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I. Shocking Reports of Chemical Weapons Attack in Syria Lead to Calls for Action

A series of videos, photographs and reports from the ground from Syria on 21 August indicate that a new chemical weapons attack [has killed](#)

a high number of civilians in rebel-held areas outside of Damascus, in what, if verified, would be

[“the world's most lethal chemical weapons attack since the 1980s.”](#)

The footage shows a large number of [children](#)

among the victims of the attacks. Casualty estimates have [varied](#) widely, from 500 to over 1300.

Reports of the attacks are emerging at the same time that the

[UN team](#)

established to investigate previous alleged uses of chemical weapons in Syria begins its work after months of

[delays](#)

. Many civil society groups, including the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, as well as several

[governments](#)

, have

[called](#)

for the UN team to be given a mandate to

[investigate](#)

the latest attacks, noting that if corroborated, such a use of chemical weapons would amount to [war crimes](#)

. In addition, civil society groups have also

[demanded](#)

that the United Nations Security Council refer the situation in Syria to the

[International Criminal Court](#)

for further investigation.

The UN Security Council

[convened](#)

for an emergency session on 21 August to discuss the attacks. However, it remains to be seen whether the Council's

[divisions](#)

on Syria will be overcome by the latest reports of mass atrocities. Many voices inside and

[outside](#)

of Syria have stated that the international community and the Syrian government have both failed in their

[responsibility to protect](#)

Syrians, a failure that, particularly in light of the alleged attacks, has reached what some are calling a tipping point and

[requires](#)

an immediate and meaningful response.

II. Excessive Violence, including Sectarian Violence, in Egypt Raises Alarm

Following the 2011 “Arab Spring” revolution in

[Egypt](#)

, Mohamed Morsi, the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood,

[was elected president](#)

on 24 June 2012. During his tenure, President Morsi issued a Constitutional Declaration granting his decrees and laws immunity from judicial review, even if they

[violated human rights](#)

. Human rights groups

[documented](#)

that Morsi’s first 100 days in power were characterized by “broad assaults” on the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and religion, as well as a marked uptick in the cases of torture and mistreatment of detainees. Morsi’s actions caused massive

[protests](#)

throughout Egypt

[beginning](#)

in November 2012. On 30 June 2013, the one-year anniversary of Morsi’s election, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators

[crowded](#)

Cairo demanding his resignation. The scale of the continued protests against President Morsi led the government to issue an

[ultimatum](#)

to the Muslim Brotherhood, insisting that they respond to the protestor’s demands or face the imposition of the military’s “road map”. Morsi’s

[defiance](#)

of the warning eventually led to a takeover by the military on 3 July 2013 that

[removed](#)

Morsi from power. The military, under the leadership of General al-Sisi, installed an

[interim government](#)

and created a

[roadmap](#)

for a political transition, which is

[expected](#)

to lead to new elections and amendments to the 2012 Constitution.

The Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters, however, refused to

[accept](#)

the military overthrow and held

[massive demonstrations](#)

and sit-ins throughout Egypt during July and August 2013. On 14 August, the military moved to

[violently](#)

disperse the protests, leading to over 630

[deaths](#)

. Human rights groups

[decried](#)

the bloody and unjustified crackdown as overly excessive and contrary to Egypt's obligations under international human rights law, particularly as it was

[directed](#)

at unarmed and peaceful demonstrators.

[Sectarian](#)

violence continues, particularly against the country's Coptic Christian and Shia population, leading civil society organizations to warn that Egypt is

[failing](#)

to uphold its responsibility to protect. Despite the continued crackdown, the Muslim Brotherhood is vowing to

[persist](#)

with its demonstrations.

1. Joint Statement by Adama Dieng, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and Jennifer Welsh, Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, on the situation in Egypt

14 August 2013

The Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng , and on the Responsibility to Protect, Ms. Jennifer Welsh, express their serious concern on yesterday morning's violence, allegedly involving the excessive use of force by Egyptian security forces against demonstrators in the city of Cairo. While the final number of casualties and injured is still to be confirmed, the Special Advisers regret the large loss of life and express their concern at the continuous escalation of violence in the country.

