

Missing Yezidis

The Imperative for a Collective and Coordinated
Search and Rescue Mission



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Cover Photo: A Yezidi holds a photo of his missing daughter.

About the Free Yezidi Foundation

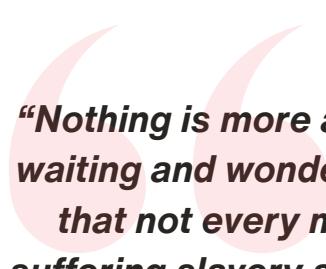
The Free Yezidi Foundation (FYF) is a non-partisan, Yezidi women-led nonprofit organization established in response to the 2014 Yezidi Genocide. FYF is dedicated to the empowerment and support of the Yezidi community through the provision of comprehensive advocacy, justice, mental healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and livelihood services. With a special focus on women, girls, and survivors of SGBV, FYF's initiatives aim to enable those most vulnerable to rebuild their lives with dignity and resilience.

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List of Acronyms

ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
FYF	Free Yezidi Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
YSL	Yezidi Survivors Law
UNITAD	United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL



“Nothing is more agonizing and frustrating to the Yezidi community than waiting and wondering about the missing. We are realistic, and we know that not every missing Yezidi is still alive. But for those who are still suffering slavery and abuse every day, the international community must make a serious, coordinated rescue effort.”

Pari Ibrahim, FYF Founder and Executive Director

2014 Yezidi Genocide

On August 3, 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) launched a genocidal campaign against the Yezidi ethno-religious minority. This campaign involved ethnic cleansing through mass executions, forced conversions, forced displacement, kidnappings, and widespread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). These atrocities led to the massacre of Yezidi men and older women, enslavement of over 6,000 Yezidi women and children, and the displacement of more than 400,000 Yezidis to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Other religious and ethnic minority communities also faced displacement and endured crimes perpetrated by ISIL.

A decade later, the Yezidi community remains profoundly impacted, with half of its population still internally displaced. Survivors continue to endure significant trauma, compounded by inadequate support for their healing and recovery.



Executive Summary

Ten years after the 2014 genocide, over 2,600 Yezidis remain missing. While many were killed by ISIS, others are believed to remain in captivity. These individuals, predominantly women and children, endure daily physical and mental torture, including rape and forced labor. The international community's inaction has left these victims feeling abandoned, while their families continue to suffer from unresolved grief and trauma. Urgently, there is a need to mobilize resources, expertise, and support to locate and rescue those still missing. [1]

Recommendations

FYF calls upon the international community to establish a formal, coordinated effort to identify and rescue Yezidis who are still missing. FYF underscores the significance of integrating gender mainstreaming and survivor-centered approaches in the identification and search efforts for missing Yezidis.

- **Establishing a Central Coordinating Body:** A task force dedicated to Yezidi rescues could help streamline efforts, allocate resources more efficiently, and ensure that different organizations work collaboratively rather than in isolation. Such a task force would greatly benefit from being led by reputable Yezidi organizations, which possess an intimate

understanding of the community's unique needs and challenges.

- **Securing Adequate Funding:** International donors and governments need to commit to sustained financial support for rescue operations, ensuring that groups on the ground have the resources they need.
- **Enhancing Security Measures:** Providing security escorts or working with local security forces can help protect rescuers and enable operations in more dangerous areas.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Utilizing advanced technologies such as satellite imagery, drones, and data analytics can improve the identification of potential rescue sites and streamline operations.
- **Providing Comprehensive Support Services:** It is crucial that rescued individuals are given the time, space, and comprehensive care they need to heal from their trauma. This includes access to medical treatment, mental health services, livelihoods, support for reintegration, and the assurance that their recovery process will be respected and guided by their own terms. Prioritizing the needs and preferences of survivors is essential for their dignity and long-term well-being.

By addressing these issues, the global

[1] IOM, [More Support Needed for Survivors of the Sinjar Massacre](#) (August 4, 2022).

community can better support the rescue and recovery of missing Yezidis, offering them hope and a path to rebuilding their lives after the atrocities they have endured.

Current Situation

The plight of missing Yezidi women and children remains deeply distressing. While approximately 6,000 women and children abducted by ISIL have either escaped or been rescued, around 2,693 Yezidis remain missing and unaccounted for.^[2] Families endure ongoing anguish, uncertain about the fate of their loved ones. This uncertainty compounds the profound suffering experienced by the Yezidi community.

Efforts to rescue women and girls from the notorious Al-Hol camp are ongoing. This camp houses tens of thousands of ISIS families and supporters. Ongoing Yezidi rescue operations are expected to yield more results in the future.^[3] These efforts are part of national and international commitments under the Yezidi Survivors Law (YSL), which mandates comprehensive measures to locate and rescue missing Yezidis, and to provide support to survivors and their families.

"The support we want and need is the liberation of those captured by ISIS."

