

Testimony for USCIRF Hearing

Good morning.

For hundreds of years the Yazidis have lived in Northern Iraq. We are a peaceful ethno-religious community that has, throughout history, been persecuted by those who are ignorant about our culture and beliefs.

Our ancestors recorded many instances of what they called ‘ferman’ - what you would call attempted genocide. Due to centuries of these attacks, more recent Arabization policies, and our homeland becoming a disputed territory, by 2014, the Yazidis were a marginalized community.

When ISIS swept across Iraq, the group used our religion as an excuse to target us. They used our lack of a holy book and different practices as an excuse and pretense for murder.

ISIS killed thousands of Yazidi men and older women. They enslaved and raped more than 6,500 young women and girls. Their aim was not only to break them as individuals, but to break communities as well.

Young boys were taken to be so-called cubs of the caliphate. Indoctrinated and turned into weapons.

They were able to enact genocide in the summer of 2014, because, according to the UN’s risk factor checklist, the Yazidis were vulnerable on nearly every single point.

Earlier this year we saw a worrying rise in hate speech against our community in Iraq. Some of the online messages were saying “Let’s finish what ISIS started”.

Almost ten years after the genocide. There are nearly 200,000 Yazidis who remain in displacement camps just hours away from their homeland.

Conditions within the camps are basic and not sustainable for long term living. There’s no privacy and no access to proper education or employment. In fact, the camps that were supposed to help them, are helping to bring about ISIS’s goal of destroying the community.

Despite the challenges, over 170,000 people have returned home to Sinjar. Our recent [Status of Sinjar](#) report outlines the devastation that greeted them. Basic infrastructure had been destroyed, homes looted, farms and livelihoods rendered unusable.

The Iraqi government and KRG have failed to address the existential threats facing the Yazidi community.

The 2020 Sinjar Agreement signed between Baghdad and Erbil was just an empty promise on paper - and many Yazidi survivors felt excluded from the process, with their wishes and aspirations ignored.

Baghdad has designated funding to rebuild other parts of the country, but that money has not found its way north to Sinjar. And the rebuilding of the Yazidi homeland is left to international organizations.

As the territory is still disputed, Yazidis are left without access to basic administrative services. Proxy forces in the region exacerbate instability.

On top of this, over 2,700 women and girls remain missing in captivity.

Those who killed Yazidi men and those who enslaved women and subjected them to sexual violence have not been held accountable.

Many simply shaved their beards and re-integrated into their communities. Others are held in prison camps on more minor charges. The psychological effect of this on the Yazidis is profound.

ISIS's invasion of Iraq was in many ways unique.

The whole world had a hand in its creation and subsequent actions. Fighters came from across the globe joining homegrown psychopaths to kill my community, filling a power vacuum left by the coalition, using weapons made by the West.

While the Obama administration came to our aid initially, there is more the US could do *now* to help create a more stable environment and to protect the Yazidis and other minorities...

We recognize, of course, there are many other geopolitical issues and concerns at play today.

The US is often fond of saying that it can walk and chew gum at the same time.

And by focusing on the plight of religious minorities and the rights of women and children in our region, there is a real chance for a successful post-conflict society. A blueprint even for other countries.

It's time for the Biden administration to consider investing more resources in Sinjar, rather than reducing them, to help rebuild what ISIS destroyed.

We still need to rescue the missing women and girls. US resources would be welcomed in this mission as well.

The US has the power to put sanctions against those groups who actively undermine security in Iraq and deny Yazidis and other religious minorities like the Christians the right to return to their homeland.

If warlords, heads of militia or even some government officials faced sanctions due to their destabilizing actions, we may see some change.

Additionally, while the US invested and continues to support the anti-ISIS- coalition it has not yet supported justice and accountability.

I would advocate for its endorsement of establishing a hybrid court, or another international mechanism, to hold ISIS members accountable for crimes of genocide and sexual violence.

The Yazidis and other minorities are resilient communities, but they cannot recovery and survive without the support of the international

community, especially the United States. The US has a long history in Iraq, and it has a moral responsibility not to abandon the Yazidis and other minorities.

Thank you for your time.