

UNITED NATIONS PRESS RELEASE



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Statement by Adama Dieng, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and Jennifer Welsh, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, on the situation in Iraq

(New York, 12 August 2014) The Special Advisers of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, condemn in the strongest terms the reported execution of some 500 members of the Yezidi community in Sinjar and surrounding areas in northern Iraq by members of the so-called Islamic State. They also express alarm at reports of the abduction by the “Islamic State” of some 1,500 Yezidi, Christian and Shabak women and girls.

“These reports are shocking in the extreme. They show, in very clear terms, the complete absence of humanity of the perpetrators of these crimes,” stated the Special Advisers. They added that such acts “constitute grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The reports we have received of acts committed by the “Islamic State” may also point to the risk of genocide”.

An estimated 200 thousand people have reportedly fled the advance of militants into the Sinjar area in the Ninewah governorate of northern Iraq. The “Islamic State” has reportedly given an ultimatum to those who remain, many of whom are from minority groups, such as Christians and Yezidis, to convert to the Sunni faith or leave. Mr. Dieng and Ms. Welsh condemn this practice, and remind the perpetrators that attacks against any individual or group on the basis of their identity, including their ethnic or religious identity, are prohibited under international law.

Special Advisers Dieng and Welsh called on the Security Council to prioritise the protection of civilians in the Council’s response to the current crisis, in particular the protection of vulnerable religious minorities. They expressed their full support for the efforts of the international community to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to communities displaced by the advance of the “Islamic State”.

The Special Advisers remind all parties that in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, all Heads of State and Government committed to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, including their incitement, and to provide assistance to states under stress to fulfil their responsibilities towards their populations. “The current plight of populations in Iraq”, they emphasized, “calls for a concerted effort from a variety of actors, both regional and global, to ensure that victims receive desperately needed support and to avert further atrocity crimes.”

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