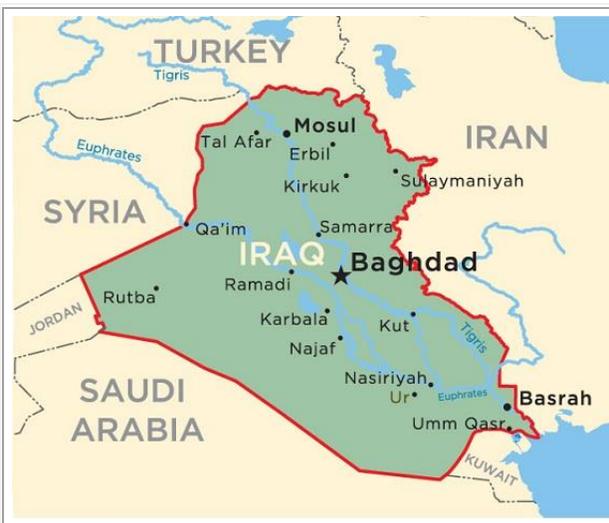


Iraq Trade Union Bulletin



Iraqi Workers and Their Unions under ISIS

Since June 10, 2014, when ISIS invaded and took control over large regions of Iraq north of Baghdad, Iraqi workers and their families have faced unemployment, violence, displacement—and sometimes murder. Many businesses and work sites have closed due to violent clashes between ISIS and military forces, especially in cities such as Mosul, Tikrit, Ramadi and some parts of Diyala.



ISIS broke into the trade union federation's building when it invaded Mosul, assuming that trade unions were part of the government structure. Far worse, unionists have faced the risk of ISIS attacks, as demonstrated by the September 2014 kidnapping and execution of the wife of a union leader in the Ninawa branch of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW).

Effective union activity is not possible under these circumstances. Millions of Iraqis have fled their homes and re-

located to safer cities in Iraq, including Iraqi Kurdistan. Most workplaces have closed in and around Mosul and the other cities noted above. Local economies have collapsed and an enormous number of workers and their families have been forced to flee their homes and jobs and relocate, especially ethnic minorities such as Yazidis, Sabians, Shabak and Christians. Some 600 small businesses, mostly shops, have closed at the mechanical sector in Mosul, for example, and hundreds more in other ISIS-controlled areas. Living standards and health are deteriorating, as thousands of jobless workers have no way to support their families.

The president of the Salah Al Din branch of the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI) describes grave economic conditions for workers and their families as inflation soars and goods and services disappear from the market. At great

personal risk, leaders of the Salah al Din Federation follow up on the conditions of workers and maintain communications with workers and union members. Recently, the federation found a successful solution for getting wages to workers who had not been paid (included in this bulletin edition).

Ongoing fighting in Anbar Governorate has destroyed much of the infrastructure and, with investment ending, unemployment and the rate of internally displaced people (IDPs) is skyrocketing. Anbar's humanitarian, social and economic crisis under ISIS will likely last decades.

The following is a snapshot of the current crisis under ISIS Iraqi workers confront every day.

Municipality Workers in Salah Al Din Executed

ISIS kidnapped and murdered eight public service-sector workers after they questioned the group's authority and protested arbitrary work policies, according to FWCUI. In an October 22, 2014 article, [FWCUI writes](#) that the decomposed bodies of the cleaning workers were found a month after they disappeared. The union reports that ISIS forced the workers to work without pay, and when they demanded wages, ISIS gathered more than 40 of them at the main parade park in Tikrit, where they kidnapped the eight workers ([Arabic version here](#)).

GFIW Branch in Mosul Attacked

Union members from ISIS-controlled areas have reported receiving threats from ISIS because of their union involvement. ISIS militants stole cars and money from the GFIW branch in Mosul and also confiscated the house and car of the branch president, who discussed the situation with Solidarity Center staff. He said he was forced to leave with no belongings and was shot in his leg when he tried to save his family. He said that in addition to his union activity, his family likely was targeted because his wife planned to run for Parliament. Many union members report they fled Mosul and other ISIS-controlled areas, such as Salah el Din and Anbar, due to the threats and intimidation.

The Impact of Displacement

Solidarity Center staff in late October visited the Arbat camp for internally displaced Iraqis, some 30 kilometers (about 19 miles) from the center of Sulaimanyya. Staff met and talked with workers like Abdul Rahman, who said he arrived at Arbat camp in August after Ninawa was attacked. Rahman is a farmer whose family owns a 1,250-hectare farm that employed many people from the villages around Mosul, now controlled by ISIS. He said his home has been ransacked and the land set to waste and that his brother and 31 others were killed. He made it clear he does not want

handouts: He wants to work to provide for his family because he cannot go back. He explained that his community wants to work, they want to provide, they do not want the life in the camp. With passion in his eyes he said, "Give me vocational education—teach me to cut hair—and I will set up a place and earn for family and community."