In particular, they note with alarm that a number of Christian churches and institutions have been targeted, including in the provinces of Assiut, Fayoum, Minya and Sohag, reportedly in retaliation to the incidents in Cairo. "We urge all Egyptians to act responsibly during these difficult moments and refrain from using violence to express their grievances, in particular by targeting religious minorities and institutions, or by using language and inciting behaviours that may escalate tensions." The Special Advisers note that Christian communities have been subjected to violence in the past, most recently on 5 July in Luxor, and alert of the risk of increased violence against these communities if no measures are taken to ensure their protection. (...)

The Special Advisers also call on the Egyptian authorities to conduct prompt, independent and effective investigation into the circumstances of the tragic events in Cairo and the attacks on

religious minorities and institutions, and reiterate that all those responsible for perpetrating violence must be held to account.

(...)

Read the full [statement](#).

2. UNA-UK: Egypt failing to uphold its responsibility to protect

United Nations Association of the United Kingdom

16 August 2013

The Egyptian interim government has declared a state of emergency after protests and riots broke out in response to a violent crackdown on supporters of the ex-President Morsi, on 14 August. It is reported that 525 people have been killed, including 43 police officers and a number of foreign journalists, when the army moved to clear two protest camps in the Egyptian capital Cairo.

Millions of Egyptians have participated in pro- and anti-Morsi protests since the coup in July, and while there have been clashes between civilians and security forces, yesterday's crackdown was by far the most violent. (...)

There are also concerns regarding the inflaming of communal tensions in Egypt, particularly against religious minorities such as Shia and Christians, who are perceived to be supportive of the coup.

In allowing the large-scale killing of demonstrators, the Egyptian interim government is failing to uphold its responsibility to protect civilians and is showing an unwillingness to abide by international human rights law.

UNA-UK urges the Egyptian government to respect the right of peaceful protest, uphold its obligation to protect all populations within Egypt from violence and we reiterate the words of the Secretary-General: that "violence and incitement from any side are not the answers to the challenges Egypt faces."

Read the [full article](#).

3. Human Rights Watch: Egypt--Security Forces Used Excessive Lethal Force Human Rights Watch

19 August 2013

Egyptian security forces' rapid and massive use of lethal force to disperse sit-ins on August 14, 2013 led to the most serious incident of mass unlawful killings in modern Egyptian history.

The ongoing Human Rights Watch investigation indicates that the decision to use live ammunition on a large scale from the outset reflected a failure to observe basic international policing standards on use of lethal force and was not justified by the disruptions caused by the demonstrations or the limited possession of arms by some protesters. The failure of the authorities to provide safe exit from the sit-in, including for people wounded by live fire and needing urgent medical attention, was a serious violation of international standards. (...)

"This excessive and unjustified use of lethal force is the worst possible response to the very tense situation in Egypt today," said [Joe Stork](#), acting Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Egypt's military rulers should rein in police forces to prevent the country from spiraling into further violence. The military should not be encouraging police to use even more lethal force."

According to the Ministry of Interior, the nationwide August 14 death toll of 638 includes 43 police officers. The dispersal sparked gunfights in the Cairo neighborhood of Mohandessin and an attack on a police station in Kerdassa, in greater Cairo, which left four policemen dead. Human Rights Watch spoke to witnesses, priests, and residents who confirmed that over the course of August 14, immediately following the dispersals, Islamists in at least nine cities attacked and burned at least 32 churches.

Over the following three days, clashes between security forces and Muslim Brotherhood protesters, and anti-Muslim Brotherhood protesters led to at least 173 additional deaths by August 18, according to the Ministry of Health.

