
ISIS takes 550 families as 'human shields' in Mosul – UN

21/10/2016



Islamic State militants have taken some 550 families from villages around Mosul, and are thought to be holding them as 'human shields' close to jihadists' locations in the strategic Iraqi city, a spokeswoman for the UN human rights office said.

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Citing “*corroborated information*,” UN spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said the office is also investigating reports that Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL) militants had killed 40 civilians in one village, Reuters reported.

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Earlier this week, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) sounded the alarm amid the carnage surrounding the recapture of Mosul and concerns that IS militants may unleash chemical attacks and use tens of thousands as human shields.

"Tens of thousands of people may be forcibly expelled, they will be getting trapped between fighting lines under siege, they may even be held as human shields," IOM's chief of mission for Iraq, Thomas Weiss, told Reuters.

The battle for Mosul, which was held by Islamic State since 2014, began on Sunday, and has since intensified. The Iraqi military and US-led coalition said that the operation to retake Mosul may last weeks or even months.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said on Thursday that the battle for Mosul is decisive both militarily and ideologically because it's about "*stabbing Islamic State in its very heart.*"

Read more [ISIS in Mosul may use chemical weapons & 1,000s of civilians as human shields – IOM](#)

The [UN says](#) Mosul could require the "*largest and most complex*" humanitarian relief operation in the world, with up to 1 million people forced from their homes as a result of the operation against Islamic State militants.

"There are real fears that the offensive to retake Mosul could produce a humanitarian catastrophe resulting in one of the largest man-made displacement crises in recent years," William Spindler, the spokesperson for the Office of

the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said earlier this week.

There are already some 3.3 million displaced Iraqis – approximately 10 percent of the population – according to the UN.

“The enormity of the potential displacement raises also considerable concerns about the protection of civilian populations,” Spindler said.

“For example, some could be prevented from fleeing or could face restrictions of movement to safe areas and access to humanitarian assistance,” he added.

Islamic State seized Mosul in June of 2014, when it was Iraq's second-largest city. The terrorist group's leader then turned it into a major military stronghold, and it is believed that between 4,000 and 8,000 IS militants are entrenched there, according to Reuters.
