

Remarks by Murad Ismael

I would like to thank USCIRF for the exceptional work in advancing the rights of religious minorities. USCIRF has been one of the strong voices advocating on behalf of the Yazidis since the Yazidi genocide commenced in 2014. The United States has stood with the Yazidi community and this support has been bipartisan over the two previous administrations.

After six and a half years from commencement of the Genocide, 65 percent of the population of Sinjar remains displaced (and that makes up 210,000 who live in more than 15 camps in the Kurdistan region). 120 to 140,000 have returned to Sinjar. Additionally, nearly 70,000 Yazidi have migrated from Iraq and nearly 25,000 migrated from Syria. While most of them have made it to Europe, there are still 1,200 Yazidi Syrians in Lebanon, nearly 1,000 Yazidis in Turkey, 1,500 in Greece, and several hundreds of Yazidi Syrians in Iraq.

The Yazidi community continues to endure unimaginable suffering, for those who returned to Sinjar, not all stay, Per UNHCR, at least 2,200 Yazidis went back to the IDP camps because life in Sinjar is extremely challenging. Security and administration issues continue to persist and implementation of Sinjar agreement face many challenges. Per IOM, the major barriers to return are destroyed houses, lack of job opportunity, lack of basic services, no financial means to return and restart. On the social cohesion side, many challenges persist as Yazidi community feels justice has not been established. Only last week, the remains of first 104 Yazidis was returned to Sinjar. Most of mass graves have not been exhumed and the process will take many years.

For the Yazidis in IDP camps, their conditions have worsened, partially due to Covid and partially due to the overall economic situation of the region. Given complexity of the situation in Sinjar, I foresee that IDP

return to Sinjar will reduce significantly and the situation in the camps will continue for many years.

The Yazidi community, whether they are today refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, or Greece, or the vulnerable families living inside Iraq, or the Yazidis who worked with U.S. army and applied to either USRAP P2 program or SIV — all are in dire need for resettlement and the U.S. will be the best place for them to find new hope and new life.

The Yazidi community in U.S. is very small, at less than 5,000 people; however, the Yazidi Americans have played a key role in responding to the genocide. A larger Yazidi community in the U.S. will help community resilience inside Iraq as well. I therefore recommend that the U.S. resettle 25,000 Yazidis from Iraq and Syria, including those who fall under USRAP P2, refugees in third countries, and vulnerable families, especially female survivors and widows who lost their husbands in the genocide — as there are no conditions inside Iraq to take care of them. Just two days ago, another Yazidi girl committed suicide, and since beginning of this year, more than 13 have committed suicide. It is important that trauma treatment and psycho social support are provided, not only construction of buildings and roads. We need it - many people are broken.

A great deal of aid and support has come to Yezidis. Much of it from the United States. We are very grateful and hope this support continues. But I have a concern that our civil society organizations are struggling to remain active and sustainable. Without a strong Yazidi civil society, we will not have a voice. I hope aid and development will prioritize not only inclusion but strengthening of Yazidi CSOs. That is by far the best way to help Yezidis in Iraq. The USAID has been wonderful in this regard working directly or through partners with the Yazidi NGOs.

Finally, I would like to say this. The Yazidi community is one of ancient religious minorities in the Middle East, a community that suffered

killing, enslavement, displacement, abuse and torture, for no reason of their own but for who they are. For that, I believe the United State and the world should continue to offer help to rebuild their homeland and to offer resettlement opportunity for those in need as resettlement is in fact creates more resilience. I therefore respectfully ask again that US accepts 25,000 Yazidis in the United States.