

Ten Years After Genocide

The Yezidi Struggle to Recover and Overcome



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In the early hours of 3 August 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) began its genocidal campaign against the Yezidi community in Sinjar and surrounding villages. The Yezidi Genocide was planned and organized, and included mass executions, kidnapping, enslavement, widespread and systemic sexual violence, forced conversion, forced militarization of children, mass displacement, and other atrocities. Yezidi men and older women captured by ISIS were summarily executed in most cases, and women and children were enslaved and subjected to unspeakable brutality. While ISIS specifically targeted the Yezidi community, the terror group also inflicted grave human rights abuses against other religious and ethnic minority communities throughout Iraq and Syria.

Every year since 2014, Yezidis have come together in early August to remember those who were killed, those who remain missing, support affected families, raise awareness of the ongoing struggle of survivors and the broader community, and call upon the international community to stand with Yezidis.

It has now been ten years. The Yezidi community in Iraq, traumatized, impoverished, and largely displaced, still struggles to chart a future in Iraq. Several significant obstacles remain, and while Yezidis have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of ISIS brutality, there is a real risk that the community – indigenous to Iraq – may not endure in this part of the world. This comes as Iraq's annual budget has ballooned to an impressive \$153 billion in 2024, more than enough to provide a future for Yezidis. Eight core issues, identified in this document, must be addressed to provide safety and some glimmer of hope for our community in Iraq.

This document has been prepared primarily for our friends and allies in the international community, so that they may more effectively and accurately contribute to Yezidi recovery and advocacy, and to those in the Government of Iraq (GoI) and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) who have the power and the resources to make life sustainable and safe for Yezidis in our ancestral homeland.


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Security & Administration in Sinjar

Security

Security in Sinjar should be maintained under the umbrella of Iraq's official, federal security architecture. Currently, several armed factions compete for control in Sinjar city and surrounding villages, damaging the prospect of safe and voluntary civilian return, and creating instability and chaos.¹ The residents of Sinjar should be empowered as officers and police to provide security in the region, as a formal contingent of Iraq's security apparatus. The individuals fulfilling these roles must not be chosen based on political affiliation and should be subject to an unbiased and thorough vetting process.

The Sinjar Agreement, which has been highly problematic from its inception, calls for far too few security officers in Sinjar (only 2,500 members).² All armed factions should be disarmed, demobilized, and then integrated into a single, coherent, and clearly delineated Iraqi security forces contingent. Most of the armed groups in Sinjar consist of Yezidis, but under the direction or control of various groups, including the Sinjar Resistance Units (Yekineyen Berxwedana Sengale – YBS), Hashd al-Shaabi (or Popular Mobilization Forces – PMF), the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and others.³

Armed Yezidi groups were first formed from collections of volunteers who fought ISIS to defend the community against a genocidal onslaught. It is important to differentiate these groups, operating with a defensive posture, from other militarized groups in Iraq with broader geopolitical ambitions. Armed Yezidis seek to maintain security in Sinjar, an existential necessity for our community in the aftermath of the Yezidi Genocide. Yezidis must not be expelled from Sinjar or be considered an enemy contingent by the Iraqi state under any circumstance. Competing political and security priorities have made life extremely challenging for Sinjar's residents.⁴ The Iraqi Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior should demobilize and integrate all forces under one umbrella, controlled by Iraq's federal security institutions. This should be determined by the community's security needs, not jockeying for political power.

This logical, federal arrangement would also reduce regional geopolitical factors that have severely destabilized Sinjar. Yezidis do not want Sinjar to be at the center of the dispute between Turkey and the PKK.⁵ Yezidis also do not want to serve as functional armed wings to advance Iranian interests.

¹ <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/tensions-sinjar-continue-threaten-yazidis-return>

² <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-stabilising-contested-district-sinjar>

³ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-stabilising-contested-district-sinjar>

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/06/iraq-political-infighting-blocking-reconstruction-sinjar>

⁵ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/2/10/Iraq-Sinjar-Yazidi-returns-halt-Turkish-airstrikes>

Administration

Sinjar is among several areas, like Kirkuk, considered disputed territories under Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution.⁶ These areas, disputed between the GoI and KRG, have long suffered from crumbling infrastructure, reduced government services, meager investment, and complex, overlapping, dual administrative processes for their residents.⁷ Such administrative and security vacuums are exploited by Iraq's worst actors.

A first step toward functional administrative decision-making in Sinjar would be the appointment and empowerment of a political independent and unaffiliated mayor from the Yezidi community whose authority is respected by all sides. This would be easier for authorities in both Baghdad and Erbil, as neither will feel that the other is seeking political control. Decisions would then be made in Sinjar for the benefit of Sinjar's population. In due course, with the cooperation of Baghdad and Erbil and the assistance of the international community, public services and private initiatives could expand, thus attracting the voluntary return of IDPs. Such efforts should also expand to the Nineveh plains, where Yezidis, Christians, and a wide range of other ethnic and religious minority communities require services and infrastructure to maintain their presence.⁸ Official government offices could support the daily needs of all Sinjar and Nineveh plains' citizens. Eventually, a new Sinjar governorate could be formally established once administrative preparations are complete.

Sinjar cannot remain a non-functioning administrative area with disputed status forever. To turn a new page, Sinjar should become a new governorate in Iraq, much like Halabja, rather than remain part of the Nineveh governorate.⁹ This will make it easier for all involved – including Nineveh governorate officials. Governorate decision-making and budgetary processes in Sinjar would then flow from the federal government in Baghdad, rather than from Mosul, and Sinjar would operate as a governorate under the same federal regulations as other governorates.

