother

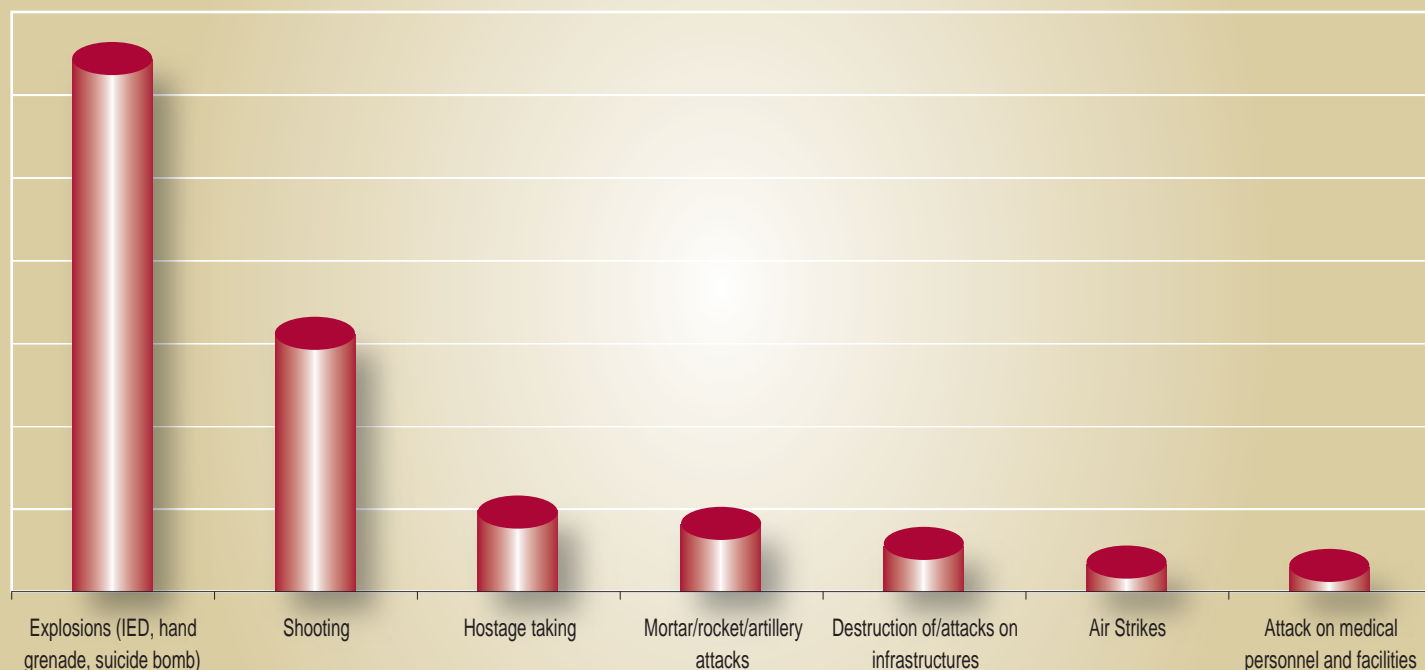
"I miss my mum and playing with my brother. They are all gone"

My parents and my younger brother and sister are all dead. I have no family anymore. Everyone is gone. I had to move to my uncle's house. I miss my mum and I want to play with my little brother and my sister. Why did they die? I thought people died when they are sick or when they are old. I am scared about what will happen to me if my uncle dies when he walks on the street next time. If a bomb kills him, I think maybe I will die too.

Mustafa at nine years old
now suffers from depression
and has had to leave school

