

Executive Summary

During the June 2017 reporting period, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) officially launched operations to recapture the ISIL-held stronghold of Raqqa. Iraqi Security Forces advanced in Mosul, entering the Old City, and conducted clearing operations in recaptured territories. As this reporting period was ending, military activity in the Old City was increasing as the final meters of territory held by ISIL were coming under fire by ISF and US-led Coalition airstrikes. Thousands of civilians were trapped in Raqqa and Mosul, raising concerns about the risks of high noncombatant casualties as a result of ongoing military activity and aerial bombardment. Cultural heritage sites in these urban environments sustained significant damage, and additional damage incidents appear to be inevitable.

Efforts to recapture the city of Raqqa officially opened on June 6, following months of encircling efforts by the SDF. US-led Coalition Forces conducted extensive aerial bombardment in support of these operations, resulting in extensive damage and reports of dozens of civilian casualties. ASOR CHI documented at least 15 heritage sites in Raqqa damaged since early June 2017. ASOR CHI remains concerned about the widespread scale of destruction as a result of intense aerial bombardment.

In Iraq, operations to recapture Mosul continued to inflict heavy damage to much of the Old City. As Iraqi forces approached the iconic al-Nuri al-Kabir Mosque on June 21, ISIL militants detonated fixed explosive charges