Projects that could help pave the way forward include the establishment of a public university, dams and waterworks systems to help support agriculture and clean water, projects to harness solar and wind energy, and government-sponsored industrial, agricultural, energy, and technological projects. The current GoI administration regularly announced large projects in different parts of Iraq.¹⁰ Political blocs exert pressure to allocate funding and investment to their constituent areas. That is one reason why Mosul, which was also severely damaged in the ISIS conflict, is now more rebuilt, while Sinjar remains in rubble.¹¹ Large governmental projects are not implemented in Sinjar or Nineveh plains, although the residents in these areas desperately need employment and upskilling, infrastructure development, and housing reconstruction. Even a handful of such projects could help transform these towns and villages and prompt the voluntary return of IDPs. We call upon Iraqi authorities to implement such projects in Sinjar and Nineveh plains. This would serve as a symbol that the ISIS campaign of terror and destruction has failed and that minority communities like Yezidis also benefit from public resources and investment.

⁶ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005

⁷ https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW69_final.pdf

⁸ https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/understanding_ethno-religious_groups_in_iraq.pdf

⁹ <https://www.newarab.com/news/halabja-becomes-iraqs-newest-governorate>

¹⁰ <https://www.iraqembassy.us/in-the-news/iraqi-gov-issues-iraq-development-fund-regulation-no-3-2023>

¹¹ <https://www.mercycorps.org/blog/picture-this-rebuilding-livelihoods-mosul>

The current scenario, where Sinjar is administratively tied to the Nineveh governorate but *de facto* controlled by competing armed factions, will never lead to a stable outcome for the inhabitants of Sinjar and surrounding villages.¹² Without strategic and logical efforts to resolve security and administrative vacuums and implement governmental projects in Sinjar and Nineveh plains, it is impossible to imagine a future for our community to safely return.

Recommendations:

- We propose, as a first step, the negotiation of a new security agreement, and that Yezidis are consulted and fully engaged in these discussions. Yezidis must be included in the leadership and management of security forces in Sinjar and surrounding villages.
- A federally mandated security contingent in Sinjar, composed of Yezidis and other residents of Sinjar, should absorb members of the competing armed factions, and help depoliticize security. This is a framework under which the residents of Sinjar, largely displaced for some ten years, can safely return home and benefit from long-term stability.
- The appointment and empowerment of a political independent and unaffiliated mayor from the Yezidi community should be appointed, empowered, and respected by all sides.
- Sinjar should formally become a new governorate in Iraq, rather than remain part of the Nineveh governorate. Sinjar would operate as a functioning governorate under the same federal regulations as other governorates.
- The GoI should develop a comprehensive plan to implement large-scale investment projects in Sinjar and the Nineveh plains to support infrastructure development, reconstruction, and local employment.

¹² <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-stabilising-contested-district-sinjar>

Justice & Accountability

Absence of Justice in Iraq

The Yazidi Genocide was perpetrated by ISIS, an internationally designated terror organization. Countries do not publicly support ISIS, although unfortunately some individuals, companies, and countries provided the terror group with seed-funding and financial and logistical support.¹³ Still, much of the world united in the coalition to defeat ISIS.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the fact that perpetrators of international crimes are also terrorists has led to significant drawbacks in the pursuit of justice and accountability. While some efforts have been made to prosecute ISIS members for atrocities, ISIS members are generally viewed through a terrorism rubric, and the international crimes and gross human rights violations they may have committed are often ignored in the court of law.¹⁵

This is particularly true in Iraq, where countless ISIS members have been apprehended and processed through a flawed and rudimentary justice system.¹⁶ Iraqi anti-terror laws do allow authorities to apprehend and punish ISIS members, but crimes beyond membership in a terrorist organization have not been prosecuted. Yazidi civil society, the UN, and the international community urged Iraq's Parliament to pass legislation criminalizing core international crimes, including genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, to no avail.¹⁷ The Iraqi justice system lacks fair trials, with some as brief as ten minutes.¹⁸ Trials do not include victims and survivors. Yazidis are generally not informed about the trials of ISIS members, which are not public, and atrocities committed against Yazidis are rarely factored into Iraqi judicial processes.

Limited Justice in Third States

Third states have rarely performed much better, almost always prosecuting ISIS members only for terror-related offenses. Germany is the notable exception, where eight ISIS members have been successfully prosecuted for international crimes, including three genocide convictions.¹⁹ Other countries have slowly followed this example, with both the Netherlands and Sweden slated to commence trials for international crimes committed against Yazidis this year.²⁰ This meager smattering of cases is insufficient, especially as ISIS members travelled from over 80 countries to Syria and Iraq, where they committed heinous crimes.²¹ In the USA, UK, most European states, and elsewhere, ISIS members face terror membership charges, if they are charged at all, and international crimes are absent from indictments. The USA and the UK have not indicted any ISIS

¹³ <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/who-s-funding-isis-wealthy-gulf-angel-investors-officials-say-n208006> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sf5NyPsY9iA>

¹⁴ <https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/>

¹⁵ https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/Education/jpme_papers/schemenaur_s.pdf?ver=2017-12-29-142155-737 ; https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Partners/Genocide/2020-05_Report-on-cumulative-prosecution-of-FTFs_EN.PDF

¹⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/12/05/flawed-justice/accountability-isis-crimes-iraq>

¹⁷ <https://iraq.un.org/en/245721-international-experts-discuss-iraqi-parliamentarians-and-legal-experts-interplay-between>

¹⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/17/world/middleeast/iraq-isis-trials.html>

¹⁹ https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/USG_Nderitu_Statement_ISIS_verdict_German_Court_22_June.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/117090-netherlands-trial-crimes-against-yazidis.html>

²¹ <https://www.freeyazidi.org/wp-content/uploads/Corr-RED-ISIL-committing-genocide-ag-the-Yazidis.pdf>

members for crimes committed against Yezidis.²² The closure of UNITAD, highlighted below, will have a negative impact on investigations and prosecutions by third states for international crimes.

