BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TERROR & HUMANITY

THE SIXTH ANNUAL COMMEMORATION OF THE YAZIDI GENOCIDE

The 2nd & 3rd of August, 2020
Yazda is a global and multi-national organization, established to urgently respond to the Yazidi Genocide that was instigated by Da’esh in 2014. The global team strives to bring justice, sustenance, healing, and rejuvenation in support of the Yazidi ethno-religious minority and other vulnerable groups. Yazda’s main branch is registered in the United States under Article 501(c)(3). Yazda is also registered in Iraq, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Australia.

Yazda-US operates out of both Houston and Lincoln in the United States. Yazda-Iraq consists of the main office, a women’s center, a documentation facility in the city of Dohuk, Kurdistan Region-Iraq, a mobile clinic in northern Sinjar, and a base office in Sinone, Sinjar.

Today, Yazda has incubated and manages a portfolio of humanitarian and community development projects for the global Yazidi community. Projects are all survivor-centered and community-centric in design and implementation. This portfolio includes the Yazidi Survivors Network, case management, mobile clinics and medical team capacity-building, education programs, household sustenance campaigns, economic development with special attention to enabling SMEs and economical development, as well as advocacy and justice-seeking efforts, including lobbying for the recognition of the Yazidi Genocide and acknowledging Da’esh crimes in Iraq and Syria, ensuring strong testimony management for court cases against former Da’esh fighter, and documentation of the Yazidi Genocide in Iraq.

We would like to thank all of our government, institutional, and private partners for championing and deeply supporting the Yazidi Cause over the last six years. We would not be here without your generosity, deep solidarity, and humanity.

www.yazda.org

In the words of the photographer on the occasion of this sixth commemoration of the Yazidi Genocide:

“The weather was unbearably hot, a sane person wouldn’t go there in the days of peace, let alone on such horrendous days. I along with other reporters and many aid volunteers from Northeast Syria were at the area of a massive influx of Yazidis fleeing the Daesh attack on Shingal, mostly women, children, and the elderly.

“When I saw this, I could partially understand their suffering given that my family was forced out of our own home in 2012. But at least my family recognized in which direction safety was.

“The aimless steps of this family represented fear and uncertainty on this woman’s face about where to seek refuge, afraid of everything. This made us feel let down by humanity. We only had our cameras in our hands, it was my only way of giving voice to these people in need and let the world know about their unspeakable sufferings in hopes for an intervention to bring an end to the persecution of these innocent Yazidis.”

Photo courtesy of © 2014 Rodi Said / Reuters
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Dear Yazidi community members and friends of the Yazidi cause,

We would like to thank every one of you for being with us to commemorate and honor the genocide inflicted by Daesh on the Yazidi people and minority groups in Iraq that began on August 4, 2014.

On the second and third of August, 2020, you moved us with overwhelming solidarity with clear voices of pledges and commitments to actions. You reassured us that the Yazidi people are not alone. You confirmed to us that we will not re-convene for a seventh annual commemoration without first achieving key milestones on the safe return to Sinjar and justice for the Yazidi women, families, and community. You took ownership that our genocide is your genocide.

The speeches and dialogue we shared and presented together to the Yazidi community, the minorities of Iraq, and the world have been documented as a public asset for diplomacy, negotiation, action, and collective accountability for us all. With this collated document, we believe we can enter a new level of transparency, expert-based diplomacy, and evidence-based advocacy to ensure the Yazidi Cause and all those harmed are not left behind.

Hand in hand, a peaceful, sustainable, and humane future can be achieved with steadfastness and dedication. Thank you for honoring our past and present, and for your relentless belief in our future.

With much gratitude and our deepest respect,

Lynn Zovighian
Managing Partner
The Zovighian Partnership

Haider Elias
President
Yazda Organization

OBJECTIVES & APPLIED METHODOLOGY

This collated documentation includes all speeches given by keynote speakers, moderators, and panelists at the Sixth Annual Commemoration of the Yazidi Genocide. All speeches were transcribed both in the spoken language of the speaker and that of the interpretation, to ensure that both the English and Arabic languages are documented.

First draft transcriptions were done live during the hosted commemoration on August 2-3, 2020, and further drafts and edits for each documented language followed using the footage and recordings taken during both days. Some transcriptions were supported by written speeches submitted by speakers. Interjections and modifications to these written submissions were accounted for, with presented speeches used as the final version for transcription.

These documented speeches and words of solidarity have been published separately in both the English and Arabic languages. Both documents will help inform the advocacy and diplomacy plans and initiatives of Yazda, with the continued commitment and support of all partners, stakeholders, and counterparts, including The Zovighian Partnership. As such, this documentation is a public asset for the Yazidi cause and the Yazidi people, serving as a means to continue to push on safe return to Sinjar and justice for all.

The videos of keynote speeches and panel discussions are available on the Yazda YouTube channel.
OPENING KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

16:10-17:10 Iraq time / 9:00-10:10 ET

Expert Speakers:

Mr. Haider Elias - President, Yazda Organization
H.E. President Dr. Barham Salih - President, Republic of Iraq
Ms. Farida Abbas Khalaf - Human Rights Activist and Member of the Yazdi Survivor Network
H.E. Minister Falah Mustafa - Minister, Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of Kurdistan Region, Republic of Iraq
H.E. Ambassador Matthew H. Tueller - Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Iraq
Mr. Karim Khan - Special Advisor and Head, UNITAD

Master of ceremony:

Ms. Lynn Zovighian - Managing Director, The Zovighian Partnership

PANEL 1 SPEAKERS
ENABLING THE SAFE RETURN TO SINJAR - PART 1: DEFINING A COLLABORATIVE ACTION PLAN

17:10-18:10 Iraq time / 10:10-11:10 ET

The Yazidi population has transformed in the last six years. What were once approximately 450,000 Yazidis living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, are now around 250,000, with so many who have fled the region, perhaps permanently. The calls for concrete and substantial action on the ground to ensure families can return to Sinjar with full safety and self-determination are long overdue. Today, Sinjar remains one of the safest and most destroyed areas in Iraq. Panelists will discuss opportunities for a collaborative action plan that brings together local, regional and central government entities, as well as the community of CSOs, diplomats, and international humanitarian agencies for Sinjar.

Moderator:

Mr. Toby Harward - Head of Sub-Office for Mosul and Nineawa, UNHCR

Expert Speakers:

H.E. Minister Evan Faeq Yakoub Jabro - Minister of Displacement and Migration, Republic of Iraq
Mr. Mohammed al-Tamimi - General Director of the NGO Directorate, Republic of Iraq
Mr. Gerard Karl Waite - IOM Chief of Mission, Republic of Iraq

PANEL 2 SPEAKERS
ENABLING THE SAFE RETURN TO SINJAR - PART 2: BREAKING DOWN THE COMPLEXITIES OF SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

18:10-19:10 Iraq time / 11:10-12:10 ET

Can we ask Yazidi families to return to their homes in Sinjar with no long-term and dependable stability and security? Center stage to recent Turkish airstrikes and the ongoing resurgence of Da’esh, Sinjar today offers no reassurance to its long-standing communities that the necessary political, economic, religious, and social assets and institutions are being rebuilt and safeguarded. Panelists will shed light on the further complexities and challenges brought about by recent geopolitical activity, calling for strong diplomatic action to instill lasting peace.