Human Rights Watch is investigating the government's dispersal of Muslim Brotherhood sit-ins at Rab'a al-Adawiya in Nasr City and at Nahda in Giza, in greater Cairo. Human Rights Watch staff interviewed 41 protesters, doctors, and residents from both areas, visited the Rab'a al-Adawiya Medical Center during the dispersal and later visited hospitals and morgues in Nasr City and Giza.

The most significant violence took place during the dispersal of the Rab'a sit-in. Human Rights Watch's preliminary findings indicate that the security forces used excessive force in breaking up the sit-ins and unlawfully killed a number of unarmed protesters. Security forces failed to plan the operation to minimize the risk to life, including by ensuring safe exits and giving public orders not to kill except in a targeted manner when absolutely necessary. (...)

Witnesses and video of the protests, as well as observations by Human Rights Watch staff, indicate that the vast majority of the protesters were unarmed, but some carried clubs and a few fired guns at the security forces. Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch and video

footage posted on YouTube indicate that the police unlawfully killed protesters who were clearly not engaged in any form of violence. (...)

Egypt's interim president, Adly Mansour, declared a curfew on the afternoon of August 14 and a one-month state of emergency. While some curfews may be legitimate and proportionate measures to reduce severe violence on the streets, the declaration of a state of emergency sends precisely the wrong signal, Human Rights Watch said. Security forces will read it as license for additional reckless and unlawful use of force, particularly given the long history of abuses carried out under states of emergency in Egypt. (...)

The attacks on the sit-ins sparked serious sectarian violence. Since the ouster of Morsy sectarian tension has been on the rise, with leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood scapegoating Egyptian Christians as responsible for Morsy's removal. Human Rights Watch has confirmed through interviews with witnesses that mobs chanting Islamist slogans attacked at least 32 churches. This violence left one Christian dead and at least 20 churches torched.

Security forces did little or nothing to protect churches, despite the high likelihood of such attacks. Human Rights Watch [documented](#) a rise in sectarian violence since Morsy's ouster on July 3, with at least six major attacks on Christians in governorates across Egypt, including Luxor, Marsa Matrouh, Minya, North Sinai, Port Said, and Qena. (...)

Read the [full article](#). **III. Security Council Holds Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict**
1. Security Council Holds Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: ICRtoP outline of debate

19 August 2013

On Monday 19 August, World Humanitarian Day, the United Nations Security Council held its third open debate of 2013 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (POC). POC has been a thematic issue on the Security Council agenda since 1999 and focuses on the protection obligations and capacities of governments and the role of the Council in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including refugees, internally displaced persons, and women and children in armed conflict. The purpose of this debate was to contribute to a discussion by the Council and the broader membership in anticipation of the next report of the Secretary-General, expected on 17 November 2013.

The debate focused on the following points: enhancing compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law; ensuring humanitarian access to affected populations; and strengthening accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

53 delegations participated in the debate. During his opening remarks, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

[reminded](#)

delegations that “Protecting civilians demands timely political action and prevention. It means helping governments -- who have primary responsibility for protection -- to build the necessary capacity.”

The Secretary-General was followed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay (both by video-conference), as well as the International Committee of Red Cross Director for International Law and Cooperation, Philip Spoerri.

During the debate, several Member States referenced the Responsibility to Protect. Australia [stated](#)

that “Protecting civilians is primarily a national responsibility. But where national authorities fail and mass atrocity crimes occur, the international community – including this Council – must be prepared to act to meet our responsibility to protect.” The United States

[noted](#)

that, while the protection of civilians was the primary responsibility of states, “it is clear that the international community must keep our attention focused sharply on the practical steps we can take to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflict and we must redouble our efforts to ensure that this Council is not sitting on the sidelines when civilian populations are in grave danger.” Brazil

[declared](#)

that prevention was the most effective strategy to protect civilians, a belief echoed by Spain, who

[asserted](#)

that the protection of civilians required the adoption of measures to “prevent, protect and punish”.