Forced, Premature Closure of UNITAD & Next Steps

The United Nations Security Council, in response to the Yezidi Genocide and other atrocities committed by ISIS, established UNITAD, a UN investigative mechanism dedicated to collecting evidence of ISIS' crimes.²³ Surprisingly, in September 2023, the GoI called for the closure of UNITAD in one year's time.²⁴ Yezidi civil society has worked closely with UNITAD to ensure that evidence and testimony provided by survivors could be preserved and catalogued – including harrowing testimony of crimes they suffered. Yezidis are frustrated and concerned by the GoI's unilateral decision to terminate UNITAD's mandate to operate in Iraq, especially without proposing a way forward for accountability.²⁵ The GoI is seeking to move past the dark history of ISIS crimes, but Yezidi can never forget. We wonder: what will become of the evidence UNITAD has collected? Will it be stored in a basement at the UNHQ in New York? Will Iraq seek to obtain this evidence, in contradiction to UNITAD's informed consent and evidence sharing protocols?

It should be noted that many Yezidis initially advocated for an international tribunal rather than an investigative mechanism. But Iraq and the international community were unwilling to do so, and we were all forced to settle for an investigative mechanism to at least preserve evidence, which Yezidi civil society ultimately supported fully.²⁶ Now that, too, will be closed.

Reparations

Despite many setbacks and ongoing struggles, there has been one bright spot. The Yezidi Survivors' Law, passed in 2021, formally acknowledged the Yezidi Genocide and provided a legal pathway for Yezidis and other survivors to claim reparations for the crimes that were committed against them.²⁷ This has been the single best law ever passed in Iraqi Parliament from the Yezidi perspective. We thank the international community for its help in advocating for this, and we are also grateful to every Iraqi Member of Parliament who voted in favor of this law. Many Yezidi survivors have now begun to receive reparations, and it will help to transform their shattered lives.²⁸ [Other reparation and compensation mechanisms are addressed in the following section, which focuses on the return of internally displaced persons.]

Truth & Reconciliation in the Absence of Justice

Yezidis and other minority communities are concerned about the thousands of ISIS members returning from Al-Hol Camp and elsewhere in Syria to various parts of Iraq, including Sinjar.²⁹ And tens of thousands of ISIS members – male and female – are currently held in Syria, Iraq, the

²² <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-08/NCITE%20final%20with%20alt%20cover.pdf>

²³ <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n17/296/25/pdf/n1729625.pdf?token=I05ABhd46Z81WSp7Ea&fe=true>

²⁴ <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15514.doc.htm>

²⁵ <https://www.yazda.org/concerns-about-the-non-renewal-of-unitads-mandate-in-iraq>

²⁶ <https://www.unitad.un.org>

²⁷ <https://c4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Yazidi-Female-Survivors-Law-March-24-2021.pdf>

²⁸ https://freeyezidi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/FYF_Leitner_YSL_Report.pdf

²⁹ <https://www.voanews.com/a/iraq-repatriates-nearly-700-more-citizens-linked-to-islamic-state-group-from-syrian-camp/7589433.html#>

Kurdistan Region, and many other states.³⁰ Given ISIS' global profile, a logical solution would be to establish an international tribunal to streamline evidence collection, triage of suspects, issuance of indictments under a functioning court, and processing of trials. Currently, there are no good solutions to manage the thousands of ISIS members held indefinitely in the custody of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Northeast Syria, for example, despite numerous requests from the SDF to the international community for assistance in resolving the crisis.³¹ At the same time, thousands of Iraqi citizens who joined ISIS are being repatriated to Iraq, including to Sinjar and surrounding villages.³²

In the absence of any meaningful progress on justice and accountability, truth and reconciliation are not realistic for the Yezidi community. Previously, ill-advised international efforts ostensibly advocating reconciliation have sought to pressure the surviving community to forgive, forget, and reconcile – pressing Yezidi community members to sign documents or pledges in return for vague notions of peace and safety.³³ In the absence of consultations and involvement of the wider Yezidi community, these initiatives are met with public backlash, often with the demand that reconciliation cannot proceed without justice.³⁴ Therefore, justice must be the primary priority. Additionally, and as a pre-requisite to reconciliation, the Yezidi community needs guarantees from Baghdad and Erbil that such crimes will never be repeated.

If a neighbor has joined ISIS, committed crimes against Yezidis, and then faces no consequences and admits no guilt, then reconciliation is not a workable remedy for our community. But if there is accountability for crimes that have been committed, then our community will be strong enough to explore solutions to coexist peacefully with other communities, as we have done for centuries. But we cannot accept reconciliation as a substitute for justice.

Recommendations:

- An international or hybrid tribunal should be established to build upon the evidence collected by UNITAD and civil society organizations. It would be easier for cases to be handled through a single tribunal rather than through courts in countries around the world.
- Simultaneously, there could be a follow-on mechanism to continue the work of UNITAD. This could be passed by the UN General Assembly, if not by the UN Security Council. And in parallel, work could be advanced to establish an international or hybrid tribunal.
- The evidence collected by UNITAD must be saved in an enhanced archive and moved to a secure location, outside of Iraq, prior to UNITAD's shuttering. Iraqi authorities can access this data only once the Iraqi Parliament passes international crimes legislation and conducts trials in accordance with international standards. Many survivors placed their trust in the United Nations when sharing traumatic and deeply painful personal narratives of the horrors they suffered at the hands of ISIS. This evidence carries enormous weight, and it must be protected and stored according to UNITAD's own evidence-sharing protocols.