Moderator:

Mr. Saad Salloum - Director, Masarat Foundations; and Founder, Iraqi Council for Interfaith Dialogue

Expert Speakers:

H.E. M.P. Saib Khidir - Member of Parliament, Republic of Iraq
Mr. Joey Hood - U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Near Eastern Affairs
Ms. Reine Hanna - Director, Assyrian Policy Institute

CLOSING KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

19:10-20:00 Iraq time / 12:10-13:00 ET

Expert Speakers:

Mr. Jean-Noël Bonnieu - Chargé d’affaires of the French Embassy, Republic of Iraq
Mr. Harald Herrmann - First Political Secretary & Cultural Affairs Officer, German Embassy in the Republic of Iraq
H.E. Najat Vallaud-Belkacem - Former French Minister of Education, Former French Minister of Women’s Rights
Mr. Murad Ismael - Former Executive Director, Yazda Organization and Yazidi Activist

Master of ceremony:

Ms. Lynn Zovighian - Managing Director, The Zovighian Partnership
Good afternoon everybody. Your Excellency, Dr. Barham Salih, the President of the Republic of Iraq, your excellencies, your eminence, representative of Iraq and Kurdistan governments, representatives of diplomatic mission and civil society organizations, distinguished delegates, honorable guests, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of Yazda and the Yazidi community, we want to express our gratitude and deep appreciation for each and every one of you for participating in the sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide, and for your solidarity with the victims, and the survivors of this genocide. We have many exceptional people here today, and we cannot find enough words to describe our appreciation and gratitude for being with us and constantly supporting our mission. Your attendance today serves as a reminder to us all just how important this day is, and how important our work is. I want to thank The Zovighian Partnership for their sponsorship and their great contribution to this relentless effort of preparing this event. I would also like to take a moment to remind you all of more than 20 honorable guests from the Yazidi Survivors Network, who are joining us from Yazda Women’s Center in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Our heroes, your attendance is extremely appreciated and has brought more honor to this event. Our heroes are inspiring us every day, and all the incredible energy and force that drives our work today. We want to applaud you all and all the survivors of this genocide for your unique ability, your resilience and your strength. I want to thank the delegates from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Armenian diaspora and thus the rest of the Arab world. I also want to thank our friends and supporters who are with us today from Europe, the United States and Australia. I want to thank the keynote speakers, panelists, and moderators for dedicating their valuable time today and tomorrow. You have made this conference a universal message that no minority should be persecuted for their identity or their belief.

This event is for remembering what has happened to this community in 2014. Enslavement of women and female children, mass killings, forced displacement of an entire community, and destruction of homes, religious temples and houses of worship. This event is also about the plight of this community that has spent six years in IDP and refugee camps with limited access to the simplest services. It is about over 2,800 missing women and children. It is about the absence of justice, accountability, and reparation. It is about the basic rights of minorities who are constantly facing baseless discrimination. Today, despite the multiple conflicts in the region and the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Yazidi IDPs are returning home to Sinjar six years after they were forced to flee a genocide. That community is returning and restarting their life and rebuilding their destroyed homes which is an incredibly difficult task.

Today, our efforts will be directed to advocacy for creating a safe and habitable environment for those families who are returning. In order to rescue the community from this ongoing genocide, we need some profound and practical steps from the Iraq and Kurdistan governments, as well as the international community to ensure that justice is served properly, destroyed areas are built, missing women and children are rescued, and that Yazidis and all other minorities are protected in their ancestral homeland.

In this conference, we hope our honorable keynote speakers and panelists will elaborate these practical steps in greater details. At the end, I want to thank you again for being here, and thank you for the great support, and value that you have given to this event. Today in your present we feel safe, and we feel supported.

[End of speech]
I salute you all, panelists and attendees, and you are all here to meet and commemorate this humanitarian tragedy that the Yazidis experienced, the Yazidis who suffered from Da’esh crimes and the invasion of Sinjar by Da’esh. Yes, indeed, there was a genocide perpetrated against Yazidis. Nevertheless, the unity of our people has dissipated all the hopes of the invaders, without forgetting that atrocities were perpetrated, and crimes were perpetrated against Yazidis, in addition to the destruction that the invaders committed throughout history. We have felt a lot of sorrow and sadness for the Yazidi genocide that took place on a large scale and that they were forcibly displaced and whose worship places were destroyed and defiled. Da’esh as well perpetrated the most horrendous crimes against the Yazidis in order to deprive them of their religious rituals.

The criminals will be prosecuted for their horrendous crimes while the Yazidis and Iraqis will be remembered for their heroism and patriotism. The same applies for the Peshmergas, for the Iraqi armed forces, and for the Iraqis who fought in a heroic way against those crimes, and who were able to show a high level of patriotism and heroism, and this has indeed deepened fraternity feelings. This heroism is commendable, and laudable, and we know what the international community and our neighbors have done to lend us support in order to fight against Da’esh, and Iraq has faced the perpetrators and terrorists on behalf of the neighbors and international community.

On this occasion, we renew our effort, and we continue all our efforts in order to ensure the safe and dignified return of all the displaced including Yazidis and Iraqis who were forcibly displaced, or who had to flee their homes because of terrorist acts and intimidation.

We reiterate the need to accelerate the reorganization process of the administration in Sinjar in order to provide the basic services that are highly needed by the Yazidi community, and some of them are returning to Sinjar on a voluntary basis. There can be no procrastination in satisfying the needs of our community in Sinjar. We reiterate the need to redress and remedy the victims and the parents and relatives of victims. Here I call upon all political forces to overcome political disagreements in order to achieve the needed stability and security for the sake of the Yazidis and all our people.

We also call the international community to shoulder its responsibility in helping Iraq in paying remedies to the Yazidis, and Iraqis. Needless to say that Iraq has strived to counter and ward off terrorism, which is a multi-dimensional and cross border phenomenon. And here comes the international responsibility in order to help us in overcoming the challenges, lessening the sufferings of the Yazidis and Iraqis.

As government institutions, we need to work more seriously with the UN and neighboring countries in order to turn all these calls into practical action plans. In addition to that, the government institutions, the security bodies and agencies, and our international friends are exerting efforts in order to reveal the destiny and the faith of the disappeared. According to the available statistics, 2,500 Yazidis were forcibly disappeared in addition to thousands who were abducted. We call upon the Iraqi parliament to enact a law for female Yazidi survivors. This is a draft law sent to the parliament in this regard one year ago, and we need to strengthen the international efforts in order to investigate this issue related to Da’esh crimes by virtue of the resolution 2379/2017. We need as well to hold accountable all the Da’esh members who were arrested by the security agencies and bodies.

Last but not least, ladies and gentlemen, we reiterate the need to prosecute and to punish those who perpetrated the crimes, and those who did not shoulder their legal or security responsibilities in different cities, communities, and governorates. In order to avoid the repetition of such atrocities, we need to be adamant on prosecuting the people who were responsible and the people who were lending support to the perpetrators. And, we also reiterate the importance of opening the mass graves, where there are more than 80 mass grave sites that have been discovered till now; and we need to collect evidence to gather evidence, and to safeguard evidence that confirms the condemnation of the Da’esh crimes.

Achieving the success of all these endeavors is some of the Yazidi entitlements and it is also a national and humanitarian entitlement in order to avoid the replication of such atrocities and crimes. Moreover, we need to work continuously, and in a perseverant way at our level, at the level of the Muslim world in order to fight hatred, to fight terrorist and takfiri groups.

In addition to fighting extremism and fanaticism, we need to work collectively in order to freeze and stop the funding of terrorist groups, and to cripple those groups in terms of movement and funding. We need to exert collective efforts in order to punish the perpetrators and those who turn a blind eye to such crimes, so as to be able to uproot these groups. In conclusion, I would like to load all your efforts, and through you, all the efforts for humanity; for peace, for tolerance. We hope, and we act in order to achieve good results regarding those who were kidnapped or forcibly disappeared. Very proudly, we remember the martyrs, glory to the martyrs, to the shapers of peace, and to the makers of the nation. Thank you.

[End of speech]
MS. FARIDA ABBAS KHALAF
HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND MEMBER OF THE YAZIDI SURVIVORS NETWORK

Ms. Farida Abbas Khalaf is one of more than 6500 Yazidi survivors of Da’esh enslavement and genocide. Since her escape, Farida has been an effective part of Yazda global advocacy campaign to bring Da’esh militants to justice, to raise awareness, and to bring international attention to the Genocide. Farida is currently board member of Yazda. Her book “The Girls Who Beat ISIS” is published in more than 14 languages. She is the recipient of the 2017 Polish Foreign Minister’s Pro Dignitate Humana Prize, the Marsh Award for peacemaking and peacekeeping by Wilton Park and the LibesPress Award.

