



Speech of Pari Ibrahim
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UK Parliament, APPG for Yezidis

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for including me in this critical discussion. I want to thank our friends in Parliament, especially Brendan O'Hara, Fiona Bruce, and Lord Alton for their solidarity and continued support of the Yezidi community, and thanks to Ewelina for organizing this virtual event.

In the Yezidi experience, I can say that violation of the freedom of religious belief is the primary and fundamental cause of forced migration and displacement. Because our population is Yezidi and non-Muslim, our people were targeted for mass execution and enslavement, leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Yezidis. It was specifically and only our religious identity that has made us a target – not only by Daesh (ISIS) in 2014 onward, but for many centuries previously, including during the Ottoman Empire and even before. A much larger Yezidi population used to live in our homeland. Now we are a vulnerable and persecuted minority population confined to a few areas in Iraq, and after the Yezidi Genocide perpetrated by ISIS, our numbers are dwindling as families seek safety abroad. We know from friends and allies that such persecution haunts minorities around the world, including in Afghanistan, Myanmar, China, and elsewhere. This is a worrying trend, and it must be confronted with a unified voice: that the protection of religious belief must be a **sacrosanct**, universally protected human right.

I would like to take this opportunity to address two specific matters with our friends in the British Parliament that relate to this topic.

Firstly, I would like to again emphasize the value of global leaders making meaningful commitments to resettle the most vulnerable members of persecuted minorities. We have been told that 52 Yezidis have been resettled in the United Kingdom since the Yezidi Genocide began: 44 from Syria and 8 from Iraq. We Yezidis have great respect for the United Kingdom, but this limited effort is deeply disturbing from a country outwardly promoting support for victims of persecution and sexual violence. European countries have not supported immigration of Yezidi families in great numbers, but this is an exceedingly poor showing from our friends in the United Kingdom. I am grateful to Lord Alton for putting forth his amendment to the Nationality and Borders Bill so that special visas could be issued to victims of genocide. I see this bill is now heading to the House of Commons. I urge the APPG for Yezidis and the APPG for Freedom of Religious Belief (FoRB) to lead efforts with all House Members to pass this amendment. From the Yezidi perspective, there are several Yezidi individuals with special circumstances, including Yezidi survivors of sexual violence with severe trauma, Yezidi survivors of mass executions, individuals with medical and psychological needs, and Yezidi mothers with children born from rape who all can benefit from resettlement. They have suffered the misery and trauma of genocide, and we respectfully seek resettlement for some of these most desperate genocide survivor cases. I believe the UK can do much, much better than resettling 52 Yezidi survivors.



Secondly, I would like to underscore the importance of justice and accountability in the aftermath of mass atrocities, as seen in the Yezidi Genocide. We are grateful that the UK has taken a significant role in supporting UNITAD and efforts to gather evidence and advance justice in response to the crimes committed by Daesh. However, we must also remember that many British citizens – male and female – traveled to Daesh territory in Syria and Iraq and committed human rights violations. They are terrorists. But terrorism is a crime against the state. What about the human rights violations committed by British Daesh members? We call upon British judicial authorities to increase their scrutiny on ISIS members – men and women – and examine carefully the human rights violations they may have committed abroad. We trust the British judicial system far more than the Iraqi and Syrian ones. If Britain cannot indict its citizens for these crimes, what hopes do we have elsewhere? In this regard, we have seen an incredibly frustrating trend in which female ISIS members are depicted as innocent victims. I am here to tell you that this was not the case. Female ISIS members were as brutal, and in some cases more brutal than the men. So please let us pursue justice and accountability in the aftermath of the Yezidi Genocide with clarity and honesty. We at FYF have conducted a crime scene analysis of one of the worst atrocities in the Yezidi Genocide, at a village called Hardan. We have been in touch with prosecutors and law enforcement agencies from 8 different countries and 2 UN mechanisms, but not with the United Kingdom. So we would like to see the British justice authorities redouble their efforts and work with us and others to ensure that British citizens cannot kidnap, rape, torture, and murder people abroad and then return to the UK with a slap-on-the-wrist terror membership indictment.

Thirdly, I strongly urge our friends in the UK Parliament and the FCDO office to consider providing direct support to Yezidi-led civil society organizations. We have seen international aid largely directed towards the Yezidi community through a complex route, and while we appreciate the UN and international organizations, there is a great social and psychological benefit to supporting local community-led organizations. FYF and other Yezidi-led groups are efficient, close to the ground, and provide direct implementation. We implore UK Aid and government and international donors to consider working closely and directly with those Yezidi organizations that adhere to international standards. In this way, you can help our community build more resilience and less dependence.

There is no doubt in my mind that religious freedom violations lead to migration, displacement, and the suffering of minority populations. This has been the history of Yezidis, even before Daesh. While we come together to recognize the harm done because of religious-based extremism, we must simultaneously look at solutions to support vulnerable survivors and the surviving community in general. Thank you to our friends in the Parliament for your continued support of the Yezidi community and our efforts.