Type of incidents ¹

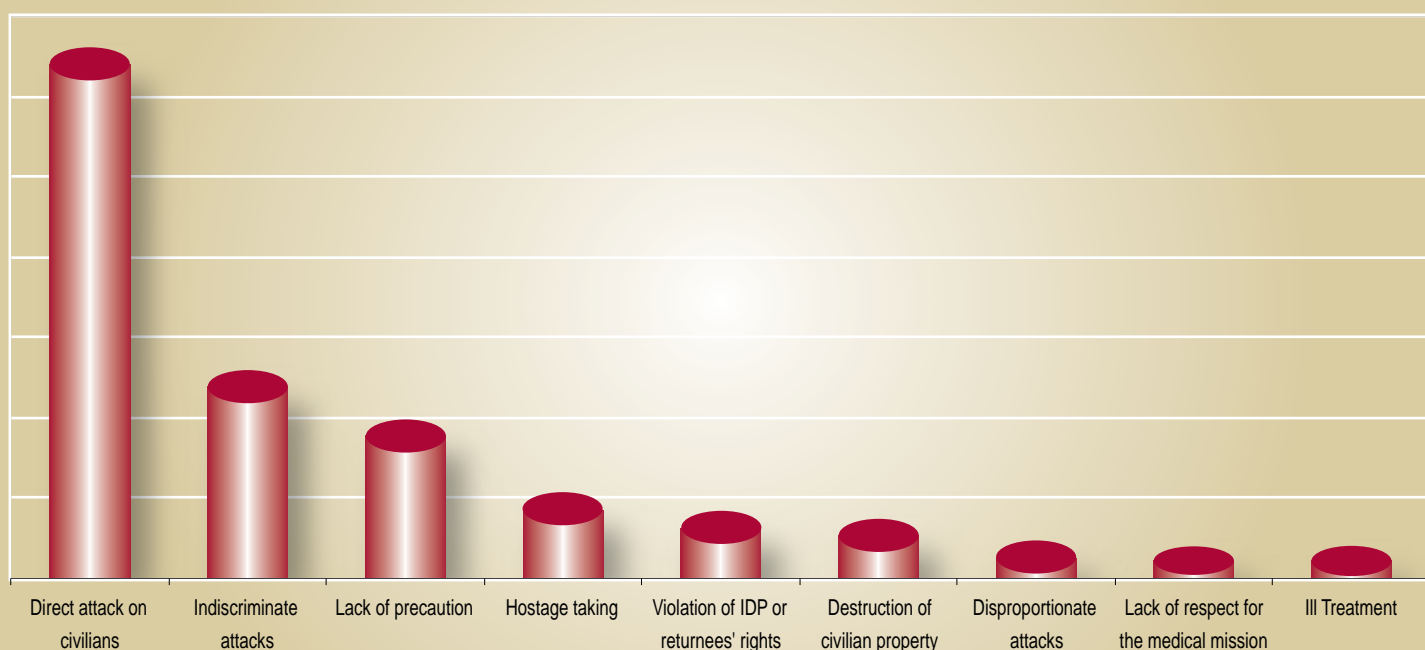
January to 15 June 2009



¹The type of incidents monitored by the ICRC are those reported in **public sources** that points to possible IHL violations against civilians, persons hors de combat and civilian objects. One incident can include more than one type of what could be considered a violation under IHL.

Type of potential IHL violations

January to 15 June 2009



The rules of the conduct of hostilities limit the right of parties to a conflict to use the methods and means of warfare of their choice. It essentially covers the conduct of military operations in an armed conflict by defining proper and permissible uses of weapons and military tactics. The well established principles of distinction and proportionality as well as the prohibition to employ weapons, projectiles and material and methods of warfare of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering are at the core of this branch of international humanitarian law.

From these principles more specific rules were developed, such as the prohibition of direct attacks against civilians or the civilian population as such or against civilian objects, the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks and the obligation to take precautionary measures with a view to avoiding, and in any event to minimizing, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.

Anbar governorate, western Iraq, Ramadi, Falluja

Salam, beloved brother

I was severely injured when a bomb exploded as I walked down the street with my brother. I do not remember much. I remember trying to stand up but I couldn't. I looked around and noticed that there were the remains of two police officers just next to me. I started shouting for my brother Salam to come and help me. I called for him many times but he never came. When I woke up again in the hospital, I found my family around me and still did not see Salam. I asked for him, everyone was crying. Salam was gone forever, taking a big part of me with him.

*Salam's brother**

"He just wanted to help our family"

I have five children. My husband is paralyzed, so I am the main breadwinner. Not long ago, my son started to work in a car park to help me with the household expenses. He was proud to be of use and I was proud to have him as a son. Now, I regret this pride bitterly and my soul aches. He was killed in a bomb explosion. A mother can never accept a son's death and the way it happened is just not possible. You go to work, you are a good person and suddenly your life is taken away by a bomb not even intended for you! How can we live like that? Where can we walk safely?