Your Excellency Mr. President, Dr. Barham Salih, your excellencies and eminence, delegates of diplomatic missions and civil society organizations, distinguished delegates, thank you for being with us today. I would like to salute all the survivors from Da’esh crimes all around the world. I would also like to thank Yazda organization to allow me to speak at the sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide on behalf of the Yazidi community.

Tomorrow, the third of August, is the sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide by Da’esh, or what is called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. This marks an extremely painful day to me personally because I lost my father, my brother, and more than 50 of my relatives. It is the day of killing and capturing thousands of Yazidis in this 21st century and selling them in slave markets in addition to physically and psychologically torturing them. It is the day when Yazidi children were separated from their mothers and recruited in Da’esh games where they were brainwashed. It is the day when Yazidi captives were first to coercively convert their religion and their belief. It is the mass- it is the day of the mass killings in the villages in Kuju, Hardan, Solagh, TI Ezer, Sibay, and all of Sinjar governmate. It is the day on which hundreds of thousands of Yazidis were besieged at Mount Sinjar under a temperature of more than 45 degrees centigrade. It is the day when hundreds of children and old people passed away because of thirst and hunger. It is the day of the mass graves, whether found or not yet still found in Sinjar. It is the day when Yazidis were forced to leave their areas in Sinjar, Shikhan, Bashqia, and Bahazni. It is the day of the destruction and looting of our homes by Da’esh, and those who are pro Da’esh in the region. It is the day when more than 65 religious and cultural Yazidi monuments were destroyed. It is the day when the very existence and identity of the Yazidis were threatened with extinction from the face of the Earth. Kuju, which is my village and where more than 2,000 people lived, was completely destroyed and exterminated by Da’esh – and our neighbors who believe in the same terrorist ideologies - after a ten-day siege, during which they committed the most heinous crimes against humanity. Brothers and sisters, Da’esh has committed horrific crimes against the Yazidis and all the societies in Iraq, Syria and around the world. I remind you of the massacres against Christians and Shia in Mosul, the crime of spiker, the crimes against the Shia Turkmen in Tal Afar and against the Kakaen in Kirkuk and many other crimes.

As a Yazidi girl, I experienced this genocide in all its details and suffering, starting with kidnapping, then having been taken captive and sold. I lost most of my family members. I was separated from the rest of my family, and I was forced to leave my village, my land and my country as well until I finally ended up in Germany, the country which thankfully embraced, treated and helped me. I am not the only [one] who experienced this genocide and suffering but tens of thousands of my countrymen did and even experienced worse.

With all its components and factors, the Iraqi people are now living in a difficult situation in the post Da’esh stage especially under the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

The situation of the Yazidis, Christians and others, all minorities is absolutely tragic and dire. They are in a state of continuous annihilation; they are on the verge of extinction from their homelands.

After six years of annihilation, more than 2,800 people, most of whom are women and children, are still missing. Also, more than half of the Yazidis in Iraq are living in refugee camps and in a tragic humanitarian situation where their future is unknown. Most of the regions for Yazidis and minorities are devastated especially Sinjar as they do not have the simplest necessities for life, such as water, electricity, access to education, health, and job opportunities. The security situation in Sinjar remains fragile and unstable due to the political dispute that continues between the central- central governments of Iraq and Kurdistan Region. For instance, there are two governors for Sinjar, one appointed by the Kurdistan Region, and the other by the central government. The same applies to other positions in the government.

Justice for the victims of the genocide has not been served, and several perpetrators of these crimes are still free, not only in Iraq, but also in Syria, Turkey, Europe, and many other regions of the world, in the absence of a local and international mechanism to bring those of Da’esh to the court and justice. More than 25% of the Yazidis have emigrated to Western countries since 2014, and several folds of this number have done the same since 2003. The same applies to the Christians and other minority groups.

The future presence of Yazidis and the rest of Iraqi components for minorities such Christians and others remain unknown and threatened with extinction. They are treated as third class citizens and even less in their homelands. Their rights, and will, and voice are confiscated. In this painful commemoration and in the name of the survivors, I call upon the new Iraqi government and the regional government in Kurdistan, as well as the international community to work on the following recommendations to assist Yazids to get out of this genocide.

First, prosecute those directly and indirectly responsible perpetrators who were members and officials of Da’esh, as well as those who committed genocide against the Yazidis and all the components of Iraqi society, in a way that is in-line with the international standards and just trials.

Second, include the genocide war crimes, crimes against humanity in the Iraqi criminal law and adopted draft law to compensate all victims of ISIS. I was called upon by the parliament of Iraq to discuss and pass the women’s survivors law proposed by the President of the Republic Dr. Barham Salih thankfully and who sent it to the parliament earlier for vote and discussion…

Third, increase the humanitarian assistance to support psycho-social therapy, and the social situation of women, men, and children who survived the genocide especially those female orphan survivors and their families.

Fourth, allocate enough and sufficient funds to rebuild minority areas, including infrastructure provision of basic services and secure and protect these areas from terrorist attacks in the future.

Fifth, solve the political, administrative, and security problems in the areas of the Yazidis and minorities in Sinjar and Nineveh plains. Also, give freedom and priority to the people of these regions to govern and protect them, and allow them to participate in the police, army, and security forces.

Sixth, work on recognizing this genocide more comprehensively and also recognize Da’esh’s crimes and criminalize their terrorist ideology.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you again for listening, and for your solidarity on this day. May our martyrs rest in peace and thank you. (silence for few seconds)

[End of speech]
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TERROR & HUMANITY

H.E. MINISTER FALAH MUSTAFA

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H.E. Minister Falah Mustafa is the Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He previously served as the First Head of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), where he administered the KRG’s foreign policy and bolstered the Region’s relations with the international community. He held positions such as a Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister of the KRG and Deputy Head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party’s (KDP) Public Relations Office.

Your Excellency President Barham Salih, excellencies, your eminence, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished participants, our Yazidi brothers and sisters, warm greetings from Erbil to all of you. Thank you for inviting me to participate in this conference.

It is important that we remember the tragedies that took place, that we honor those who were killed and remember those who survived. We were all shocked to see the kind of brutality used against a civilian population in the 21st century. ISIS attacks against the Yazidi amounted to crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide. But, beyond the shock, we must do our utmost to heal the wounds of the survivors, seek justice for the victims, and find an inclusive and peaceful future for the next generation of Yazidis. I’m encouraged to see many people from around the world participating in this conference. This is an indication that we all stand by you, and we are together in this effort.

It’s important for the crimes committed by ISIS to be documented and recognized in order to ensure that this kind of hate and brutality will not be repeated, and to ensure the perpetrators are held to account. I’m impressed by the name you have chosen for the conference “bridging the gap between terror and humanity” which is truly a future oriented approach. I commend you on choosing this theme for the conference, which shows that we are ready together to begin a new chapter while never forgetting what has passed, or the burden of pain that the Yazidis continue to carry today. The Yazidis faced evil and villainy in the form of ISIS in August 2014, and then continue to bear the scars of that trauma. Fortunately, today the Yazidis see goodwill from the international community, support from the people and government of the Kurdistan Region, and a desire from everyone for their community to be able to return to their beloved homes and villages in Sinjar.

This conference is important and timely, not only because it marks a somber anniversary, but also it helps us to together prioritize and identify the areas of need whether humanitarian, legal, social, economical, or political.

It’s true that older people of Iraq suffered at the hands of ISIS terrorists, but some communities were singled out and bore the brunt of this tragedy and the savagery. No one can deny the fact that the Yazidis have suffered the most through the executions, abductions, sexual enslavement, and destruction that they faced. The Christians, Shabak, and others also face genocide, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and destruction of their homes. Their anguish remains fresh for both the Yazidis and Christians returning to their homeland in Sinjar and in the Nineveh Plain is a key demand. We need to address their needs in terms of humanitarian assistance, mind clearance, delivery of services, and reconstruction so they can look forward to a better future.