Murad, 40, is a Yazidi from Sinjar who told Solidarity Center staff that before his family was displaced, he taught school. Married with eight children, he said after his house was destroyed, he and his family fled to Mount Sinjar. Thousands of Yazidis fled to the peak; hundreds were surrounded and stranded for months. Although he escaped, many of his family and friends did not. ISIS militants killed the Yazidi men they captured and sexually abused and enslaved the women. In one family, 21 women were taken, some as young as 14 years old. Murad talked about his family's nine days on the mountain and how they ate leaves from trees to survive. Many Yazidis perished in the hostile environment without food and water. It was particularly hard on the children, who quickly dehydrated. Today, Murad said he just wants to work and to continue his children's education.

Muhammed, a Sunni from Al Abaaj, has two wives and four children, one of them born in the camp. He lost his house and possessions when ISIS learned he was a police officer—and so, in the view of ISIS, an agent of the state. When ISIS arrived, his unit had received an order to leave Al Abaaj, so he left his family. After he reached Kurdistan, he succeeded in getting his family out of Al Abaaj. He says he never wants to go back.



Iraqi workers, unpaid for weeks, waged a series of protest rallies in recent months.

Iraqi Unions Respond

Despite horrendous conditions, the Iraqi trade union movement remains resilient. Here are a few recent actions.

- In January, hundreds of contract employees at the Ministry of Electricity rallied in Baghdad, demanding full-time employment. They also demanded the government re-activate the article in the 2015 budget that would transition them from temporary to permanent employees
- Dozens of employees from a Basra-based petrochemical company [marched in late January](#) to protest not receiving their salaries for the past three months. The protestors cut traffic on the main highway connecting Basra with the town of Safwan. They demanded immediate back wages and future wage payments to come from the central government because, although companies are required to generate sufficient operating revenue to pay 40 percent of workers' salaries, they have repeatedly been unable to do so.

Many of the protesting employees called on the Basra government to intervene with the central government to secure their salaries.

- Workers of self-funded companies affiliated to the Ministry of Industry also [protested in recent months](#) to demand their salaries, unpaid for three months, and to switch their payment system to the central budget. On December 1, 2014, hundreds of workers from several Ministry of Industry companies gathered at the headquarters of the leather industries company in the center of Baghdad. They [urged the government](#) to develop Iraq's industrial sector, activate all non-functioning factories and establish a multisource economy not dependent upon oil exports. Workers also seek freedom of association for public-sector employees. Other demands included calls for social and economic reforms, rejection of privatization policies, condemnation of administrative and financial corruption in state enterprises, and a reduction of salaries, privileges and allowances enjoyed by members of the three senior governmental authorities.



Iraqi workers have been standing up for their rights across Iraq. Credit: Wesam Chesab Ouda

- Unions continue to work to defend worker rights even in ISIS-controlled areas of Iraq. The General Federation of Workers and Unions in Iraq (GWUI) organizers recently held a workshop for telecommunication workers in Salah Al Dein to educate them about their rights under international financial institutions lending standards. The Solidarity Center trained the organizers at a November 2014 workshop.
- The FWCUI branch in Salah al Din negotiated an agreement with the government to pay more than 1,000 workers at a factory under ISIS control two months in unpaid wages. The government had been unable to transfer their funds directly because Daesh would have intercepted them. The workers would not have received their salaries without the FWCUI intervening on their behalf.

- - Labor and other civil society participants took part a recent [conference](#) of the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI), in Oslo, Norway, where they agreed upon joint actions for 2015. They plan to urge the government to assist workers affected by the conflict by providing compensation and social security to reduce the social and economic impact many workers and their families are experiencing. Labor participants, who included Solidarity Center staff, made important links with other civil society organizations to further much-needed collaboration at a time of societal tension. Read presentations by Solidarity Center staff [Wesam Chaseb Ouda](#), and union activists [Ilham Abdul Maaboud Majeed](#) and [Talib Hashim Jabur](#).

Read related union statements:

- GFIW statement on women under ISIS in [English](#) and [Arabic](#).
- [FWCUI statement on recent events in Mosul and other Iraqi cities](#).
- GFWUI statement on effect of events in Iraq on workers ([English](#)) and ([Arabic](#)).

Watch videos of worker rallies (shot by Wesam Chesab

Ouda):

- [Iraqi Workers protest in Baghdad, January 26, 2015](#)
- [Iraqi Workers protest in Baghdad, December 1, 2014](#)

Read More on the Impact of ISIS on Iraqi Working Peoples' Lives

<http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-islamic-state-mosul-20150126-story.html#page=1>

http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?id=736125&news_type=Top&lang=en

Solidarity Center
888 16th Street NW, Suite 400 | Washington, DC 20006
| information@solidaritycenter.org
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