

Joint Press Release

Commemorating the Third Anniversary of the Genocide Against the Yazidis

(For immediate release)

Today, 3 August 2017, marks the third anniversary of the genocide against the Yazidi. In the summer of 2014, the so-called Islamic State (IS or ISIS) 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.

In the following weeks, ISIS captured thousands of members of the Yazidi community, summarily executing thousands of men and subjecting thousands of women and girls to prolonged physical abuse, sexual violence and enslavement. Yazidi boys were separated from their families, forced to convert to Islam and recruited as child soldiers. Many men and elderly women were also coerced into converting to Islam and used as forced labourers. Sites of religious and cultural significance to Yazidis were deliberately destroyed. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria noted in its June 2016 report that “3 August 2014 would become a dividing line, demarcating when one life ended, and - for those who survived - when another, infinitely more cruel, existence began.”

The UN, European Union, Canada, United States, France and United Kingdom, including the Scottish national parliament, have all recognized that the crimes committed by ISIS against the Yazidis amount to genocide.

Tragically, ISIS’s genocidal campaign against the Yazidis continues to this day. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, over 1,600 abducted women and girls and 1,700 men and boys remain unaccounted for. Mass graves have been discovered in areas liberated from ISIS, including at least 44 within the Sinjar region. Amal Clooney, legal counsel for Yazda and Yazidi survivors, said that “it is shameful that three years after the genocide began, no ISIS member has been held to account for it in a court of law. I look forward to the day that Yazidis and other victims of ISIS can face their abusers in a court in The Hague.”

Although the liberation of Mosul marks a crucial step towards defeating ISIS, the group still holds considerable territory across Iraq and Syria and continues to pose a threat to international peace and security. The Iraqi Government, with the support of the international community, must ensure that ISIS is defeated on the battlefield, but this will not be enough. UN Goodwill Ambassador Nadia Murad warns, “ISIS members must also be held accountable for their crimes and a comprehensive reconciliation strategy must be established in consultation with all affected communities to ensure that the cycle of violence, discrimination and oppression against my people, the Yazidis, and other minorities in Iraq is broken.”

Today Yazidi Genocide survivors, civil society organisations, members of the Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government and representatives of the international community are gathering in Baghdad to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives to ISIS. We join them in demanding meaningful accountability – international justice is one of the most effective tools for protecting human rights and preventing the recurrence of atrocities.

We call upon the Iraqi Government and the international community to work together to bring to justice members of ISIS who have perpetrated international crimes. The UN Security Council should immediately establish an international investigative commission to collect, preserve and analyse evidence of ISIS’s atrocities in Iraq.

In order to defeat ISIS, and to counter violent extremism wherever it manifests itself, the international community must show that it will not allow the perpetrators of the genocide against the Yazidis to escape punishment.