We admire the Yazidi community’s resilience which has helped the people of this ancient faith and culture survive over the centuries, through bravery, unity, and a total commitment to their beliefs and traditions. But the trauma of genocide is a heavy burden that needs care and time to overcome. There is a lot more that needs to be done, such as providing psychosocial support to the victims of abduction, and enslavement, and to those who witness their loved ones being killed and injured. There is a need for moral support, as well as providing material assistance but most importantly, providing a sense of partnership that the Yazidis are equal partners in this country, and they deserve a better life, and a better future.

The Yazidis had an expectation from all of us, from the Kurdistan Region, from the Federal government in Baghdad, and from the international community. We all need to focus on their needs and to be ready to address them. We still have a large number of Yazidis missing. One third of the Yazidis are in IDP camps in the Kurdistan Region. Their homes, villages and the city of Sinjar are destroyed and strewn with bombs and mines. More than 80 mass graves have been found and the need to- they need to be exhumed, and proper burials carried out for those who were killed. We need to address the Yazidis’ immediate needs but also ensure they have a long term sustainable and secure future ahead of them. We all know that prior to ISIS attacks, the political process in Iraq was going in the wrong direction. After the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, the then Prime Minister of Iraq, started to take actions regardless of the consequences. We saw peaceful demonstrations in Anbar province in Fallujah and Ramadi, where people were asking for security, safety, better services, and inclusion in the political process. All legitimate demands. But these legitimate demands from peaceful protesters were responded to militarily. This is one example of how sectarianism and political exclusion help ISIS to emerge. The sectarian led government in Baghdad marginalized and excluded the Sunni community and started to take action against the Kurdistan Region.

We saw an army that was supposed to Iraq’s national professional military heavily armed by the United States, failing to fulfill its obligation to defend all the people of Iraq, and all the territory of Iraq. These political and security mistakes were costly for Iraq, and we must all learn the lesson before we can start on building a new chapter in the life of the Yazidis, and the entire population of Iraq. Regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds, we in Kurdistan Region believe in through a genuine partnership. We also believe in sharing power, but also in devolving power. That’s why we also support the cause for establishing a province in Sinjar, for the people of Sinjar, to manage their own affairs, and to be in charge of their own affairs.

The same thing goes to the Christian community in the Nineveh plain. When they asked for autonomy, we in Kurdistan Region support this approach. We support calls that lead to sharing power, sharing wealth and devolving power to local communities. A large number of the Yazidis who were abducted have been found or rescued, but there is yet a significant number, who are still missing. This is an issue we need to work to all together, to share intelligence and information on their whereabouts so that we can bring all of them back to the embrace of their families. At the same time, we need to provide healthcare, psychological assistance, and social support for the victims and their families to prepare the ground for their reintegration into their communities. We know that this is an exceedingly difficult task, but this is a must and something that with the right resources can be done. When we talk about missing women and children, we also talk about serious problems. Children who have been born to ISIS fathers, this is a problem in itself and that has been an obstacle in the face of many of these women to come back to their families and to reveal or register these children. Therefore, we need to work together to address this, this socially, religiously, administratively, and politically. But we have to find the right environment, legally, as well, to make sure that these children will have a future. It is not their fault to be judged by the crimes of the people who have committed such kind of brutality.

We also need to work together to support the communities that six years later, are still displaced. While the Kurdistan Regional Government has done its best to provide water, electricity, education, and healthcare services to all the displaced and refugees, it is not enough. Every child deserves the best education and opportunities for success. Every mother deserves to know that her family is healthy and kept safe. Kurdistan Region’s population of five million is supporting a total of 1.1 million refugees and IDPs from Syria, and displaced people from the rest of Iraq, including the Yazidis and Christians. Up to 70% of the cost of caring for them is borne by the KRG, while the rest is provided by friendly governments and NGOs. We are grateful for that assistance, but more is needed, especially at this time, when our country is suffering, and we are still living under the shadow of the pandemic. Those living in camps are more vulnerable to contacting the coronavirus, keeping in mind that social distancing, and practicing protective measures are not always possible when living at close proximity to one another. The governments of Erbil and Baghdad, and our international partners have a collective responsibility to help protect the displaced community against COVID-19, and to ensure that aid communities to reach the most vulnerable families.
The displaced families need assistance, whether they are in camps or living within the host community. But at the same time, we need to make sure that we have the long-term plan for the safe, voluntary, and dignified return to their homes. These communities will not be able to go back unless they have security, basic services, a prospect of a livelihood, and a sense of control over their own destiny. Some have called for a greater say in the administration security of their home areas. We back any step that will bolster the stability and long-term sustainability of the Yazidis, Christians, Shabaks, Kakais, and other components, who feel under threat. One of the highest challenges in rebuilding is rebuilding trust. Many Yazidis and Christians fear returning to their places of origin because often it was their neighbors who turned them over to ISIS or joined ISIS themselves.

How can the Yazidis be expected to feel safe when some of their people of the next village were involved in killing or raping their loved ones? Rebuilding a sense of community, educating people across Iraq to accept each other, and to live together in peace and shared prosperity is ultimately the way forward. But it’s a long and arduous process that requires commitment from all sides, tenacity, and the support of our international friends.

The Kurdistan Regional Government has spared no effort to improve our educational system so that children learn about different faiths, not only Islam. It has supported rebuilding Churches and Yazidi temples. It has supported and has promoted the principle of religious freedom and peacefull coexistence. Kurdistan Region is ready to work closely with Baghdad to address these issues in order to secure stability and to build a lasting peace. The culture of religious freedom and harmonious coexistence must be prevalent in all aspects of life in Iraq, in our politics, society and economy, and it should touch every corner of our country. Kurdistan Region is ready to coordinate with Baghdad, with the government of Nineveh, as well as with the Yazidi and Christian communities on the issue of security. As far as security is concerned, it is important for all foreign militia and armed groups to be out of Sinjar. So, about that Erbil and Baghdad can work together to provide security to the local population in Sinjar. In this process, we need the heavy engagement of United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq UNAMI, and all other UN agencies and donor countries who are in Iraq, in order to have the reconstruction of these areas. We need better cooperation between Erbil and Baghdad, and our partners in the international community.

It is important here that we thank the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and all the members of the global coalition to defeat ISIS, who have helped and supported the Yazidis, the Christians, and Iraq as a whole. Without the coalition, the Peshmerga and the Iraqi security forces will not have been able to bring the territorial caliphate to an end. Now, we need our international partners to work with us to ensure the political process in Iraq is on the right track and that the Peshmerga and the Iraqi forces work in lot step to eradicate ISIS from disputed territories. Cooperation between Erbil and Baghdad as well as the United Nations and the coalition is critical to addressing the needs of the Yazidis and their aspirations.

Many communities in Iraq have suffered genocide over the decades. Whether you are a victim of Saddam Hussein’s unfiled genocide, three decades ago, or a Yazidi, who was the casualty of ISIS crimes, you seek justice and accountability. When we talk about seeking justice and bring the perpetrators to justice, it’s important that Erbil and Baghdad work closely with each other, but at the same time, cooperate and work with the United Nations investigation team led by special advisor Karim Khan. This is important for the Yazidis, and Christians, and for all the Iraqi communities, but at the same time, to the international community that justice is taking place. Achieving justice is essential. To bring the perpetrators to justice for committing genocide is an important part of the healing process for the victims, for the country as a whole. Without justice, there cannot be reconciliation and without reconciliation, we are doomed to live in suspicion of each other. In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, as we mark this somber sixth anniversary of a monumental tragedy, we must acknowledge that not enough has been done to support the Yazidi community. About 100,000 Yazidis have left Iraq altogether since 2014. And about 360,000 Yazidis have been displaced. To ensure they can return to Sinjar and have a sustainable and bright future in their own country, we must overcome political obstacles, avoid the traps of prejudice and be tenacious in pursuing justice for the victims and comprehensive peace for all of Iraq. Thank you very much indeed.

