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Iraq: Spate of suicide bombings against civilians are crimes against humanity

A wave of suicide bombings targeting school children and Shi'a pilgrims over the weekend marks a deplorable turn in the current surge in violence, said Amnesty International.

In the latest attacks at least 22 people were killed today in a fresh wave of explosions in Baghdad.

"Deliberately killing civilians can never be justified. These latest attacks are war crimes and are part of a widespread attack against civilians in Iraq that amounts to crimes against humanity," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Deputy Programme Director.

The attacks, which included suicide bombings in a school playground in northern Iraq and on Shi'a pilgrims in the capital, left scores of people dead, including at least 12 children.

The violence in various parts of the country has been surging to levels not seen in several years. No armed group has yet claimed responsibility for the latest series of attacks, but they bear the hallmarks of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), an al-Qa'ida affiliate.

ISIS has claimed responsibility for attacks that have killed hundreds of civilians, including many Shi'a, around Iraq in the last few months. Its purported aim is to ignite a full sectarian war between Sunni and Shi'a Iraqis, similar to the one that ravaged the country in 2006-7.

Latest wave of attacks

On 6 October a man driving a lorry full of explosives blew himself up at a primary school in the Shi'a Turkmen village of Qabak just outside the town of Tal-'Afar, 70km north-west of Mosul in northern Iraq. At least 12 children aged between six and 12 were killed and scores were injured.

It came a day after three separate attacks on 5 October.

In Baghdad, another suicide bomber attacked a crowd of Shi'a pilgrims in al-Adhamiya district on the eve of the anniversary of the death of a revered Shi'a Imam, killing at least 51 people and injuring at least 70

Also on 5 October a suicide bomber struck a café in Balad, north of Baghdad, killing at least 12 people and wounding at least 25 others.

The same day in Mosul, two media workers for the satellite television channel al-Sharqiya, correspondent Mohammad Karim al-Badrani and cameraman Mohammad Ghanem, were shot dead by armed men. Al-Sharqiya said that the two men had previously received threats because of their reporting on security issues.

Iraq's head of Parliament Ussama al-Nujaifi condemned these latest attacks and urged the government to do more to protect the population.

“Armed groups must immediately end deliberate attacks on civilians. The Iraqi government must do more to protect the civilian population from such attacks, and ensure prompt, independent and impartial investigations into these crimes,” said Hassiba Hadj Saharaoui.

According to the group Iraq Body Count, 229 civilians have been killed around Iraq since the beginning of October, and more than 6,000 so far this year, the highest death toll since 2008.