

HONOURING VICTIMS OF THE YAZIDI GENOCIDE

Press Statement by Nadia Murad and Barrister Amal Clooney
August 3rd, 2020

It has been six years since ISIS invaded Sinjar, Iraq, and began its campaign of genocide against the Yazidi community. An ethno-religious minority, the Yazidis have survived centuries of persecution in the region. ISIS came with the goal of permanently eradicating them from their homeland and destroying it to prevent any possibility of return. They killed thousands of Yazidis. They kidnapped more than 6,000 women and children and sold them into sexual slavery. And they brainwashed young Yazidi boys and forced them to serve as child soldiers and suicide bombers.

Six years have passed and though ISIS was largely defeated on the battlefield, the effects of the genocide still reverberate throughout the Yazidi community. Over 200,000 Yazidis – almost half of the entire community in Iraq – remain displaced, languishing in camps where they lack access to adequate medical treatment and face an increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. There is no concerted attempt to search for or rescue over 2,800 women and children who remain missing and in captivity in Iraq and Syria. Over 120,000 Yazidis who have returned to Sinjar still lack access to basic services and infrastructure. Yazidis desperately need healthcare, electricity, shelter, clean water and sanitation, education, and opportunities to make a living.

In 2016, the United Nations acknowledged that the crimes committed against the Yazidis constitute genocide. This acknowledgement is critical to the healing process of survivors. But it is only a first step. Survivors deserve justice. They deserve to see ISIS fighters tried for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the elaborate system of sexual slavery that tortured a generation of women and girls. They deserve to see those who are guilty punished for their crimes.

Yet six years after the genocide, only a handful of European countries have taken the lead in holding their foreign nationals accountable. German authorities have also launched the first prosecution for genocide under universal jurisdiction laws. This is an important milestone, and an example to the rest of the world. But this alone is not enough.

ISIS recruited more than 40,000 foreign fighters from 110 countries, many of whom are still detained in Iraq and Syria. The establishment of UNITAD, the UN Investigative Team created by the Security Council, was a vital step to systematically collect evidence of ISIS's crimes in Iraq. But this evidence is only useful if states assume their responsibility to prosecute ISIS perpetrators, either in their national courts, or by supporting prosecutions by the International Criminal Court or a new international court established to hold such trials.

To honour the survivors, the international community and national governments in Iraq must prioritize justice for the Yazidi community and support the rebuilding of their homeland. Until this happens, the crimes against this community will continue.