This speech was presented at the sixth Yazidi Genocide Commemoration in the English language and with live interpretation in the Arabic language.
Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in the solemn occasion to commemorate an honor of the sixth anniversary of the Yazidi genocide at the hands of ISIS. Today and tomorrow we remember those who lost their lives. We express sympathy to those subjected to horrific and dehumanizing activities and console those who lost their families.

Senior officials across the US government see and recognize the suffering experienced by the Yazidis. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Joey hood, will speak later today. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback will speak tomorrow. Ambassador at Large, Morris Tan, who leads the Office of Global Criminal Justice, an office that was specifically established to respond to the world’s most egregious mass crimes, sends his regards, and expresses his commitment to justice for the Yazidi people. And there are many more. The ISIS occupation of Sinjar was a scene of profound tragedy. Many Yazidis fled their homes to escape the targeted campaign of killings, rapes, abductions, and enslavement. Many of them remain displaced today, or permanently left out of the country. The Yazidi people are deeply connected to their ancestral homeland and as such we acknowledge the deep loss those separated from it must feel. The brutality against the Yazidi community by ISIS represents a dark chapter in humanity’s shared history and must never be forgotten. We must also remember that Da’esh targeted anyone who would not accept their ideology of hate and support their quest to build a culture of intolerance. But in their failure, we see hope. Hope that despite their efforts to sow division and mistrust, the evil they brought to Iraq instead inspired cooperation and support among all of its people.

Today Yazidis are working hand in hand with Sunnis, Shi’a, Turkman, Christians and all of Iraq’s communities to rebuild. So, while today we remember the lives lost and the victims and their suffering, we must also honor the strength, resilience, and perseverance of the Yazidi people. Know that our support to your community is unwavering. We hold in the highest esteem those survivors who braved potential rejection and marginalization to come forward and tell their stories of encouragement. Stories the world must hear every day to ensure that the legacy of your communities’ sacrifice remains eternal.

Today, I am hopeful for Sinjar and the Yazidi people. Since June, hundreds of Yazidi families have returned to Sinjar. Finally coming home after years of displacement and exile. These families, and those who follow them must be supported by the Iraqi Government and the international community. Today the US government has provided more than 470 million dollars in support of the Vice-President pensions initiative to support religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq to heal and restore their communities. Support by the United States Agency for International Development, USAID, has included the provision of supplies to the Sinjar General Hospital, which will allow the hospital to expand its services, a key factor in Yazidi returns to the homeland. As well as, the rehabilitation of key irrigation wells, the equipment and rehabilitation of several schools and other such activities that make return possible. The State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration is also working to support sustainable returns in Sinjar district, including assistance and rehabilitation of a water network in Sinjar Center, allowing 445 households to connect water to their homes. The Bureau’s education partners are supporting schools in Sinoni, through provision of learning materials school rehabilitation teacher training and accelerated learning centers to help students who have missed years of education due to conflict. A year ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Lalish temple, the small holy site in the Yazidi faith. And at that time announced the grant from the State Department for 500,000 dollars. Today, I’m pleased to announce that we are contributing an additional 500,000 dollars for the rasterization and stabilization of that important site. But the full renewal of civic and religious life in Sinjar can only be achieved through justice and accountability. To that end, we are also supporting the United Nations investigative team to promote accountability for crimes committed by Da’esh. UNITAD, Karim Khan, and their work to help communities heal by collecting preserving and storing evidence of the war crimes and genocide perpetrated by Da’esh and its leaders. Our support and that of the international community must be accompanied by progress to establish a local government and security mechanism that enjoys the full confidence and support of Yazidis. I urge Iraqi leaders in the international community to make this a priority moving forward.

Let me conclude with this. Nothing we can say or do will ever fully address the pain and loss that Yazidis experienced. Nothing can bring the victims back, and the suffering experienced by the survivors will last long after this state. To honor them all, we must pledge to never again, allow the evil that Da’esh inflicted upon the world to be seen again. Thank you.

[End of speech]

This speech was presented at the sixth Yazidi Genocide Commemoration in the English language and with live interpretation in the Arabic language.
Your Excellency Dr. Barham Salih, President of the Republic of Iraq, Ambassador Matthew Tueller, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, it really is an immense privilege to be invited to join you all on this day of remembrance. Many speakers have highlighted what a somber occasion it is. It’s a somber occasion, it’s a painful occasion, and it’s also a heroic occasion. The remarkable fortitude that you, the Yazidi people have displayed will be written large in the annals of history, in the annals of different religious groups that have struggled to maintain the identity and their right to practice and worship, free without constraints, without reprisal, and with full security.

May I start by really applauding Yazda, President of Yazda, Haidar Elias, the workhorse of Murad Ismael as the Former Executive Director, Lynn, you and The Zovighian Partnership for sponsoring and helping to arrange this event. For the Yazidi survivor groups, Farida, who always has always eloquently and powerfully brings a spotlight to a continuing injustice. It is important to recall that whilst the crimes took place six years ago, they are continuing. We’re not talking about a historic crime as if everything is now looking at recovery and psychosocial support. Families still feel bereft. I have met survivor after survivor, and I am incredibly moved. Lawyers even have emotions, and must have emotions, were moved. When I speak, when I went to Kanki Camp, just a couple of months ago, I think in March, just before the COVID restrictions, I spoke in Kanki camp to one raped survivor. The story to tell was chilling. And yet, her concern was not one of pity for herself. It was a simple request that we must need that where is my sister? Where is my mother? And numerous Yazidi families today, are waiting to know the fate of loved ones, those that may be dead, to find out where they are buried. Those that are missing to find out where they are and to reunite these divided families.

I won’t go into the acts of depravity of Daesh because, you, the Yazidi community have witnessed it firsthand. You don’t need outsiders, even a firm and committed friend like myself and my team, to tell you what you’ve suffered. Every act of depravity, every act of cruelty, every type of crime was inflicted upon the Yazidi people. And it’s in response to your voice, the role of Yazda, the role of people like Farida, Nadia, Murad, that the international community was moved. It was moved to action in creating the United Nations Investigative Team to promote accountability for the crimes of Daesh. UNITAD, the team that I have the honor to lead, and which determination moves states, even in this highly fractured environment of the Security Council, where it is very difficult to get consensus on any particular issue. A council spoke with one voice saying what dire state is unacceptable to all humanity, and with the support of the Government of Iraq, with the welcoming embrace of the Government of Iraq, UNITAD deployed, 20 months ago, on the 31st of October 2018 to Iraq, and started its work.

For a moment, I’d like to pause there, because it’s important to reflect. I think if we’re looking at bridging the gap between terror and humanity, certain key axioms, certain very similarities in business, in management. It is often said that the mark of a good leader or a good colleague is not how they treat the powerful, their bosses, people in positions of authority, but you can have a far keener insight, when you see how the weakest, the most junior individual is treated. The same in my humble view applies to states, the majority, the powerful, those with the power to affect change are of authority, but you can have a far keener insight, when you see how the weakest, the most junior individual is treated.

Many speakers have highlighted what a somber occasion it is. It’s a somber occasion, it’s a painful occasion, and it’s also a heroic occasion. The remarkable fortitude that you, the Yazidi people have displayed will be written large in the annals of history, in the annals of different religious groups that have struggled to maintain the identity and their right to practice and worship, free without constraints, without reprisal, and with full security.

And we also underlined as one of the previous speakers my brother, Faiia Mustafa, highlighted that stigma must not attach to survivors, but to the perpetrators proved as such in fair trials. And the children impacted, affected, or created by the crimes of Daesh must also be treated with kindness, and that collective action is the only way forward. In addition to the mass graves work that we have been working in partnership with the authorities in Iraq, UNITAD has conducted testimonial evidences, interviews, we have worked with the Iraqi judiciary and judge Zaidan to collect phone records of Daesh perpetrators so that we can identify those Daesh members and have evidence that we can feed into different courts.