Several delegations, including the

[UK](#)

, Brazil, U.S.,

[Malaysia](#)

, Estonia,

[EU](#)

, Uganda, Spain, Armenia and Croatia, declared that establishing a culture of accountability would be essential for ensuring the protection of civilians. Hungary

[noted](#)

that the lack of accountability established “a breeding ground for future atrocities.”

The ICRtoP will upload transcripts/statements from the debate to its website as they become available.

Visit the ICRtoP's coverage of past POC debates [here](#)

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IV. Civil society advocacy on other RtoP related crises and situations

1. Aleppo satellite images show devastation, mass displacement one year on

Amnesty International

7 August 2013

[New satellite images of Aleppo](#)

provide the most recent evidence of how the protracted conflict in Syria is resulting in massive human rights violations against the civilian population which is bearing the brunt of the spiralling violence, displacement, and humanitarian crisis.

The new analysis – one of the most comprehensive satellite image analyses of an active conflict zone to date – shows alarming trends in how the conflict is being fought: with utter disregard for the rules of International Humanitarian Law, causing extensive destruction, death, and displacement. The analysis was produced by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in collaboration with the Science for Human Rights program of Amnesty International. (...)

By documenting the vast damage to Aleppo's infrastructure since that warning was issued, the newly released analysis conducted by the AAAS leaves little question as to a significant cause for the staggering displacement of half of the city's population: a campaign of indiscriminate air bombardment by government forces, which have also reduced entire areas to rubble and killed and maimed countless civilians. (...)

With analysis of seven new images over a nine month period (early September 2012 to late May 2013), the project represents the most comprehensive physical damage assessment of Syria's largest city to date. (...)

End the International Paralysis

Combined with Amnesty International's own field research and citizen video, the satellite image

analysis adds to a growing body of evidence of potential war crimes in the conduct of the Syria conflict. Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the U.N. Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, which would send an unequivocal message to the parties that anyone committing or ordering war crimes or crimes against humanity will be held accountable.(...)

To read the full article, click

[here](#)

2. Sudan: The Economics of Ethnic Cleansing

John Prendergast, Omer Ismail, and Akshaya Kumar

The Enough Project

8 August 2013

Economic imperatives are now a major driving force for escalating violence in Darfur, says a [new Enough Project report](#)

. Based on research from a recent trip to the region, the report confirms that the Sudanese government is sponsoring violent clashes to strategically pacify restless janjaweed militias and consolidate economic control over Darfur's rich natural resources. (...)

Since the height of genocide in 2003-2005, the government of Sudan has relied on militia groups, acting as proxies, to carry out the regime's security interests in Darfur where Sudan Armed Forces are weak. In recent years, the government budget has declined, leaving the Sudanese government unable to fulfill patronage obligations. To appease weakened alliances and loyalty among militia groups, the regime now secures its interests by allowing these militias to loot and pillage with complete impunity and keep the spoils as a form of compensation.

Omer Ismail, Darfuri Activist and Enough Project Senior Advisor states:

"As the regime struggles to stay afloat economically and pacify Janjaweed militias looking for greater compensation, Sudanese government officials are increasingly willing to fan the flames of violence, even against some of their traditional allies. The refugees we talked to in Chad explained that the 'chameleon is switching its colors'. Now, for economic reasons, government-backed Arab militias are even attacking other Arab communities."

Competing Arab groups have clashed in the past. However, the patterns of recent violence reveal that the systematic nature of attacks aligns with Khartoum's underlying strategy: consolidating control of Darfur's economy and appeasing Janjaweed militias that the government needs for its fight against the rebel Sudan Revolutionary Front. The report states that a closer look at the common threads of economic motivations for militia groups and the Sudanese government's patronage networks reveals that motives are visible, as follows:

- North Darfur's gold: Long-favored Abbala tribe cleared the Jebel Amer gold mining area of traditional Beni Hussein custodians but then grew dissatisfied and declared their own rebellion.
- South Darfur's gum arabic: Beni Halba cleared gum arabic producing areas of Gimr with support of second vice president.
- Central Darfur's arable land: Ali Kosheib's Taaysha pushed Salamaat off their land with support from Minister of Finance.
- Nyala clashes: In a rare fissure, Janjaweed and National Security and Intelligence Service forces clashed in South Darfur following a dispute over spoils from an extortion scheme.