³⁰ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/prisons-holding-isis-members-in-syria-a-breeding-ground-for-radicalization-officials-say>

³¹ <https://repreive.org/uk/2023/06/12/kurdish-administration-announces-it-will-hold-trials-of-suspected-isis-fighters/>

³² <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2024/04/30/iraq-syria-isis-al-hol-camp/>

³³ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/300320241> ; <https://www.usip.org/blog/2024/04/usip-explains-community-dialogue-northern-sinjar>

³⁴ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/300320241>

- Any international tribunal or larger collective effort to prosecute ISIS crimes must include investigations into those individuals, organizations, and companies that provided funding and direct support to ISIS and have not yet been called to account.
- All countries must redouble their efforts to hold individuals or entities in their jurisdiction accountable for committing or supporting the commission of ISIS' international crimes against Yazidis and other communities.
- The international community contributed significant funding to UNITAD. Resources must be provided to civil society organizations from affected communities to continue the justice and documentation work, advance legal investigations, and press for reparations, all in accordance with international standards. Civil society organizations have led the way, and they must be empowered to continue this work.
- The international community should continue to pressure Iraq's Parliament to adopt legislation on core international crimes.
- ISIS members convicted of terror-related offenses in jurisdictions around the world should be cross-checked for culpability in the commission of core international crimes, and investigations should be conducted as warranted by evidence.
- The Yazidi Survivors' Law must be implemented in a survivor-centric manner. Beyond monthly financial stipends, other provisions of the law, including on rehabilitation and memorialization, must be implemented.
- The international community must actively assist the Syrian Democratic Forces in assessing the culpability of ISIS-affiliated individuals in detention camps and facilities.
- Reconciliation processes involving Yazidis in Sinjar must prioritize justice and cannot be forced upon the community by external actors.

Safe, Voluntary, Dignified Return to Sinjar

Return of Displaced Persons

We strongly support the voluntary, safe, dignified return of Yazidis and other IDPs to their areas of origin in Iraq. However, these returns must be practical to be successful, and displaced families should not be forced out of camps or shelters into homelessness. The process of facilitating the return of displaced families must be humane and well-planned, not rushed or forced for political purposes. What does a dignified, voluntary return look like? A city without adequate schools, functioning hospitals, employment opportunities, infrastructure or basic services is not suitable for families. Aside from resources to facilitate housing reconstruction, basic needs must also be met.

We are particularly grateful to the United States, above all, for leading the funding to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other agencies to provide direct financial support to Yazidi IDPs whose return to Sinjar is voluntary.³⁵ We call upon the GoI, with its vast resources and enormous annual budget, to scale up support to Yazidis and other displaced communities returning home by increasing stipends for returnees and allocating funds for Sinjar's reconstruction. The four million Iraqi Dinar stipend for families returning from IDP camps to destroyed houses and a devastated Sinjar is insufficient.³⁶ If we hope to see families begin their lives again in Sinjar, an allocation of \$20,000USD or so for each family to rebuild housing is reasonable.

Thousands of Yazidis have filed reparations claims through an existing Iraqi Government mechanism, Law No. 20 of 2009,³⁷ in the aftermath of the destruction of Sinjar.³⁸ To our knowledge, of the many thousands of claims filed, none have been granted.³⁹ We call upon relevant authorities in Baghdad to move these claims forward, and we call upon the international community help pressure the GoI to review all such claims filed by Yazidis without delay.⁴⁰ This, as much as anything else, will help support the voluntary return of families to their homes.

The contrast between Mosul and Sinjar – both devastated in the war against ISIS – is instructive. While Mosul still bears the scars of conflict, it is reemerging as a functioning and bustling city.⁴¹ Mosul benefited from infrastructure and reconstruction investment after ISIS was militarily defeated. Conversely, Sinjar has been largely ignored. Families will struggle to return to and remain in Sinjar if reconstruction is forgotten, and basic services are not provided. A Yazidi campaign launched one year ago, on 3 August 2023, called upon Iraq to invest only 1% of its annual budget, for one year, to rebuild Sinjar.⁴² That \$1.5 billion could transform a largely devastated city into a thriving, diverse, multicultural hub, and a sustainable homeland for the

³⁵ <https://weblog.iom.int/nine-years-remembrance-road-ahead-yezidi-genocide-survivors-iraq>

³⁶ [https://www.cabinet.iq/en/category/aDOu\\$GSzDnEA-_z/aDOu\\$GSzDnEA-_z](https://www.cabinet.iq/en/category/aDOu$GSzDnEA-_z/aDOu$GSzDnEA-_z)

³⁷ <https://webarchive.archive.unhcr.org/20240713171905/https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=5e4579204>

³⁸ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/opinion/130720241>

³⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/09/iraq-compensation-isis-victims-too-little-too-late> ;

<https://www.rudaw.net/english/opinion/130720241>

⁴⁰ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/opinion/130720241>

⁴¹ <https://geographical.co.uk/culture/mosuls-cultural-regeneration>

⁴² <https://freeyezidi.org/news-updates/fyf-statements/demand-for-1-5-billion-sinjar-reconstruction-fund-by-3-august-2024/>

Yezidi community. If Mosul can be rebuilt, so can Sinjar. This would go a long way to resolving Iraq's displacement crisis and advance stability and a safer environment for families in these areas.