Mr. Khan is the Special Advisor and Head of the Investigative Team established to support domestic efforts to hold ISIS (Daesh) accountable by collecting, preserving, and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed by the terrorist group ISIS (Daesh) in Iraq. Mr. Khan is a barrister and Queen's Counsel in the United Kingdom, with more than 25 years of experience in international criminal law and human rights.
to abandon that belief, at the hand of a gun. And your survival, your existence is the most eloquent repudiation of Da’esh. Your existence, the event today is the most eloquent act of defiance. Because, to the extent, there was an attempt, to wipe out, to silence, to decimate your community, that has failed. So, I wish each and every one of you: safety, serenity, peace and justice. We can only do that if we are united. So, today and tomorrow, there will be a number of events like this, remembering what took place. The greater challenge, the greater imperative in my view, is we do not forget, next week or next month. And we take concrete steps to ensure those criminals are subjected by way of evidence-based trials, fair trials that stand the test of time. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today.

[End of speech]

This speech was presented at the sixth Yazidi Genocide Commemoration in the English language and with live interpretation in the Arabic language.
It’s an honor to be asked to participate in the sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide and to moderate a panel that is incredibly important, and indeed very current, at this present time, enabling a safe and I would add a voluntary return of the Yazidi community to Sinjar. Thank you Yazda, thank you The Zovigian Partnership for organizing today’s event. And, a big thank you to the distinguished panelists.

Before I introduce the panel, if you will allow me, I just want to set the scene for the remarks which have been put extraordinarily eloquently by the prior speakers. Six years have passed since a so-called Islamic State group, or Da’esh invaded Yazidi homelands around Mount Sinjar, committed the most evil crimes and as Karim Khan said the most depraved crimes imaginable against the Yazidi people and displaced entire communities, both Yazidi and non-Yazidi from their homes. But while Da’esh was militarily defeated in the following years, a very large number of Yazidis have not yet returned to the Mount Sinjar region preferring to stay in internal displacement camps, mainly in Duhok or seeking to leave Iraq and make new lives in other parts of the world. As long as Yazidis remain displaced and as long as they remain unable or too fearful to return to their homes, their tragedy will continue.

Now, in conversations that I have had with Yazids in Sininar in Sinuni and in Mosul during the past year, I’ve been presented with a long list of obstacles to return whether it is the security situation, the lack of local government structures, destroyed homes, the presence of mines and IEDs unexploded objects, the issue of compensation, wider legal concerns, the absence of basic services, be it health, education, water, electricity, and the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities. There’s so much critical work that needs to be carried out in this region, from both government entities at all levels, from civil society organizations and from the United Nations and other international humanitarian and development partners in order to assist safe and voluntary return. There’s a real need for a collaborative action plan to engage all involved actors in their respective spheres of expertise.

So, with that I am really delighted to introduce our distinguished panel of speakers. Firstly, Her Excellency Evan Faeq Jabro, Iraqi government Minister of migration and displacement. Your Excellency, thank you so much for participating with us today. Secondly, His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Al Tamimi the general director of the NGO Directorate at the Iraqi Council of Ministers. Thank you, Your Excellency, for your participation. And, to Mr. Gerard Waite the chief of mission of the International Organization for Migration IOM in Iraq. Thank you, Mr. Waite for your participation. Before I give the floor to the first panelist, I would like all panelists to consider answering the following questions within their remarks. Firstly, how can the government and the international community support the Yazidi population to achieve a safe, stable and a dignified future?

And secondly, for those who voluntarily choose to return to their areas of origin, what are the most pressing needs in Sinjar today? So, following the three interventions, I will ask a couple of follow up questions, and then open the floor to questions from conference participants which I think they can do so on Zoom chat. And so please, I would say to all participants, please send your questions and we will try to answer as many of them as possible when the second part of the hour starts. So, with that, I give the floor to Her Excellency Minister Evan Faeq Jabro. The floor is yours.

[End of panel introduction]
Dear survivors, excellencies, dear representatives of organizations, dear participants, assalāmu ʿalaykum [Peace be upon you].

Today, we are commemorating the plight of Sinjar which has led to a suffering that we will not forget. This is a very thorny and complex file and issue, and we should seriously try to find a solution to support the noble Iraqi society, to secure the safe and dignified return, especially After the great distortion and difference left by ISIS and the wars. ISIS has or did acts of genocide to disseminate the Yazidis.

We are all encountering obstacles and challenges in Sinjar. And, we are really exerting efforts to address the main issues which will Secure stability and security in Iraq and also which will secure a resumption of the economic cycle. As well as, meeting the basic needs education, health, water, infrastructure, sanitation. And, we are also talking about the social and criminal justice which is very important in the region.

Until today, all the coexistence projects were unsuccessful in Sinjar due to the immensity of the atrocities, the crimes, the offenses endured by the Yazidis. The clans were the victims of ISIS and, what is more dangerous is that these members were not punished, prosecuted, and they were not criminalized yet.

What was seen in Sinjar on the third of August 2014, what was witnessed was frankly, breaking of all the promises made to the Yazidis in Sinjar.

In order to realize the promises, we call upon the international community and all our friends to unify our ranks. To realize the agreement between the Iraqi Government and the UN agencies which is to host and sponsor the conference that was supposed to happen in the Fall of 2020. The aim of this conference was to look into the future of Sinjar and to secure the dignified and safe return of Sinjar and the resumption of peace and security and the achievement of coexistence, as well as, for the provision of basic needs in this country and this region in particular, especially endorsed by the Yazidis. We call upon once again the stakeholders, and we are, currently, in preparatory committee. We are working with this committee to secure the security in Sinjar in the future, basing our work on the achievements really made by the resilient and perseverant Yazidi community which has proved that it is able to be attached to its land and to return to it despite of all the circumstances.

We are talking here about the importance of economy, health, education, and other sectors. And, this was possible with efforts of the Yazidi community and the international and national agencies and stakeholders.

On the economic level, the Yazidi community was able to reactivate the economic system to revive the economy and to work on the wheat crops in the northern part of Sinjar which guaranteed self-sufficiency. And, also Sinjar was able to plant tobacco.

As for the education we currently have 45 schools open in both Arabic and Kurdish languages. And, we were also able to open the first university in Sinjar which is milestone in the period.

As for the health sector, we are trying to revive the hospitals, the dispensaries in Sinjar, in the northern parts of Sinjar and also in Sinjar itself. It came along the reopening of the National Hospital in Sinjar and also an opening of a new hospital with the assistance of the French government and the Iraqi Ministry of Health.

This speech was presented at the sixth Yazidi Genocide Commemoration in the Arabic language and with live interpretation in the English language.

MR. MOHAMMED AL-TAMIMI
GENERAL DIRECTOR OF THE NGO DIRECTORATE, REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

Mr. Muhammad al-Tamimi is the General Director of the NGO Department in Iraq and Head of the Operations Room of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

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The most important issue is the violation, the injustice endured by the Yazidi women in particular. This was clear in the organized targeting of Yazidi women. Systematically, ISIS opened mass graves in Sinjar. We are currently talking about seventeen exhumated graves currently.

Our plight today is still continuous. We have more than 3,000 women and children who are still abducted even though we were able to defeat ISIS three years ago. However, these women and children are still of unknown whereabouts. And after six years, the survivors are still enslaved, are still in pain, are still in despair. And this really makes it even more urgent to involve the Yazidi women in the rebuilding of Sinjar and to allow her to participate in the future of Sinjar, in drawing the prospects in Sinjar.

We should also talk about the need to redress, the need for reparations for the Yazidi women because the married Yazidi women are skilled enough to be leaders, and they are really the best example of coexistence in Sinjar. Hopefully, we will meet next year, and hopefully we will be able by then to achieve all our promises.

Thank you very much for this conference. On behalf of the Iraqi society, I would like to thank Yazda, I would like to thank all those who organized this conference and hopefully Sinjar will really be a [...] [direction] for coexistence and of a more prosperous future. Thank you very much.

