

More than 6,000 corpses found in Iraq in five months

By [Kadhem al-Attabi](#)

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Baghdad – Every morning as ambulance cars and police vehicles rush to the hospital in Bab al-Mo'adham carrying corpses of unidentified victims, a queue of women, teenagers and elderly men forms in front of the morgue as people search for their relatives, fearing they might be found among the bodies.

Usually, one of their family member is lost or kidnapped by gunmen and then turns up after a week or so later as a corpse with gunshot wounds on the body, a further victim of the latest wave of sectarian violence that has swept through Iraq in recent months.

Iraq's main morgue had never received that huge number of corpses on a daily basis – not since modern Iraq was established in 1920s.

According to statistics by Iraq's morgues institute, 6,002 corpses were found in the past five months: 1,068 in January, 1,110 in February, 1,294 in March, 1,155 in April and 1,375 in May.

Most of the corpses had gunshot wounds, while others showed marks of burns or electrocution.

Morgues institute officials said that since the institute was established in 1927, it had never received such a huge number of corpses as currently, with the daily average now 35 to 50 per day.

Before the US-led coalition invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the institute used to receive only seven to 10 corpses per day.

In occupied and conflict-ridden Iraq, the morgues have become the daily destination for at least 100 Iraqis looking for their relatives who were kidnapped by militiamen or who were killed in explosions.

'I came from al-Mada'en in search of my son Saad who was lost 12 days ago and we could not identify him in the photos that we saw inside the hall,' said Ahmed Ibrahim, 62.

'For two months, I have been visiting here in search of my husband whom I don't know anything about since he left for work in al-Shorja marketplace in Baghdad,' said 41-year-old Elham Khalil.

An official at the morgues institute said that unclaimed corpses are buried in the state cemetery, Karbala cemetery, Najaf cemetery and Mohammed Sakran cemetery in Baghdad.

He said that the burial procedures take place following judicial authorization that requires maps for locating the burial sites in the event that the bodies need to be located later on.

'Most of the corpses we receive are brought in by police patrols who usually find the corpses in far-off and waste areas and at the gates of the cities, handcuffed, some with gunshot wounds and torture marks,' the employer said.

Spokesman for the Iraqi Health Ministry said that the ministry has required health officials in Baghdad not to receive any unidentified corpses and that unidentified corpses should only be received by the morgues institute.

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