IDP Camp Closures

Yezidis are entitled to return to their homes, but they must not be forced to do so before they are ready or against their will. Closing IDP camps is not a humane solution. We object to the use of force and intimidation to prompt IDP returns.⁴³ The IDP camps should be closed *after* families have voluntarily returned, and until they decide to do so, they must be provided with shelter and basic needs. Iraq has cynically decided to close or threaten to close all IDP camps to force families to return to their areas of origin.⁴⁴ Funding to schools in IDP camps has already been cut, so many children in IDP camps no longer have access to education.⁴⁵ This is inhumane and in violation of UN's principles of voluntary, dignified, safe return.⁴⁶

The return of Yezidis to homelands in Sinjar, surrounding villages, and the Nineveh plains is critical for the long-term existence of our community in Iraq. We do not want to see Yezidi land taken away because of ISIS atrocities. We support practical, systematic efforts by Iraq and the international community to help Yezidis achieve this goal. But it must not be through force or intimidation, without adequate resources and reasonable assurances that families can build a better life. Our people cannot remain in IDP camps forever, but they also must be provided with the necessities of life back home and aided in their return through a humane and practical framework.

Recommendations:

- The GoI should urgently process Yezidi reparations claims submitted through existing Iraqi mechanisms, and the international community should consider this a top priority.
- The GoI should increase the one-time stipend for returnees from IDP camps.
- The GoI should activate reconstruction projects in Sinjar, surrounding villages, and the Nineveh plains.
- The GoI should allocate 1% of one year of Iraq's annual budget – currently \$153 billion – exclusively to the reconstruction of Sinjar and surrounding villages.
- The GoI Ministry of Migration and Displacement should immediately cease its inhumane pressure tactics, such as the closure of IDP camp schools and threats of camp closures, as tools to prompt IDP returns.
- The GoI should adhere to UN principles of safe, dignified, voluntary return of displaced persons.

⁴³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/13/iraq-looming-camp-closures-kurdistan>

⁴⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/13/iraq-looming-camp-closures-kurdistan>

⁴⁵ <https://kirkuknow.com/en/news/70039>

⁴⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/us/media/policy-framework-and-implementation-strategy-unhcrs-role-support-return-and-reintegration-0>

Yezidi Political Representation in Iraq & the Kurdistan Region

For centuries, long before the establishment of the modern Iraqi state, Yezidis have suffered from a lack or complete absence of political representation.⁴⁷ In many ways, our society has become accustomed to exclusion and dearth of opportunities to advocate for the rights and well-being of our people. In the aftermath of the Yezidi Genocide, raising our voices was the only way to ensure the survival of the community. While Yezidis still suffer from severe lack of representation, civil society has helped the Yezidi voice reach far and wide.

Iraq

The Iraqi Supreme Court revised an earlier practice of Yezidi parliamentary seat allocation in 2022.⁴⁸ Yezidis are not the majority community in Iraq but constitute a significant population and deserve corresponding political representation. This is not a trivial matter. As highlighted in elsewhere, larger political blocs, led by the Parliament's Speaker, were able to allocate international and domestic reconstruction funds to help ensure Mosul and other areas destroyed in the ISIS conflict were rebuilt.⁴⁹ Dozens of parliamentarians aligned with powerful political blocs could help to stand up for their constituents. Yezidis, with restricted representation in Parliament, are at an enormous disadvantage.

In recent GoI administrations, there are no Yezidi ministers or Yezidi members in the National Security Council. Very rarely do Yezidis reach the Director-General level in the massive and powerful GoI bureaucracy. Yezidis are simply absent from decision-making positions, and this inevitably leads to less attention to the needs of our community. For example, Yezidis are displaced at an astronomical rate – far higher than any other community⁵⁰ – and yet due to lack of political representation, funds to rehabilitate our homeland are meager and regularly reduced.

Kurdistan Region

Prior to this year, the Kurdistan Parliament had an internal allocation of 11 parliamentary seats for minority populations.⁵¹ In principle, this is an admirable policy. Shockingly, Yezidis were not considered minorities to be included in the parliamentary quota! (Five seats were allocated for Iraqi Christians, five for Turkmen, and one for Armenians.⁵²) This year, after legal disputes between Erbil and Baghdad, the allocation of seats for minorities was reduced to five; once again, all for Christians, Turkmen, and Armenians.⁵³ It does not mean that Yezidis cannot sit in the Kurdistan Region Parliament, but there is no quota guaranteeing the community's representation. The rationale behind this is that the KRG considers Yezidis to be Kurds, and thus our community is not considered a minority for the purpose of seat allocation.⁵⁴ Yezidis are also not represented

⁴⁷ <https://minorityrights.org/communities/yezidis/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/220220222>

⁴⁹ <https://peacerep.org/2023/06/30/halbousi-iraqs-sunni-strongman/>

⁵⁰ <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/iraq-progress-toward-durable-solutions-iraq-sinjar-district-june-2024?close=true>

⁵¹ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/21052024>

⁵² <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/21052024>

⁵³ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/21052024>

⁵⁴ A sensitive issue has emerged: some Yezidis identify as Yezidis while others identify as Yezidi-Kurds. The issue of identity is complex and personal. Every individual should be treated equally, with respect and dignity, and not be pressured from any side to frame their identity in one way or the other. See also: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17449057.2020.1860550>.

proportionally in accordance with our population in various KRG administrative bodies. A related matter is the manipulation of minority quota seats by powerful political parties.⁵⁵

We support reform in the parliamentary quota system in Baghdad and Erbil. Seat allocation should be determined in proportion with Yezidi's population, which it has never been, and minority representation should never be hijacked by political blocs. With restricted political representation, it is important that our elected officials can speak fairly and genuinely to promote the well-being of our community.

Recommendations:

- GoI and KRG parliamentary quotas should be enacted to ensure proportional and independent Yezidi political representation.
- The GoI and KRG should ensure Yezidis are included in government positions in a fair and equitable manner.