[End of speech]
communities, presence of multiple security actors, and the fear of ISIS attacks. To answer them, what is the most pressing need? I would say, it is close coordination between the multiple actors that are able to support durable solutions in Sinjar, not only in terms of general support, but also in terms of support for justice, accountability, support for preparing social relations. We can rebuild homes, but if Yazidis are still uneasy returning to Sinjar due to security concerns, the impact will be negligible and will ultimately fail. Recent government decision to allocate two billion Iraqi Dinar to provide Yazidis with return grants is a tremendously important initiative about further investment in a wide range of areas is still needed to ensure that returns could be sustained. Thank you.

[End of speech]
I would like to welcome all of you and to thank you for this important opportunity. First of all, I would like to pray on the souls of the Yazidi martyrs and the Iraqi martyrs in general. Six years ago, on this day, our heroes were at the forefront to defend, to attack ISIS after they were left and abandoned by everybody to defend our land, to defend our dignity, our honor. May the souls of our martyrs rest in peace. And, appreciation is to Yazida who is working every year to commemorate this genocide.

We would also like to welcome our dear sisters and brothers mainly Mr. Qassim Al Araji who is the spokesperson of the Yazidi cause. Hopefully, all his work will echo and will resonate. And I should also thank our supporter, our friend, Mr. Joey Hood who does not spare any effort to help us.

And to you, I would like to say that your role is crucial to defend the minorities and thank you also to Madam Reine Hanna. So, I have listened to all the speeches delivered so far and that were discussed since the beginning of our conference today. What is nice and beautiful is that they all indicated the problem, they all identified the problem which is to support the Yazidi community and to support the Yazidi cause and the importance to help the Yazidi community whether the authorities in Baghdad or the authorities in Erbil. So, they have identified the problems, however frankly, since six years ago or a bit less we are still demanding and requesting the solution of these problems, but there are none why? It is a question that I have been asking so far because my parents are asking this question. Of course, we are representing our people, but we are also questioned by our parents. And, they are asking all the political agencies and we are also asking this question to the consecutive governments. If you are really supporting the cause, if you are really able to diagnose the problems, why aren't able to identify the solutions?

Of course, there are three problems incorporated in the Yazidi cause and we are repeating them. There are administrative, security, refugee, and services problems. I do not know where to start, and I do not know what the reason is because every stakeholder is throwing the responsibility on someone else or on another stakeholder. Erbil is saying that the problem is in Baghdad, Baghdad is saying that the problem is in Erbil. The governor is saying that there is a consensus between Erbil and Baghdad so where is our cause? Where is the Yazidi problem? Where is the salvation for the Yazidi cause? Really a solution should be found… Today the simplest touristic and service provider agencies, the health agencies also, all these agencies are involved in a political conflict. If I want to open, let’s say, a veterinary hospital, it is involved in a political problem, in a political conflict. And of course, this is not serving the sake of the Yazidi community, and this is not showing the love of the Yazidi community. If I love a certain community, I should provide the services. Politics is political! However, the need is something else. Today, we are talking about influx of returns. This is a blessed step, however there are no solutions, no services, no aid, no well-defined solutions.

I listened to all those who are in the agencies and the government who talked about this issue, but frankly, we are really listening to the same words, where are the practical steps? None! We are saying brothers, concerned individuals, officers, please we need to find a solution for the administration. It is a simple solution we have a lot of stakeholders in Sinjar, we have upcoming elections, it’s a blessed step taken up by the government.

Today we have an administration, and of course we need to have a person who is in charge. We have different viewpoints in Sinjar. And, of course, this is not in the best interest of Yazidis to have one person who is biased. So, it is very simple to reach a consensus regarding the administration and unfortunately there is no solution in this matter.

The second issue is the security. Today there are concerns, there is fear. The majority of the tendencies, the viewpoints, the ideas, and these movements, all have arms and weapons, and they are all using the Yazidi as a tool. So, the tools are
Silo, and there is an agency or a party that is obstructing the work. And every stakeholder is throwing the responsibility on another stakeholder.

Frankly, the Yazidi issue does not need directives from Erbil and from Baghdad. We have already heard these slogans and we are still hearing them. We do not need to tell the Yazidis that you are part of Iraq, you are the origin of Iraq, you are a very important component of Iraq. No, this is wrong because we need solutions to these problems, we already have solutions. The solutions are present and clear. And, the problems and clear and unknown. Why do not we work on solving them? So, we are being asked by our parents to answer these questions, and we are also asking these questions to the officers.

Some people want the Yazidi, to go back to the era pre-2014. Now, however no one wants to go back to this era and thank you very much.

This speech was presented at the sixth Yazidi Genocide Commemoration in the Arabic language and with live interpretation in the English language.
Thank you Yazda for inviting me to commemorate once again the genocide against the Yazidi people six years ago. It’s an honor to be participating with my friend Mr. Saib Khaifir who is a perfect example of what Iraq is capable of. If Iraq is going to find solutions for all of its suffering components, it’s with people like Saib. I appreciate how frank and direct he was in his assessment of the situation because that’s what we need to hear now, we need to dispense with the big words and big ideas and get down to the truth of what we need to accomplish.

As many of you have heard me say many times, as you have heard from our Ambassador, and from Ambassador Sam Brownback, one of the highest priorities of the United States is helping people, Yazidis and others in Iraq return home safely and with dignity. That’s why over the past three years, the United States has allocated more than half a billion dollars to helping Yazidis and other victims of genocide return home. That help has been important in keeping people alive. But, we all know, and we just heard from Mr. Saib that insecurity due to the presence of armed groups outside the control of the central government is the main reason Yazidis cannot return home.

Personally, I remember how shocked I was when I arrived in the village of Kuju about a year and a half ago to commemorate the opening of the first mass grave. I was shocked to find Hashish Shabih flags flying more prominently than the flag of the State of Iraq. It pains me every time to hear Turkish jets bombing PKK targets in Sinjar. We have been encouraged by the assurances of Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi and his government’s engagement with Yazidi representatives. Political leaders in Baghdad and Erbil and throughout the country need to work together to create a political environment that allows all components to feel safe and dignified, that’s the only solution.

The international community can help in every aspect, but the main action needs to be taken by the central government and the regional government. This means putting security in the hands of professional security forces including, and especially, locally recruited police, police who aren’t from the area and who will protect and serve their communities, not armed groups from some other location. That means, implementing real governance that empowers the local community and brings back essential services.

The international community can do everything, we can restore all of the electricity, all of the water, all of the hospitals, and brings back essential services.

Six years after the genocide began, we know that not everyone will choose to return to their former homes, even if there is security, even if there are basic services, even if there is a civil administration, so as we continue to help people return safely and in a dignified way to their old homes, we also need to help those who decide to make their homes elsewhere in new locations. When I visited the sacred temple at Lalish last year, and I tied a knot in a colorful cloth, I made a prayer to see all Yazidi people and all Iraqis living in safety and in dignity. And, that remains my prayer today as well. Thank you.

[End of speech]
successfully exemplified by the NPU is the only policy proven to facilitate the return of minorities, specifically Christian Assyrians to the Nineveh Plain and significant proportions. The expansion and empowerment of the NPU could also enable the government of Iraq to regain control of Nineveh government, and I will elevate the Nineveh Plain above the Baghdad Erbil dispute in order to prioritize the needs of local communities. Reestablishing federal control of these areas is necessary to rebuild local governing institutions, to diminish local tensions, and to reduce territorial contestations. Threats against democratic rule in Iraq are many, but the recent popular uprisings have shown that the change is possible, but we cannot wait for change. Yazidis, Assyrians, and other vulnerable peoples do not have the luxury of time. Urgent measures and proven policies are needed to ensure their longevity.

If we’re serious about supporting Yazidis and Assyrians in Iraq, then we need to speak honestly about the factors that undermine their interests. The designation of the Nineveh Plain at Sinjar as a disputed territory is contrary to the interests of Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabaks and other people of the region. The ongoing political conflict coupled with foreign intervention in the region has created long lasting instability, uncertainty; it has prevented development, enabled violence, it’s continuing to fuel immigration, and it continues to hinder return to areas affected by ISIS.

