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## 'I have never seen such horrific crimes against humanity': Hermoine Macura documents life under Islamic State

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👤 Gillian McNally The Daily Telegraph



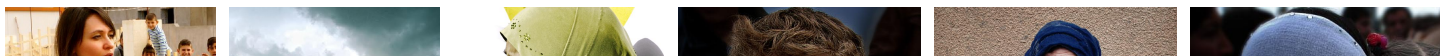
Hermoine Macura, right, with fellow photographer Sara von Kienneger at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan on the border near Syria. Picture: Courtesy: Straight Street Media

- **Warning: Contains some graphic content**

SYDNEY-born journalist Hermoine Macura has spent the past decade witnessing firsthand the rise of Islamic State and its reign of terror.

Raised in Maroubra and now based in the United Arab Emirates, [the TV anchor is one of the most trusted faces of news](#) in the Middle East and has an audience of 80 million.

Having arrived in the region after 9/11, Ms Macura, 35, has travelled deep into Syria and Iraq to cover the extremist group's horrific attacks that have torn the Arab world apart.





A prolific photographer, much of her work is with IS survivors, especially women and children, and she says the Paris attacks are just a minor slice of IS's bloody rampage through the Middle East and North Africa.

"Europe is only seeing a glimpse of what this group has been doing for the last 18 months in the Arab world," Ms Macura told [The Daily Telegraph](#).

"In Iraq and Syria, thousands have died at the hands of IS militants."

As the attacks unfolded in Beirut and Paris, an exhibition of Ms Macura's photos opened in New York featuring images that capture the humanity and heartache of her adopted home.

Here, The Daily Telegraph features the Wollongong University graduate's photographs and speaks to her about life under the constant threat of terror.

**You have worked in the Middle East since 9/11 when the Taliban and al-Qaeda were the headlines. What has changed with the rise of IS?**

The emergence of Islamic State has caused havoc across the Arab world and sparked a humanitarian crisis that has displaced millions of people, especially Arab Muslims who have had to flee for their lives.

Other minority groups such as the Shia Muslims and Yazidis have also been mercilessly killed in mass executions and their women enslaved.

Arab Christians, who make up less than 10 per cent of the Arab world, have also had to pay an Islamic tax to stay or flee for their lives.

Children as young as six years old are being raped and tortured.

I have never seen such horrific crimes against humanity in all my years as a journalist.

**What is the current feeling in the region following the Paris and Beirut attacks?**

Most Arabs are horrified by any act of terrorism and of course feel devastated to see the loss of life.

The majority of Arabs has suffered under harsh dictators and extremist movements for decades, however IS has taken it to another level.

In Iraq and Syria, thousands have died at the hands of IS militants.

**What are some of the worst stories you have encountered from IS survivors?**

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Women are enslaved and sold for as little as \$US50. Virgins are sold at a higher price.

Women are commodities in the Islamic State, currently the size of the UK.

Some refugees begged me to take their children with me as they were terrified IS would take them and raise them as child soldiers or abuse them.

I've reported on countless women who have been systematically raped and tortured. Some Syrian women had babies cut out of their stomachs and others had metal pipes inserted into their private parts and rodents released into them which tore their insides to pieces.

Some young girls were sold and raped by three soldiers a day.

I've reported on a priest who was held hostage by IS and despite his family paying the ransom, they killed him and chopped him into pieces and sent it to his family.

Men are also raped and tortured. Around 20 per cent of rape cases involve male victims.

### **Do you think jihadists are hiding among refugees fleeing Syria?**

This is a huge concern and of course it is the reality we are now having to deal with. The solution to take in refugees is not sustainable.

The majority of people that need help are still stuck in Syria and Iraq and can't get out.

And while the majority of immigrants and refugees arriving on Europe's shores are just seeking safety and security in the free world, the fact is that all it takes is just a handful of IS supporters to cause chaos and kill hundreds of people.

### **Your [Faces of the Middle East](#) project reveals the diversity of the Arab world, why is this important?**

My book aims to highlight the hope I see in the common thread of humanity and kindness I have experienced in the region.

It's also important to know that most Arabs and Muslims don't support IS and are disgusted and terrified of them.

I've seen countless Muslims speak out and even risk their lives to denounce IS. Some Islamic leaders in Syria spoke out against them and had their children murdered as a result.

In my opinion, until Islam as a religion is reformed and extremist ideologies and movements eradicated, terror groups like IS will continue to rise and threaten humanity and freedom.

Religion and State need to be separated so laws like the Jaafari law in Iraq — which permits the marriage of nine year old girls — can be eradicated.

### **What are your fears for the region following the Paris attacks?**

These are all just signs of the lack of response from governments to deal with the problem effectively.

It will just get worse if the current coalition formed by the Obama administration doesn't take more stringent action against IS and its supporters.

I love the Arab world and its people — it breaks my heart to see so many people suffering.

### **What gives you hope?**

My faith in God remains my hope and that love will overcome and that justice will prevail.

It's not easy. There is so much darkness and oppression.

Random acts of kindness have also renewed my hope in humanity.

It's amazing what people do for each other when faced with the fight for survival.

As an Australian woman, the peace, prosperity and freedom we enjoy at home also inspires me to fight for justice for others unable to do that for themselves.

### **There is anxiety in Sydney following the Paris attacks. Having lived in a region where the threat is constant, what insights can you offer?**

Criminals and anyone that threatens the safety and security of Australia need to be prosecuted, deported and/or jailed.

Our government is being vigilant when it comes to security and the safety of Australians which is very important.

I also believe building bridges with the Australian Muslim community is important as many Muslims will know who are the IS supporters among their own and will expose them.

It's also important to know that fear mongering, racism, sexism and random attacks against innocent people of Arab origin and Muslims is disgusting and is ignorant.

To persecute them for terror acts committed by an extremist terror group on the other side of the world is not the answer.

One of my Arab friends who immigrated to Australia from Palestine was attacked by a man in Sydney city who called her obscene names and tried to push her around. Other Australians came to her help and defended her.

It broke my heart, as she escaped one war zone to find herself in another type of war zone which she did not expect to see.