⁵⁵ <https://amwaj.media/article/how-iraq-s-minorities-became-political-pawns-for-both-kurds-and-arabs>

Root Causes of Anti-Yezidi Discrimination

Religious discrimination against Yezidis is the fundamental source of our community's struggles over the centuries. Yezidis have suffered 74 genocides or organized attacks in our history.⁵⁶

In some ways, these tendencies are best illustrated through the brutality and horrific crimes perpetrated by ISIS and previously, Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Certainly, ideological leaders of these terrorist organizations believed in the eradication of Yezidis, as they believe our people do not have the right to exist. However, if these views were only held by extremists, Yezidis would be far less imperiled. The frightening reality is that ISIS and extremists draw upon a well of anti-Yezidi sentiment. When ISIS swept through parts of Iraq where Yezidis lived, they tapped into entrenched ignorance, hatred, and discriminatory practice that already existed.⁵⁷ This is why neighbors – some who had known Yezidis for decades – could so quickly turn on our people and participate in the murder and rape of our unarmed civilians.⁵⁸

Given the depth of anti-Yezidi discrimination and the dire consequences of extremist attacks, it is important that Yezidi areas are not left unguarded and vulnerable. We have seen where this leads, and governmental and religious authorities must not wait until religious-based hate speech turns to action. Three concrete steps can begin to combat the root causes that have historically threatened our community.

Hate speech that incites harm against religious minorities in Iraq cannot be tolerated. While free speech and open expression must be protected, certain hate speech trends in Iraq are too dangerous to be left unchecked. Legislation and implementation of regulations against hate speech should be enacted throughout Iraq. And government officials at all levels must forcefully and immediately rebuke hate speech that degrades and dehumanizes Yezidis or other religious minorities.

Two complementary aspects of educational reform are urgently needed in Iraq. While we support efforts to scale up education throughout the country in all academic subjects, civic courses on Iraq's diverse ethnic and religious communities are critical. This should become part of elementary and high school curricula across the country – a standardized course in which Iraq's next generation can learn accurate information. The many religions practiced in Iraq should be explained to the younger generation with facts, maps, and historical references, so youth become less vulnerable to extremist dogma. At universities, targeted efforts could help Yezidis and other minority communities meet students throughout the country and interact in a safe and positive learning environment. At the same time, universities in Iraq could conduct educational trips to Lalish or Sinjar, learn more about our community that is indigenous to Iraq, and hear directly from Yezidis in an educational setting. Yezidis have suffered immensely from isolation and marginalization – educational exchange is one tool to tackle that problem.

Educational awareness and exchange efforts must be coupled with atrocity education and memorialization efforts. Many Iraqi communities have suffered from violence and mistreatment

⁵⁶ <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/08/18/341403231/embattled-yazidis-say-they-are-now-enduring-atrocity-no-74>

⁵⁷ <https://cfri-irak.com/en/article/the-yezidis-in-iraq-demographic-islamisation-internal-divisions-and-drivers-of-perpetual-genocide-2024-06-19>

⁵⁸ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/displaced-iraqis-traumatized-betrayed-islamic-militants>

for many decades. The Yezidi Genocide, along with other crimes from previous eras, should be taught to Iraqi high school students as part of a mandatory historical atrocities course. Iraqis – particularly the youth – must understand this history. It is the solemn duty of Iraq to inform students, properly and accurately, about the Yezidi Genocide, the Ba’ath regime’s Anfal Campaign, the brutal crimes committed by the Ba’ath regime against Shia society, and other dark and sorrowful aspects of the past if we hope to avoid repeating this behavior.

Finally, workplace or social discrimination and other instances of civil rights violations must be reportable in a safe and codified manner. On a day to day basis, these violations damage the Yezidi community’s hope for a life in Iraq and participation in the economic and social fabric of the country. If a job applicant is told that a company refuses to hire Yezidis, this sort of discriminatory practice should be reportable. Unfair hiring and educational acceptance practices have relegated Yezidis to second or third class citizens for too long. These practices often occur at the municipal, sub-district, district, and governorate level. The GoI and KRG could convene a joint task force to help monitor civil rights violations. We need the international community to help us work with Iraq to combat these trends and create pathways for reporting discrimination, punishing such behavior, and eventually opening the door to equal opportunities for our people. Yezidis do not seek special treatment, handouts, or any benefits above those available to other citizens. We only seek fairness and equality.

Recommendations:

- The Iraqi Parliament should pass legislation against hate speech, and government officials should forcefully rebuke hate speech that degrades and dehumanizes Yezidis or other communities.
- The GoI and KRG Ministries of Education should establish mandatory courses on Iraq’s diverse ethnic and religious communities; as well as atrocity education to inform students of the Yezidi Genocide and other gross human rights violations endured by Iraqi communities.
- Civil rights violations based on religious discrimination should be reportable in a safe and codified manner, and the GoI and KRG should convene a task force to monitor such violations.

Humanitarian Considerations

Trauma

The trauma inflicted during the Yazidi Genocide has left deep scars on the Yazidi community. Many survivors, particularly those who endured captivity and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), suffer from severe mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.⁵⁹ The community at large grapples with collective trauma, compounded by the loss of loved ones, the uncertainty of those still missing, the destruction of their homes and livelihoods, and protracted displacement. Mental health services are often inadequate and inconsistent, thus revealing a critical need for culturally sensitive and sustainable psycho-social support to aid in the healing process.⁶⁰

Basic Needs

The Yazidi community faces significant challenges in securing basic needs, such as livelihoods, education, and shelter.⁶¹ Many Yazidis, both IDPs and returnees, struggle to find stable employment. The lack of economic opportunities available to Yazidis exacerbates their vulnerability and hinders their ability to rebuild their lives.⁶² Sustainable livelihood programs are urgently needed to provide financial stability and foster economic independence. Access to education is limited, particularly for children and young adults. Many schools in Sinjar remain damaged or destroyed, and displaced Yazidi children often face barriers to enrollment and attendance in host communities. Investing in education is crucial for the future of Yazidi youth, enabling them to break the cycle of poverty and trauma. Thousands of Yazidis still live in temporary shelters or makeshift camps, enduring harsh living conditions for ten years.⁶³ The reconstruction of homes and infrastructure in Sinjar is slow, and there is a dire need for safe housing solutions for both returnees and those still in displacement.