By pitting regional groups against each other, Khartoum has been able to seize lucrative resources throughout the region while attributing violence to historical tribal conflicts. Now, clashes between tribes regularly occur around the gold mines in North Darfur, gum arabic groves in South Darfur and fertile lands of Central Darfur, often driving out civilian populations and destroying towns.

John Prendergast, Enough Project Co-Founder states: "Crafting a durable solution to the unfolding human catastrophe in Darfur requires understanding the economic drivers of the violence. (...) Civilians are suffering the consequences." (...)

Akshaya Kumar, Sudan and South Sudan Policy Analyst states: "The Sudanese government's continued inaction in the face of systematic ethnic cleansing campaigns is a clear failure of its responsibility to protect its own. Now it won't even allow refugee aid workers into the country. When a state won't fulfill its duties to its people, the international community's responsibility to act is triggered."

The report concludes that peace efforts in Darfur since the mid-2000s have intensified conflict instead of reducing it. Real solutions, the authors write, will only come if the United States and its international partners can play a major role in helping construct a new comprehensive national peace process that replaces the region-specific initiatives, and addresses the core issues that drive violence in Darfur, and include the interests of the rebels and general population.

Read the full
[report](#)

Read the full
[press release.](#)

3. The Sentinel Project for Genocide Prevention: A Blueprint for Local, Nonviolent Responses to Mass Atrocities

Danny Hirschel-Burns

8 August 2013

Part One:

The task of preventing and responding to mass atrocities mostly falls to international organizations. While the UN and other regional organizations often develop approaches to mass atrocities and political violence, bureaucracy and competing political interests inhibit timely and effective mitigation efforts. In light of this response gap, the persistently common occurrence of intrastate wars, and a peacebuilding culture that disproportionately focuses on the national level, prevention and response strategies must further examine how communities can protect themselves from the specter of mass killing.

To understand how nonviolent, local responses to mass atrocities can be effective, a brief typology of mass atrocities is helpful. According to Harff (2003) and Valentino (2004), mass atrocities almost always occur during war. In these moments of upheaval, extremists have a better chance of seizing power and the pursuing their radical goals. While such agendas certainly do not always lead to mass killing, if perpetrators do not see another way to achieve their goal mass atrocities often result. (...) Other conditions that have been demonstrated to be conducive to mass atrocities are: authoritarian regimes, group-based inequality, political polarization, and the existence of two main ethnic groups in which one is much smaller than the other. (...)

While scholars such as Daniel Goldhagen have argued that mass atrocities occur because of widespread hate and complicity among the perpetrator group, the reality is more complex. Valentino argues that for mass atrocities to occur, it really only takes a small group of perpetrators in power and the complicity of society, which is uncomfortably often quite forthcoming. Even in historical mass atrocities such as Rwanda, a relatively small number of individuals actually participated in the killing. Killers are almost always part of military or

paramilitary organizations, though civilians do play a large role in obtaining information and giving denunciations to armed actors. In that sense are mass atrocities often quite personal. As Kalyvas points out, these micro-level interactions help explain the often vast variation in violence levels by area in civil wars.