Taghreed, mother*



Baghdad : A father (in black) is comforted by a relative as the body of his son who was killed in a blast is taken away for burial

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"Alive but trying hard to feel happy again"

My son Ahmed is only 10 years old and was working in a grocery shop to help me at home, because I am a widow and life is not easy for us. One day, as he walked to work a car bomb blew up outside Alfalluja restaurant killing and injuring many people. Ahmed lost one of his arms. He is alive, thank God, but now he cannot work. He is sad as he cannot help us anymore and that just destroys his spirit.

*Ahmed's mother**

"My restaurant became a place where people died"

I built a restaurant in Aljazeera neighborhood, in Albou Thiab area. I put all my savings and lifeblood into it. It was working well, I employed 17 people, and they were able to support their own families. In 2007, the restaurant was the target of a suicide bomb attack, which claimed the lives of many people and destroyed neighbouring shops. I still have no idea why we were targeted. We managed to repair the restaurant and even took some security measures. This July, my restaurant was attacked again. A car exploded just in front of it killing bystanders and injuring two staff. Once again, my restaurant was destroyed. After this explosion, I have closed my restaurant for good because it became a target for killing civilians and I do not want to think of that. You become afraid to enter places. You suspect any car parked near you or just passing by. How can we work under these circumstances? You feel trapped in your own world.

Abou Ahmed Al-Abdali, restaurant owner*



Kirkuk : An Iraqi woman sits amid the wreckage caused by a truck bomb

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"Our only means of survival reduced to rubble"

I am 50 years old and have four sons and three daughters. It is a big family to support. I had a shop for women's clothes and accessories. On the day of the explosion, I lost everything. The shop was not mine; it was rented. My wife sold her jewellery to buy things for the shop and I worked hard to make my business a success and to support my family. One unexpected blast destroyed all our dreams. The crying, the shouting, and the shattered remains of my shop will stay with me until I die.

Abo Mustafa's, shop owner

"Grief makes us grow up quickly"

Amal means hope in Arabic and my little daughter was so excited about going to school. On her first day, Amal was not feeling well and had a stomach-ache so I decided to take her to Dr. Ibrahim. While we were crossing the street, I heard a very loud explosion and before I knew what was going on, there was another explosion. I could not see my daughter. I was desperate. People were running everywhere. I was looking around frantically. Then I saw her lying there on the road. I shouted for help and people gathered around me. Somebody took her from my hands and ran to the hospital. The doctors said she was badly wounded and needed surgery immediately. I never saw her beautiful eyes open again, because she died during the operation.

*Amal's mother**



Tal Afar: An injured child lies on a hospital bed after being transferred following a double suicide attack

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"A daily struggle with fear and anxiety"

I have witnessed many of Iraq's troubles and I have lost many of my relatives because of all our wars. I am married and have four little girls. Two years ago, I lost my youngest brother when he was killed on the street in front of my mother's eyes. Since then, something has broken inside me. My daily life is a mixture of many feelings but especially fear and terror. Fear of losing someone else. Fear of living with all these troubled emotions. I have two daughters in school. Each day when they leave or when my husband and I leave for work, I fear that it could be the last day that we will all be together. Is it possible to live like this? I don't think so. I know I am not the only one and that many Iraqi families feel the same way. We have all lost someone dear to us and fear that it will happen again...

Fatma, sister and mother*



Mosul: An Iraqi man sits grieving after losing members of his family the morning after two car bombs were detonated

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Baghdad : Female family members weep as they collect the bodies of loved ones the morning after a car bomb

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The way violence has become a feature of every day life in Iraq should not be seen as normal or acceptable. If the existing rules of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) were followed, much of the suffering caused by armed conflict could be avoided.

Article 3 common to all four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 is of key importance for Iraq as it covers non-international armed conflicts. The adoption of this article was a breakthrough since previous International Humanitarian Law treaties had only covered situations of wars between States.

Common article 3 sets a baseline for the protection of civilians as well as sick, wounded or detained fighters to which all sides – State and non-State parties to conflict – must abide.

An extract of common Article 3:

"In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:

(1) Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

To this end, the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

(a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;"

THE ICRC HAS BEEN WORKING IN IRAQ ON A PERMANENT BASIS SINCE 1980, RESPONDING TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF ARMED CONFLICTS.

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ICRC mission The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



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