Gender Considerations

Yezidi women and girls often face additional layers of discrimination and hardship within their communities. Survivors of SGBV not only contend with the trauma of their experiences but sometimes face stigma and ostracization.⁶⁴ Efforts to support Yezidi women and girls must be prioritized. Comprehensive care for SGBV survivors is essential, encompassing medical, psychological, and legal assistance. Empowerment programs that focus on education, skills training, and economic opportunities for women can help mitigate the effects of gender-based violence and promote gender equality.⁶⁵ Initiatives to raise awareness about the rights and needs of women and girls, and to challenge patriarchal norms, are essential for fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment.

⁵⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10090394/>

⁶⁰ <https://api.repository.cam.ac.uk/server/api/core/bitstreams/cf5c0fcc-619a-47a5-8d74-03c4ebb742f1/content>

⁶¹ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/05/decade-after-horrors-iraqs-sinjar-remains-ruins>

⁶² https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/understanding_ethno-religious_groups_in_iraq.pdf

⁶³ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/seven-years-in-camps-life-for-the-abandoned-victims-of-is/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=100973>

⁶⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

Recommendations:

- The international community should support Yezidi-led organizations that have deep understanding of the community and are at the forefront of humanitarian and development efforts.
- Mental health and trauma recovery support should be properly integrated into Yezidi humanitarian and development programs.
- Women and girls in the Yezidi community and other affected communities should remain a priority for humanitarian projects, with the aim of equipping women and girls with tools for economic empowerment.

Socio-economic & Educational Rights

Safeguarding the socio-economic and educational rights of minority populations is a priority in many places around the world. This applies to Yezidis and other minority communities in Iraq as well. Systemic and historical marginalization and discrimination have relegated Yezidis to the edges of society – largely surviving on subsistence agriculture.⁶⁶ It should be noted that throughout history, Yezidis have forged alliances and cooperative relationships with neighboring communities. Our community will never forget those tribes and families who refused to participate in atrocities against Yezidis. At the same time, the betrayal of neighbors deeply damaged our sense of trust and belonging.⁶⁷

Our community should not suffer because of religious differences – Yezidis should be given fair opportunity for employment and education. To better explain the situation to our international friends: many Iraqis refuse to eat food made by the hands of Yezidis, among other degradations, and entrenched prejudice and discriminatory practices have hindered our ability to participate in Iraq's society and modern economy.

In Sinjar, security is now a main sector of employment, along with agriculture. But our community must also benefit from newer and more sophisticated economic sectors. We would like to see training and employment opportunities in industry, technology, service delivery, and other fields. This will not be easy and will require a concerted effort from the GoI and KRG to help support our community in this economic transition. It would also require investment in projects in the Sinjar and Nineveh plains region, where residents could benefit from new jobs.

Simultaneously, Yezidi youth must have the chance to learn applicable skills. The education system in Iraq is sub-par, but the education offered to Yezidis is dismal.⁶⁸ Of all investments, we value basic and university education for our young generation most highly. If we hope to break the cycle of dependency, marginalization, and vulnerability, our young people must be equipped with skills and knowledge that align with the demands of the modern economy. We call upon the GoI to allocate resources to better staff existing schools, expand the number of schools in Sinjar and surrounding villages, establish a public university in Sinjar, and explore creative solutions through informal education and private initiatives to help upskill Yezidis, whether they are displaced or recently returned to Sinjar. This can all come as part of an earnest reconstruction package for Sinjar's post-ISIS recovery, as highlighted elsewhere. We do not ask for special favors for the Yezidi community, but only equal opportunity to obtain relevant skills and benefit from Iraq's modern and growing economy.

Recommendations:

- The GoI should invest in industry, technology, and service delivery projects in Sinjar and the Nineveh Plains, coupled with training courses for residents.

⁶⁶ <https://theconversation.com/strangers-in-their-own-land-iraqi-yazidis-and-their- plight-7-years-on-from-genocide-170699>

⁶⁷ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/displaced-iraqis-traumatized-betrayed-islamic-militants>

⁶⁸ <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/21178-Lack-of-schools,-teachers-in-Iraqi-camps-cause-Yezidi-children-to-drop-out#>

- The GoI and KRG Ministries of Education should allocate more resources to existing and prospective schools in Sinjar, surrounding villages, and the Nineveh Plains, and ensure displaced Yazidis continue to receive basic education.
- The GoI and KRG Ministries of Higher Education should establish a public university in Sinjar.

Missing Yezidis & Mass Grave Exhumation

Missing Yezidis

Ten years after the 2014 genocide, over 2,600 Yezidis remain unaccounted for.⁶⁹ Many of them were killed by ISIS, but others are still held in captivity ten years later. The missing individuals, predominantly women and children, have endured physical and mental torture, including rape and forced labor.⁷⁰ The international community's inaction has left these victims abandoned, while their families continue to suffer from unresolved grief and trauma that prevents healing and recovery. The unknown fate of the missing agonizes the Yezidi community more than any other issue.⁷¹

To date, there has been a glaring lack of coordinated, formal efforts to rescue the missing Yezidis. Most rescue operations are conducted by individual volunteers ('rescuers')⁷² and a handful of non-governmental organizations. These efforts are often fragmented and insufficient, lacking the resources and support necessary for a comprehensive rescue strategy.