Responding nonviolently to mass atrocities on the local level is often a necessity as communities rarely have the military might to take on armed actors (though [vigilante groups in Mexico](#) and village defense forces in Colombia and Liberia are examples). (...) However, scholarship on atrocity prevention and response has historically neglected the role that civilians play in their own defense (that fact was a main motivator for conducting this research). Scholars frequently and erroneously charge that once violence in a mass atrocity situation has begun, there is little civilians can do to stop it. This statement relies on two false assumptions. First, it sees violence as dichotomous: either there is a mass atrocity or there isn't. Mass atrocities are a process in which violence builds and self-reinforces. Certainly it becomes harder for civilians to intervene further along in the process, but that does not mean there is a point at which they immediately lose all effectiveness. Second, it ignores the role civilians play in encouraging or slowing violence. Numerous historical examples, from Colombia to Greece to the Philippines (Kaplan, Kalyvas, and Hancock and Mitchell respectively) demonstrate how civilians are able to decrease violence through strategic interactions with armed forces. Finally, an emerging theme in conflict scholarship (Autesserre, Kalyvas, [Kaplan](#)) is attempting to understand the micro-dynamics of violence. While more scholarship is certainly needed on the subject, the influence of individual civilians and communities on the course of armed conflict is likely larger than scholars previously believed.

Read the full [post](#)

Part Two:

(Published on 16 August 2013).

Separating mass atrocities into categories risks oversimplification, but different response strategies apply to different types of violence. Therefore, modern-day mass atrocities can broadly be separated into two categories: counterinsurgency (COIN) and communal. While this division risks empirical oversimplification and many scenarios have elements of both, delineating the two allows for a more concise construction of the logic behind civilian self-protection.

During counterinsurgencies, the flow of information is the central cause of mass atrocities.

Combatants use civilians to gather information about enemy troop movements and the identity of civilian supporters of the opposition. (...)

To counter these issues, there are a few basic measures civilians can take. Collectively, these measures are most coherently contained within the concept of “Zones of Peace” (ZoP’s). ZoP’s have been established in varying forms and with varying levels of success around the world. They rest on the basic principle of civilian non-participation in COIN. In his study of ZoPs in Colombia, Kaplan lists a few generalizable strategies communities can use: Creating a culture of peace, implementing conflict resolution processes, creating internal investigative bodies that have the trust of armed actors, and naming and shaming. The first two help prevent civilians from using armed actors to settle disputes, while the second solves the information problem for armed actors. If combatants are confident that a certain community is not aiding any armed group, then they are much less likely to target the community. Finally, the last strategy allows civilians to shame certain armed actors that have committed abuses. If the guilty parties need to maintain good relations with NGOs, foreign governments, and local civilians, they may refrain from committing atrocities in the future. One final strategy is for civilians to confront armed groups en masse and demand an end to atrocities. While confrontation carries a high element of risk, if an armed group is hesitant to kill large numbers of civilians at the same time, it can be effective.

Responding to communal conflict differs from COIN mass atrocity mitigation, but the difference is not as clear as one might think. In both situations, civilians become the intentional targets of violence as part of a process in which other goals necessitate the use of violence directed against civilians. One commonly advocated strategy to address communal violence, particularly among studies examining the Holocaust, is to identify societies with deep social cleavages and cultures conducive to mass killing, and then attempt to positively change those elements through public messaging. However, since explanations focused on pre-existing societal rifts seem to poorly explain why mass atrocities emerge and these rifts are widespread and deeply-rooted in many societies, addressing such issues directly would require huge resources (human, financial, and institutional). Instead, addressing “hot spots” (as mass atrocities are often committed and directed by a very small group) with contact programs or education aimed at violence-reduction could be effective. (...)

Two other locally-focused strategies that hold promise for mass atrocities violence mitigation are locally-led advanced mobile aid (LLAMA) and localized conflict early warning systems (LCEWS).

[LLAMA](#)

provides, quick, mobile humanitarian aid to communities at risk that are beyond the political, geographic, or temporal reach of traditional aid agencies. It can also be adapted for

[civilian protection in conflict situations](#)

. It can improve information flow to isolated, at-risk communities and provide them with the information and the means to move to lower-risk areas when physical escape is the best option.

[#160;LCEWS](#)

are another important strategy.

Currently, early warning systems mostly exist at the level of national or international organizations, which according to Barrs, creates the problem that “alerts, bulletins, and reports are sent around the world in real time. Yet they rarely touch ground where the killing happens. (...)