Waam (Yezidi Survivor)

FYF's Work to Find, Rescue, and Reintegrate Yezidis

FYF's dedicated efforts to locate and rescue missing Yezidis focus on supporting families, facilitating returns whenever possible, and holding the government accountable for finding the missing. Adhering to international standards of gender ethics, FYF prioritizes the rights and welfare of women and girls, always considering the expressed wishes of survivors above all else. This commitment involves conducting needs assessments to identify essential services for those rescued and empowering them to voice their preferences within their communities and families.

FYF is a trusted survivor-centered NGO, providing accurate information, legal guidance, critical services, empathy, and steadfast advocacy for Yezidi survivors. In situations where rescued women and girls express distress or face danger in their home environments, FYF facilitates referrals for protection and necessary treatment through established channels. FYF is one of the few Yezidi NGOs that supports rescued women with children born of rape. FYF helps these women access essential resources and works to build trust, facilitating a comprehensive recovery for both the mothers and their children.

[2] <https://freeyezidi.org/missing-yezidis/>.

[3] Rudaw: [Yazidi woman rescued during anti-ISIS op in northeast Syria \(February, 2024\)](https://www.rudaw.net/english/syria/2024/02/01/Yazidi-woman-rescued-during-anti-ISIS-op-in-northeast-Syria-(February-2024).).

FYF is a staunch advocate of ethical rescues, urging Iraqi and international NGOs to adopt survivor-centered approaches. Some organizations exploit survivors for their own benefit, neglecting to provide immediate and essential mental healthcare and support in the aftermath of a rescue. These groups may forcibly separate mothers from children born of rape and reintegrate survivors without proper psychological preparation or consent. Such actions strip survivors of their agency, potentially worsening trauma and hindering long-term recovery and reintegration.

Challenges

Reintegration

The reintegration of Yezidi survivors is fraught with obstacles, rooted in societal stigmas and discriminatory practices. Within the endogamous Yezidi community, accepting children born of rape to Yezidi women and ISIL-affiliated fathers is particularly challenging, especially in the aftermath of the Yezidi Genocide. The community feels its existence is threatened, leading many Yezidi mothers to face the painful decision of either leaving their families and community behind to stay with their children or reintegrating into the community without them. In some cases, if they are rescued, that decision is made against their will.

Adding to these challenges are patrilineal Iraqi legal practices, where

children born to unknown or Muslim fathers, including those linked to ISIL, are automatically registered as Muslim by the Iraqi government. This threatens the already precarious future of children born from rape.^[4]

Moreover, Yezidi women who return from ISIL captivity with children born of rape often encounter significant pressure to abandon their children. Resisting this pressure can put them at risk of honor killings, particularly in isolated regions such as Sinjar, where governmental oversight and security measures are lacking.^[5] This fear of violence and social exclusion deters some from identifying themselves and returning to Iraq. ISIL's propaganda during captivity further ingrained the belief that the Yezidi community would reject their return, regardless of whether they had children, thus exacerbating the reluctance to seek repatriation.

Justice and Healing

Survivor testimonies are vital for justice and accountability, often serving as the only evidence to locate and prosecute ISIL perpetrators. These testimonies ensure that the atrocities are documented and the horrors endured by the Yezidi community are not forgotten.

The imminent closure of UNITAD, the

[4] Articles 20 and 23 of the National Identity Card Law.

[5] Jordan Greaser, [Attitudes of Sinjari Yezidis in Iraq Regarding the Rape of Yezidi Women and the Babies Born from Rape During the ISIS Genocide](#) (2018).

UN's investigative team collecting evidence of ISIL crimes, threatens the continuity and effectiveness of these efforts. UNITAD's closure would hinder the collection of survivor testimonies and the compilation of essential evidence needed for legal proceedings and historical remembrance.

The importance of accountability and the search for missing Yezidis extends beyond legal implications to the profound need for community healing. Sharing testimonies remains challenging due to entrenched stigmatization within the Yezidi community. Many survivors fear social ostracization, family rejection, or reprisals, discouraging them from sharing their traumatic experiences despite the crucial role their testimonies play in seeking justice and accountability.

Security and Political Environment

To date, the efforts to rescue missing Yezidis have been fragmented and largely uncoordinated, falling short of what is needed for a comprehensive and effective strategy. Most rescue operations are spearheaded by individual volunteers, civil society organizations (CSOs), and a limited number of NGOs. These groups often operate independently, without the benefit of a unified approach or adequate support from larger international bodies or governments.

The current rescue efforts suffer from several critical limitations:

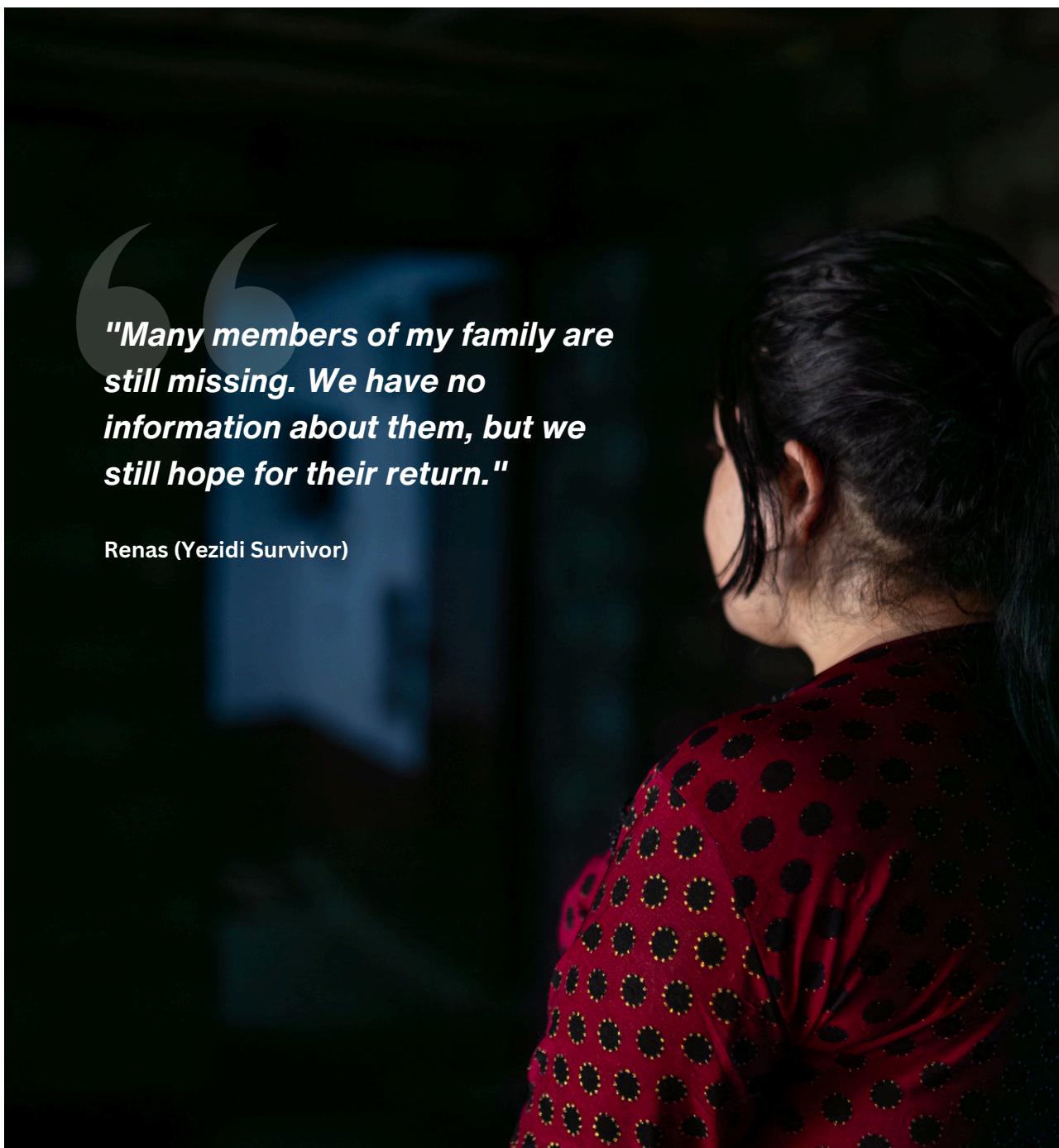
1. Resource Constraints: Individual volunteers and smaller organizations often lack the necessary financial, logistical, and human resources to conduct extensive search and rescue operations. This hampers their ability to cover more ground and sustain long-term efforts.

2. Lack of Coordination: The absence of a central coordinating body means that efforts are not synergized. Different groups may duplicate efforts or miss opportunities to collaborate, leading to inefficiencies and gaps in coverage.

3. Insufficient Support: There is a significant deficit in support from international organizations and governments, both in terms of funding and operational assistance. This limits the ability of rescuers to leverage advanced technologies, intelligence resources, and broader networks that could enhance their effectiveness.

4. Security Challenges: The volatile security situation in regions where Yezidis are held captive adds another layer of difficulty. Many volunteers and CSOs are not equipped to navigate these dangerous environments without substantial risk.

5. Political Complications: The complex political landscape, including disputes over territorial control and differing priorities among local, national, and international actors, further complicates rescue efforts. Political instability often leads to inconsistent support and fluctuating access to critical areas.



Renas (Yezidi Survivor)

Conclusion

The crisis of missing Yezidis demands urgent attention and coordinated action. The current insufficient efforts to search for and locate missing Yezidis not only undermine the pursuit of justice and accountability but also exacerbate humanitarian suffering and prolong the trauma of families awaiting news of their loved ones. Addressing the plight of missing Yezidis requires a coordinated approach among multiple stakeholders to pool resources

and expertise. Every missing individual must be located and accounted for, and FYF remains unwavering in its dedication to supporting rescued Yezidis, whether they choose to reintegrate into the Yezidi community or resettle abroad. By offering holistic services and culturally sensitive programs, FYF strives to facilitate healing and cultivate inclusivity within the community.



A Yazidi mother looks at photos of her missing children.



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FOUNDATION

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Photo - Khanke Camp, Duhok, Iraq.