A significant concern is the prevalence of unethical rescue practices. Some organizations exploit survivors, failing to provide the necessary mental health care and support. These groups may forcibly separate mothers from children born from rape, and reintegrate survivors without adequate privacy, psychological preparation, or consent.⁷³ Such actions can exacerbate trauma and hinder the survivors' long-term recovery and reintegration.

To address these challenges, there is an urgent need for a task force led by reputable Yezidi NGOs that adopt a survivor-centered approach to rescue operations. These organizations have a deep understanding of the cultural and psychological needs of survivors and are best equipped to provide sensitive and effective support. They should coordinate with government bodies, UN agencies, and camp officials to ensure the safety and ethical treatment of rescued individuals.

Rescued individual must be given time, space, privacy, and comprehensive care to heal from their trauma. This includes access to mental health services, support for reintegration, and the assurance that their recovery process will be respected and guided by their own terms.⁷⁴ Prioritizing the needs and preferences of survivors is essential for their dignity and long-term well-being.

The ongoing suffering of missing Yezidis and the inadequacy of current rescue efforts constitute a critical humanitarian crisis.⁷⁵ The international community must take urgent action to support a coordinated and ethical rescue strategy led by Yezidi NGOs. Only through sustained and respectful support can we alleviate the suffering of those still in captivity and help their families find closure.

⁶⁹ [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/3/nine-years-after-the-yazidi-genocide-what-next-for-survivors#:~:text=Her%20family%20initially%20hoped%20he,Kurdistan%20Regional%20Government%20\(KRG\).](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/3/nine-years-after-the-yazidi-genocide-what-next-for-survivors#:~:text=Her%20family%20initially%20hoped%20he,Kurdistan%20Regional%20Government%20(KRG).)

⁷⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2021/09/25/the-missing-yazidis-women-and-children-must-be-located-and-rescued/> ; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-66108078>

⁷¹ <https://freeyezidi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Missing-Yezidis-The-Imperative-for-a-Collective-and-Coordinated-Search-and-Rescue-Mission.pdf>

⁷² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-66108078>

⁷³ <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/09/721210631/freed-by-isis-yazidi-mothers-face-wrenching-choice-abandon-kids-or-never-go-home>

⁷⁴ <https://www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/responding-sexual-violence>

⁷⁵ <https://www.state.gov/statement-on-missing-yezidi-women-and-children/>

Mass Graves

A decade after the 2014 Yezidi Genocide, the landscape of Sinjar is still marred by mass graves, many of which remain unexhumed.⁷⁶ The slow and unclear identification process must be improved, and the pressing need for legal recognition and reparations for the Yezidi families of victims must be addressed. The lack of exhumation not only impedes justice but also prevents families from attaining closure and honoring their deceased loved ones.

According to statistics obtained from the Iraqi Mass Graves Directorate, a total of 94 mass graves and 49 individual graves have been identified in different areas of Sinjar.⁷⁷ Thus far, 61 mass graves have been exhumed, and the remains of 696 people, including men, women, and children, have been recovered. Of the 696, only 243 victims have been identified.⁷⁸ The other 33 mass graves have not yet been exhumed. UNITAD was supporting Iraq's Technical Team, Mass Grave Directorate, and Medical/Legal Team.⁷⁹ With UNITAD's impending closure, it is unclear who will provide support to continue this lengthy and complex process.

Exhumation is not the only challenge. A significant issue is the lack of recognition of those killed by ISIS as legally deceased. The process of identifying victims after their remains are taken to Baghdad is complex and slow. The remains of numerous Yezidi victims have been exhumed; however, the process of identifying these individuals and ensuring they are returned to their families for proper burial presents significant challenges. Exhumation is merely the initial step in a lengthy bureaucratic process of identification and repatriation. Many Yezidis left in mass graves have not been officially declared dead, depriving their families of the right to government reparations.⁸⁰ Conversely, families of ISIS members killed in the conflict have received compensation, highlighting a stark injustice.⁸¹ This exacerbates the suffering of Yezidi families, who are left without financial support or legal acknowledgment of their immense loss.

Recommendations:

- A formal task force should be established to identify and rescue missing Yezidis, led by Yezidi civil society, UN agencies, and relevant GoI, KRG, and AANES offices.
- All remaining mass graves must be exhumed urgently, and a transparent and efficient process for identifying the victims must be established.
- The GoI must expedite the legal process to declare those killed by ISIS as deceased, ensuring that their families can access reparations and legal acknowledgements in accordance with Iraqi law. Submitted files should be acted upon without delay.

⁷⁶ <https://www.yazda.org/publications/documenting-mass-graves-of-the-yazidis-killed-by-the-islamic-state>

⁷⁷ Statistics obtained by Yazda from Iraq's Mass Grave Directorate

⁷⁸ Statistics obtained by Yazda from Iraq's Mass Grave Directorate

⁷⁹ <https://www.unitad.un.org/news/hamadan-latest-unitad-and-iraqi-authorities-joint-excavation-and-investigation-isil-victim-mass>

⁸⁰ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/10th-anniversary-yazidi-genocide-and-iraqi-pms-historic-white-house-visit-key-discussions>

⁸¹ <https://amwaj.media/article/corruption-claims-payouts-to-is-families-shake-iraq-s-martyrs-foundation>

Ten Years After Genocide

The Yezidi Struggle to Recover and Overcome

