



Speech of Pari Ibrahim
Executive Director, Free Yezidi Foundation
Human Rights Council, Geneva

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us in this important session. I would like to thank Dr. Ewelina for arranging this event. I would also like to thank the United States and the Netherlands Missions in Geneva. FYF is based in New York and Amsterdam, so I am pleased to see FYF's two home countries supporting this event.

ISIS terrorists began a genocidal campaign against Yezidis of Sinjar, Iraq in August 2014. This was a planned and carefully targeted attack, aimed to eradicate Yezidis not for territory or wealth, but simply to destroy our people because of our religion, because of who we are. ISIS is militarily defeated, but the fall of the ISIS caliphate has not eliminated the root causes and the dangers that continue to face Yezidis and other ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq.

Today I want to discuss two matters: the humanitarian impact of Turkey's airstrikes in Sinjar and the systemic discrimination and 'othering' of Yezidis as an ethno-religious minority community in Iraq.

Airstrikes on Sinjar

Over the past two weeks, countries around the globe have seen the impact of complacency. With the invasion of Ukraine, we are witnessing how the lives of peaceful citizens of a sovereign nation can be destroyed for political power and geographic land gains. The situation in Ukraine demonstrates how incursions and violations can lead to large scale atrocities and humanitarian emergencies. The lack of response to Russian aggression in Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014 set the stage for the current crisis in Ukraine. We see the same pattern in Turkish aggression in Syria and Iraq.

Since 2019, Turkey has occupied more and more territory that previously belonged to religious and ethnic minorities in Syria. Afrin, a multi-ethnic area of Syria that had included several Yezidi villages, is now controlled by Turkish-backed extremist Jihadists – many of whom are re-hatted ISIS or Al-Qaeda fighters. The Yezidi religious shrines have been destroyed and the villages have been emptied. In Northwest Syria, Turkey's so-called "Operation Peace Spring" brought fear and terror to religious minorities in the area, and a boost to ISIS insurgents. Turkey has also established military bases in parts of Iraq, purportedly to carry out anti-PKK operations.

For Yezidis, the regular Turkish airstrikes in Sinjar have been absolutely devastating. ISIS terrorists overran Sinjar, displacing hundreds of thousands of Yezidis. As the international community seeks to rebuild Sinjar and help genocide survivors return home, Turkey is simultaneously bombing Sinjar and conducts targeted assassination – against Yezidis! In a six-month span, Turkey has conducted cross-border airstrikes in Sinjar, often targeted assassinations of Yezidis, on:



- August 16, 2021
- August 17, 2021
- September 2, 2021
- December 7, 2021
- December 11, 2021
- January 21, 2022
- February 1, 2022

The massive barrage of airstrikes on 1 February left behind severe destruction. Sinjar's residents are afraid, which is one of several reasons they remain in IDP camps. We spoke to several displaced Yezidi after one such Turkish airstrike. Here is one account:

“My family had plans to return. There was an NGO that would have supported my family in opening a sweets project, but after this airstrike, given the situation, we decided to not return, and we canceled that project...some of my relatives returned back to camp [from Sinjar] and now they all live in one tent.”

Systemic Discrimination against Yezidis

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Following the Yezidi Genocide, most Yezidis are living as IDPs or have emigrated out of Iraq. Some have returned to Sinjar, but many dangers hamper their return. This includes the airstrikes by Turkey but also other factors including local security challenges, lack of a functioning and representative governance system, the devastated infrastructure, and lack of basic services.

Yezidi activists have serious concerns about the so-called Sinjar Agreement. In principle this was meant to facilitate the return of Sinjar's population home and resolve disputes between Iraq's Federal and Kurdistan Region Governments. Sadly, the Yezidi community was not included in these negotiations. Although some provisions of the agreement could be positive if implemented, others are problematic. What is especially worrying has been the silence from Baghdad and Erbil in the aftermath of the Turkish airstrikes in Sinjar – airstrikes that targeted and killed Yezidis who are Iraqi citizens and defended Sinjar against ISIS. One cannot help but suspect that part of the Sinjar Agreement may have included a green light for Turkey to conduct airstrikes in Sinjar, which we and the entire Yezidi community wholeheartedly reject.

This is part of a pattern of exclusion from decision-making that has plagued minorities in our part of the world for many years. Ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq, even prior to the formation of the Iraqi state, have suffered from varying levels of persecution and social and economic exclusion at different times. This has led to several effects:

- Our community suffers from multi-layered trauma, compounded with the misery inflicted on individuals and families because of the Yezidi Genocide. Trauma has many insidious effects, including suicide and depression but also the slow disintegration of identity, motivation, and daily welfare that accompany hopelessness.



- Additionally, discrimination and the ‘othering’ of minorities – especially Yezidis – has reduced our community’s educational and employment opportunities in Iraq for many generations. That means that our adult population have fewer opportunities to succeed than others. A significant portion of Iraqi citizens will not consume products made by Yezidi hands.

We support proactive measures to provide education and employment opportunities to discriminated and marginalized minorities as well as help to alleviate our community’s trauma.

Priorities for Yezidi Recovery and Empowerment

Distinguished Guests,

With these challenges, progress sometimes feels incredibly difficult to grasp. Nonetheless, there have been some limited areas of success. In the Iraqi Parliament, the Yezidi Survivors’ Law has created a pathway for reparations and recovery for survivors. Much work must be done to ensure proper implementation, but this law is a solid step in the right direction.

For those of you seeking to contribute to Yezidi recovery, I believe some of the top priorities are the following:

- Help us identify and rescue the more than 2700 Yezidis that remain unaccounted for.
- Advocate for direct support to Yezidi civil society organizations.
- Help us pursue justice and accountability, including the prosecutions of ISIS criminals in Europe and beyond.
- Advocate for developed nations to consider granting refugee status to Yezidi women, especially those with children born from rape.
- Contribute to the education, training, and employment of Yezidis in Iraq through pro-active programs.
- Pressure the Iraq and Kurdish Governments to include tolerant, multi-religious curricula in basic education, so children respect all components of Iraqi society from a young age.

Yezidi civil society, including my Foundation and all other Yezidi organizations, have the dedication and the community spirit to accelerate recovery and provide tools for a better future to the next generation. We are eager for partnerships and support.

Thank you again to the hosts for giving us the platform.