



By: *Sharmila Devi*

# Yazidis feel betrayed and abandoned almost 10 years after ISIS genocide



By the end of next month, about 155,000 displaced people, most of them Yazidis who have already faced violence and much upheaval, will be forced to **leave camps** for displaced people in the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq and find new homes by order of the Baghdad government.

Much of the world may have recognised as genocide the atrocities committed almost ten years ago by ISIS against the Yazidis and other minorities but thousands continue to languish and are unable to rebuild their lives.

In Iraq, many are in camps or makeshift homes in abandoned buildings, in Europe many are in legal limbo awaiting asylum, and countless others pay people-smugglers to flee the Middle East.

Reparations let alone justice has mostly eluded the Yazidis while the psychological scars inflicted by ISIS may never leave them, including the thousands of women and girls sold into sexual slavery.

Unless the federal government in Baghdad waives its deadline to close the camps as has happened previously during what it calls a drive to reduce aid dependency, the Yazidis face a precarious future.

## An essential part of the Kurdish movement

Their historical homeland around Mount Sinjar where 80 per cent of public infrastructure was destroyed needs much reconstruction while the region is disputed territory between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil and there are fears that their tussle for control could erupt into armed conflict.

“At this stage, I can only express hope that the upcoming anniversary [of the ISIS genocide] will not be wasted but rather used by all authorities, actors and stakeholders to unite and step up to the plate with the sole aim of serving the people of Sinjar,” Jeanine Hennis-

Plasschaert, UN head in Iraq, **told** the Security Council in May.

More than 5,000 Yazidis were killed and 7,000 girls and women forced into sex slavery by ISIS, whose victims included other Iraqi minorities such as Shabaks, Mandaeans, and Christians, according to UN estimates.

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The Yazidis have suffered persecution throughout their history, with 72 massacres committed under Ottoman rule during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Their religion is syncretic with their beliefs owing something to Zoroastrianism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Manichaeism. No outsider is allowed to see their holy book, which is written in Kurdish, and they believe in the dualism of God and Satan. Muslims have often thought they are devil-worshippers.

The Yazidis, a minority within the overwhelmingly Sunni Kurds, have long been an essential part of the Kurdish movement for autonomy and independence. A Yazidi leader, Shir Sarim, led an uprising against the Persian Safavids starting in 1506.

## Iraq has not prosecuted a single ISIS member

But ties with the Kurds have been fraying since the atrocities of Islamic State, which overtook vast swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria before being defeated by an international coalition in 2019.

Iraqi Kurdish lawmakers are strongly opposed to Yazidi efforts to pass a bill that would give recognition to them as a distinct nationality in Iraq like other recognised nationalities including Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. The bill

was submitted to the Iraqi parliament in early June and is currently in the committee stage.

Iraq passed the Yazidis Survivors Law in 2021 to provide monthly payments, medical and psychological care, and the granting of residential land, among other provisions but only a couple of thousand of Yazidis have received reparations so far.

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The ability to bring further prosecutions will be severely eroded later this year, say human rights groups, because the UN mission to collect and preserve evidence of ISIS crimes is being shut prematurely in September by Baghdad.

UNITAD - the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh (ISIS) - was reluctant to share its evidence with Iraq because it retains the death penalty, which is against UN policy, according to Reuters.

Many Yazidi survivors also did not consent to sharing their testimonies with Iraqi authorities for fear of reprisals from Iraqi Sunnis.

## Dangerous journey to Europe

It was unknown what would happen to UNITAD's 40 terabytes of documentary and forensic evidence, which has been used in foreign courts to try ISIS members but not in Iraqi courts as originally intended because Iraq has not passed legislation to prosecute international crimes.

Rights groups hope the UN Security Council will agree to the creation of an "active repository" so the evidence is accessible to third states, such as Germany that has convicted eight ISIS members for international crimes against the Yazidis.



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Further trials for international crimes by ISIS are due in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and France and there are ongoing investigations in the UK

More broadly, international donor support for oil-rich Iraq has fallen sharply amid the UN's shift since 2023 away from emergency humanitarian services and towards development support for Iraqi ministries and institutions.

Yazidis living in the camps for displaced people say Baghdad's offer of 4 million Iraqi dinars, about £2,400, towards resettlement costs is laughable and would barely cover the cost of building one room in Sinjar where there is little electricity, drinkable water or jobs.

Those Yazidi genocide survivors who make the dangerous journey to Europe should be offered a "humanitarian visa", say the NGOs Refugees International and Voice of Ezidis.

But it seems to be a lot easier for western countries to recognise a genocide than to deal with its aftermath.