

More than 200 mass graves of IS victims found

BAGHDAD: More than 200 mass graves have been uncovered in Iraq in areas formerly controlled by the so-called Islamic State militant group, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

The graves contain the remains of thousands of people, believed to be the victims of the hard-line Sunni group, who between June and December 2014, overran large swathes of northern Iraq and declared it part of their so-called caliphate.

The dead include women, children, the elderly and disabled, as well as members of Iraq's armed forces and police, a UN report said.

The United Nations has said previously that almost 33,000 civilians were killed by the group in Iraq, with more than 55,000 injured.

The grave sites are concentrated in four provinces – Ninewa, Kiruk, Salah al-Din and Anbar – in the north and western parts of the country, near the border with Syria.

IS had entrenched itself in these areas until their defeat in December 2017 by Iraqi forces supported by a US-led coalition.

The United States estimates between 6,000-12,000 bodies are contained in the 202 graves documented in the report. But exact numbers were difficult to establish, it said, since only 28 mass graves have been excavated so far, with just 1,258 bodies exhumed.

These deaths occurred in what the United Nations has called a systematic and widespread campaign of violence, “which may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide”.