Ultimately, there are plenty of strategies out there for nonviolent, local mass atrocities mitigation, but the growing abundance of such studies has been largely ignored by policy makers. So while policy makers would do well to accept less bureaucratic, nonviolent, and local methods for preventing and responding to mass atrocities, scholars also need to expand this idea theoretically, rather than the conceptually and geographically limited studies that populate the majority of the relevant literature. A key question still remains: how do perpetrators and victims actually interact? (...)

Read the [full post](#).

4. Iraq: Attacks Amount to Crimes Against Humanity

Human Rights Watch

11 August 2013

(Baghdad) – Militants who carried out a series of bomb attacks in

[Iraq](#)

on July 29, 2013, deliberately killing more than 60 people committed crimes against humanity, Human Rights Watch said today. Crimes against humanity are some of the most serious crimes under international law.

The Islamic State of Iraq, as Al-Qaeda in Iraq now calls itself, has

[claimed](#)

responsibility, saying publicly that it organized and committed the July 29 attacks and a series of others over the last four months. Al-Qaeda in Iraq has issued statements claiming responsibility for numerous lethal suicide, car bomb, and other attacks in Iraq that, taken together, amount to an ongoing and systematic policy of killing civilians in gross breach of international law. On August 6 and August 10, another series of car bombs targeted busy markets, shopping streets, and parks where families were celebrating the end of Ramadan in and around Baghdad, killing

at least 130 people, though no one has claimed responsibility.

“The July 29 attacks, coming on top of other horrific attacks in recent months, provide clear evidence that Al-Qaeda in Iraq is guilty of crimes against humanity,” said

[Joe Stork](#)

, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “No political goal or grievance can possibly justify this widespread and organized murder campaign, which is wreaking terrible suffering on Iraqis.”

The July 29 attacks were some of the deadliest of 2013. The car bomb explosions, predominantly in Shia neighborhoods in Baghdad, killed more than 60 people and injured hundreds more, including many civilians. They were part of a surge of bomb attacks by al-Qaeda and other militant groups during Ramadan in both Shia and Sunni areas. Attacks also targeted state institutions and military installations.

Together, these attacks made July the bloodiest month in over five years according to the United Nations. On August 1, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) released [figures](#) showing that acts of terrorism and violence in July claimed the lives of 1,057 Iraqis and wounded 2,326 others. The dead included 204 police officers and 129 members of the Iraqi Security Forces. (...)

(...) Crimes against humanity are crimes of universal jurisdiction, meaning that those responsible, including those complicit in such crimes, can be prosecuted anywhere in the world. As a matter of customary international law, the term “crimes against humanity” includes a range of serious human rights abuses, including murder, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack by a government or organized non-state group against a civilian population.

Those who commit crimes against humanity, order, or are otherwise complicit, should be held individually criminally responsible for their actions, Human Rights Watch said.

The Iraqi authorities’ failure to hold anyone accountable for security force violence against Sunni protesters, their widespread use of torture to extract confessions from detainees, regardless of their sect, and the courts’ reliance on secret informant testimony that the defense cannot see and coerced confessions to issue arrest warrants and obtain convictions may constitute a failure to take the necessary steps to prevent and prosecute crimes against humanity.

Iraqi authorities need to take all possible measures to protect the right to life through ending these attacks. They should identify, arrest, and prosecute those responsible, and others

complicit in assisting the attacks. To do that, Iraqi authorities should undertake urgently needed criminal justice reforms, including revising the Draconian anti-terror law.

Iraqi authorities should also repeal criminal procedure code articles that allow the use of secret informant testimony and coerced confessions that taint court proceedings. Judges and security officials should base convictions on evidence, not on confessions, which may be coerced. The government should put into effect a zero-tolerance policy for bribery, which permeates much of the justice system, ranging from detention officials who seek bribes to release detainees to security forces who bribe judges for false or after-the-fact arrest warrant. (...)

Read the
[full article.](#)