

Statement Marking the Fourth Anniversary of the Genocide Against the Yazidi

Today, 3 August, marks the fourth anniversary of the genocide against the Yazidi. In the summer of 2014 the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) launched a systematic campaign of mass atrocities against civilians in northern Iraq. By 3 August that campaign reached Sinjar City and many other towns and villages in the region that were home to a significant population of Yazidis, a distinct ethno-religious minority group with centuries of heritage.

The attack on Sinjar was part of a larger offensive whereby ISIL sought to destroy the diverse mosaic of minority ethnic and religious communities across the Nineveh plains, including Yazidis, Christians, Shabaks, Shias and Turkmen. In the weeks after 3 August ISIL summarily executed over 5,000 Yazidi men and subjected over 7,000 women and girls to prolonged abuse, sexual violence and enslavement. Yazidi boys were separated from their families, forced to convert to Islam and recruited as child soldiers. Sites of religious and cultural significance to Yazidis were systematically destroyed.

Since 2014 the UN, European Union, Australia, Armenia, Canada, United States, France and United Kingdom have all recognized that the crimes committed by ISIL against the Yazidis amount to genocide.

It has been over eight months since Iraqi government forces and Kurdish peshmerga successfully regained all territory formerly held by ISIL. However, an estimated 3,000 Yazidi men, women and children captured by the group remain unaccounted for. At least 94 mass graves have been discovered in areas of Iraq liberated from ISIL, including at least 44 within the Sinjar region. Thousands of Yazidi also remain in camps for internally displaced people, unable to return to their villages due to continued insecurity.

Crucially, four years after the genocide began and despite the UN Security Council establishing an Investigative Team to support domestic accountability efforts in Iraq, no ISIL member has been held accountable for genocide in a court of law.

ISIL's military defeat is not sufficient. While continuing to battle violent extremism, it is essential that the government of Iraq adopt enabling legislation to incorporate genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity into domestic law. UN member states should support the swift operationalization of the Investigative Team established by Iraq and the UN Security Council and provide financial and technical assistance. Those responsible for the genocide against the Yazidi must be held accountable for their crimes.