



Free Yezidi Foundation Statement

Yezidi Refugees in Lithuania

6 April 2022

The Free Yezidi Foundation (FYF) notes with concern the desperate situation facing some Yezidi refugees who are seeking asylum in Europe. In particular, FYF draws attention to Yezidi refugees currently detained in the Republic of Lithuania. Yezidis are an ethno-religious minority group native to Iraq. The Yezidi population has been subjected to religiously motivated persecution for many centuries, most recently during the Yezidi Genocide perpetrated by ISIS.

A group of Yezidi asylum seekers arrived in Lithuania in 2021, seeking protection in the aftermath of the Yezidi Genocide, which has left most Yezidis homeless, living in IDP camps or makeshift shelters. Those Yezidis seeking asylum abroad have faced genuine threats to their lives and their basic rights in Iraq, which motivated their migration.

We are told that approximately 400 Yezidis have been living in detention in Lithuania for more than nine months. Although FYF cannot independently verify this information, we nonetheless call upon authorities in Lithuania and the European Union to clarify the situation of Yezidi asylum seekers in Lithuania. We are told that these asylum seekers are restricted in movement and cannot reach hospitals or obtain basic goods or services outside the detention center. We have been told that several Yezidi members have been imprisoned and threatened with deportation back to Iraq. We have also been told that no Yezidi has received the right to asylum or even an exit permit to leave the detention facilities. FYF was told, “We share with you our suffering and our voices as Yezidis, and we hope you will consider our case...”

The Free Yezidi Foundation understands immigration regulations and the asylum protocols that Lithuania and other European states have in place. Nonetheless, according to international and European refugee regulations, asylum seekers such as the Yezidis in Lithuania have basic rights that must be protected by the host government. FYF is not able to independently verify the legal status of these Yezidi asylum-seekers in Lithuania, and we will therefore be directing our inquiries to Lithuanian Immigration Services and the Lithuanian Red Cross, as well as to political and humanitarian friends and allies in Europe and beyond. Europe has admirably welcomed Ukraine’s refugees fleeing violence and conflict. Solutions for Ukrainian refugees materialized rapidly, but Yezidi genocide survivors seeking refuge have apparently been languishing in detention facilities for months. We hope to see the same humanitarian spirit of acceptance and refugee protection for this group of vulnerable Yezidi asylum seekers.

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For more information, visit www.freeyezidi.org
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