
**UNITED NATIONS DIGITAL DIALOGUE
COMMEMORATING THE SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GENOCIDAL
CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE YAZIDI MINORITY**

**Remarks by Amal Clooney
3 August 2020**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me to address you today. We are here to mark 6 years since the Yazidi genocide began, and the life of every Yazidi as they knew it came to an end. For many, the 3rd of August 2014 was the last time they saw their mother; held their child, or spoke to their sibling. The last time they felt safe. Or had hope for the future.

We all know what happened. We saw images of thousands of Yazidis crossing mountains to flee murder, rape and pillage in their home. We've heard the testimony of survivors, like Nadia, who were tortured at the hands of a group that preyed on the young and vulnerable. We've read the reports documenting the execution of thousands of Yazidis, the brainwashing of young boys forced to fight on the frontlines, and the subjugation of girls in a system of sexual slavery unlike anything we have witnessed in modern times. ISIS was responsible for this devastation. But the rest of us are responsible for what we did, or did not do, once we knew about it.

It is of course a challenging time for the world. We are fighting a global pandemic, and hope each day for a vaccine. But when I addressed the UN Security Council last year, I said that we were already dealing with a pandemic of a different kind – a pandemic of violence -- including sexual violence -- against women and minorities. I told the Council that the *antidote* was justice. I put forward four alternative pathways to create or empower an international court to put ISIS on trial, including granting jurisdiction to the International Criminal Court or creating a court by treaty between Iraq and the UN. And I said that if we don't act now, it may be too late, because ISIS fighters held in makeshift prisons in Syria were at risk of escape.

I repeated this message to the UN General Assembly in September. And as we are convened once again, a year later, let me update you on what progress has been made on these fronts.

None.

No progress has been made.

None of the pathways to a court have been studied, pursued, or seriously discussed at the United Nations, or by the Security Council.

No conference of foreign ministers has been convened.

No government proposals, or counter-proposals, have been put forward and analysed.

No state has offered to host international trials.

The escapes that we feared took place; with hundreds of prisoners reportedly walking free from ISIS camps last October.

So the update is ‘no progress’ - even though the survivors could not be more deserving, or the perpetrators more reprehensible.

Of course, there are important milestones that we must mark. Credit must go to the UK and the US, and other Security Council members, for spearheading the effort to create a UN investigation now operational in Iraq. Credit must go to European prosecutors, including in Germany, France and the Netherlands, for the trials they have initiated against ISIS fighters and those who bankrolled their crimes. Germany has gone further than any other state by prosecuting an Iraqi national for genocide under universal jurisdiction laws – the first trial of its kind anywhere in the world.

Yet survivors tell me they can’t understand how 6 years after the genocide, the vast majority of ISIS fighters can simply go on with their lives.

So in preparing these remarks, I looked back at how the world has responded to such atrocities in the past. Of course, many gruesome crimes around the world go unpunished every day. But when Hitler’s men murdered 6 million Jews, the world said ‘never again’. And states created the United Nations so that – at least when it comes to *this* crime – the crime of genocide - the world would not stand idly by.

6 years after the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis, an international trial of the 24 principal architects of the genocide had been organised in Nuremberg, Germany, by the US, UK, France and Russia. 19 men had been convicted. And more than 140 lower-level Nazis had been convicted in other trials.

6 years after the Rwandan genocide was the year 2000. By then the UN Security Council had created an international court– on behalf of almost 200 UN member states - and this court, based in Tanzania, had indicted more than 60 people, and convicted 8.

6 years after genocide in Bosnia, an international court in The Hague backed by the UN Security Council had indicted 69 people for crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, and convicted 13.

More recently, we have witnessed genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar. This led 35 states within the UN Human Rights Council to establish an international team to prepare case files against perpetrators. 57 nations support a case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar under the Genocide Convention at the International Court of Justice. And crimes in Myanmar are currently under investigation at the International Criminal Court.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Yazidi survivors deserve no less. The crimes committed by ISIS were committed by individual men and women. And the responsibility of the ‘international community’ to respond is one that also rests with individuals. That means the leaders of states; the diplomats of the United Nations; and all those with influence who can be advocates for justice; each and every one of you. Doing nothing is not only wrong, it is *dangerous*: because these fighters are not going away, and their toxic ideology continues to spread. And justice *is possible now*, just as it has been possible before, if only it is made a priority.

Let me end with a quote from a courageous human rights leader who sadly passed away last month: John Lewis. His last letter was published in the New York Times a few days ago, and in it he called on us all to do more, try harder, to make a positive change in the world. As he put it:

When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say that it was *your generation* who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression and war.

I echo his words, and I believe that there can be no peace unless the victims of violence, aggression and war see that justice is done.

So I hope that when it comes to pandemics that are man-made – those we *can* prevent and *must* punish – we will finally start to see more progress.