We can rebuild these regions as Mr. Hood said, but rehabilitative roads and new churches are not going to inspire returns on their own. The priorities are clear. People want to feel safe, and they want conditions of equality. Yazidis and Assyrians must be directly involved in shaping the policies that will determine their future, the governor of Iraq and its international partners, namely the US must take urgent action to demonstrate that they have learned from the failed policy framework that has driven these peoples to the brink of extinction in their ancestral lands, and the window to act meaningfully and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past is rapidly closing. Thank you.

[End of speech]
I would like first and foremost to thank the persons who organized this very important conference today that was perfectly implemented remotely. Our conversations today are very much emotionally charged.

So, our conversations today are emotionally charged because we are talking about all the atrocities made against the Yazidi community. We are talking here about the historical and human component of the Iraqi society. And, we are talking about a very urgent matter because the Yazidi community is still suffering from the atrocities that happened six years ago.

We know that women, children and men of this community have endured atrocities, this is why France is continuing its commitment towards the Yazidi community. We have to honor our engagement in Iraq and everywhere else, because we are very much attached to the minorities. We are very much attached to an inclusive and democratic system, the promotion of a multicultural society, the necessity to fight against impunity, and the right to a dignified return to refugees and displaced persons. Since 2015, we have supported the Yazidi community with projects. The project has a double objective or two objectives, the first is to improve the living conditions of the Yazidi families. However, this help, this assistance is only temporary. This is why the second objective is to facilitate a safe and dignified return to the refugees and displaced persons. It is a guiding principle to our action, it is also the priority of the current Iraqi government that we support, and that should continue while respecting the International Human Law. 2,000 families have returned to Sinjar in the last few weeks. We have worked in four aspects.

The second aspect is the reviving of public services, or the recovery of public services. We have worked on the level of education with the construction of schools in Sinjar, and we also support the health services with mobile clinics and project to build a hospital. This project, maybe you have heard about, is being held with the partnership of Nadia Murad foundation and the Iraqi Ministry of Health. We consider that health is also a form of security.

The third point, we encourage the recovery of social coexistence with supporting projects of dialogue and mediation with different stakeholders.

Finally, the fourth aspect is justice and fight against impunity. And, of course, we support the action explained by the representative Karim Khan in his intervention. These are the four pillars on which we are working currently. And, this allows us to contribute to the safe and dignified return to Sinjar. However, all these question like accountability for the genocidal campaign led against the Yazidis that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Many Yazidi survivors have found refuge and a new home in Germany. Germany government at federal and state levels, as well as the German public in general have taken greatest interest in the case of Yazidis and continue to do so. And, Germany continues to support the Yazidi community in a wide range of activities and projects here in Iraq, in humanitarian assistance stabilization and reconstruction areas, in providing psychological assistance to traumatized survivors, in rebuilding destroyed infrastructure in Sinjar and other regions, in rehabilitating schools and providing teaching materials, in securing livelihood and supporting business startups with a special focus on female-led households. While progress has been achieved in the past years, and the increased return of Yazidi families to Sinjar since June is an encouraging signal to, still too many Yazidis who wish to do so have people to return to their homeland here in Iraq.

Challenges remain with regards to humanitarian assistance, security, access to services, and reconstruction among others. And, the Corona pandemic has not made it any easier and represents an additional challenge to our continued support. But please rest assured that Germany will remain committed and the staunch friend of the Yazidi community as it has proven in the past years. We will continue to pay close attention to the situation of Yazidi and other minorities in Iraq. We remain committed in contributing towards building a stable and secure Iraq that can be a safe and secure home for the Yazidis living in peace and prosperity together with other communities. This we can only achieve together with the support of the local communities, and the international community with the federal, regional, and provincial governments, with civil society, international, national, and nongovernmental organizations. And of course, an active and determined Yazidi community at its heart. At today’s solemn occasion, we honor the victims and remember to ensure that such horrific crimes will never happen again. And, we’re also looking forward to building together, a brighter future for Yazidis in Iraq. Thank you very much.

[End of speech]
Dear everyone, thank you for welcoming me among you in this ceremony which is first and foremost a moment of recollection. In 2016, on February the 18th, Nadia Murad, who was travelling through France, honored me by coming to introduce herself to me. I was then Minister of Education in France, she was 21 years old, she seemed to have already crossed hell several times on foot, shivering with cold despite the sun. But she stood upright, dignified, concentrated on her purpose so as not to forget anything, charged with a sacred mission that of bearing witness to the sufferings of her people and [...]. The men or the old women who could have told the story were dead, savagely murdered by Da’esh in August 2014, on Mount Sinjar. Woman and children were captured, raped, stabbed, forcibly converted, sold, reduced to sex slaves for woman, and listed and conscripted for young boys. A genocide planned codified with its administrative formalities and glorified propaganda magazines of Da’esh. Between 2,000 and 5,000 people were murdered in this blitzkrieg; about 6,000 enslaved insured an assumed policy of elimination, and enslavement of the Yazidi-minorities in Iraq which unfortunately was not the first in history. 72 executions of this kind had already been suffered by these people. This story, this meeting with Nadia remains engraved in my memory. There was such an icy gap between the two women that we were. I, who, a year and a half, earlier had become the first woman in history to be Minister of Education in France, a sign of modernity and invaluable emancipation. She, the embodiment of the most terrifying fate reserved for woman since the dawn of time. Enslavement, domination, slavery, important, suffering, yes, all this has existed since the dawn of time. Yes, all wars had been recognized by abuses committed against women.

But in recent years, these abuses have become industrialized as a weapon of terror and massive psychological and physical destruction. Not only for woman themselves, but also on their entire community. Women’s bodies have become a battlefield in the GRC, in Libya, in Kenya, in Mali, in Syria, in Iraq. I have always fought so that this violence does not fall into oblivion and does not go unpunished. For a long time, the International Criminal Court only dealt with them in an annexe. Yet, they are crimes against humanity, war crimes genocide in their own light. We have had many exchanges on this subject with Fatou Bensouda the ICC prosecutor who has positively changed things. Yes, the perpetrators of these sexual crimes must know that they will be punished as severely as their barbarity justifies it. Stigma and shame must change side. In France, five years ago, we engaged with NGOs, a real work in this direction. The crimes against humanity unit of the national anti-terrorist prosecutor’s office opened the historic procedure of an investigation implicating now two French men for genocide and crimes against humanity against the Yazidi minority. None of these would have been possible if women, Yazidi women of inestimable courage, had not agreed to come and testify in the ongoing investigations to tell, to say and repeat, in spite of the suffering of reliving the horror each time.

Because naturally for justice to be done, stories and evidence are indispensable. And that’s why in September 2015, when we organized in Paris the International Conference on the victims of ethnic and religious violence in the Middle-East, we adopted the Paris Plan against impunity and decided in particular to give our support to UN investigation mechanism to collect and conserve evidences punished. Therefore, healing, as well as psychological and legal assistance must be given to the victims. No one comes out of hell, without aftereffects without serious physical and psychological trauma. Access to victimology and health service for physical reconstruction must be promoted. In France, a fund has been set up to help victims and families have been welcomed in our territory. I hope that my country will do more.

Finally, women must participate in peacebuilding. One of our famous revolutionaries in France, Olympe de Gouges used to say, “Since women can go up to the scaffold, why cannot they go up to the freedom?”. Yes, women have always been victims of abuse, why are they not more present in the discussions that prepare for peace in the future. No conflict can be resolved without taking into account half of humanity. The simple principles are what I call “The three Ps”, P for “Protection”, And yes, I support the Nadia Murad’s call for the creation by the international community of a safe zone in Iraq for the Yazidi community. P for “Pursuit” and justice, and P for “Participation” to the discussion. We should add a fourth one, which is also P for “Prevention”. In order to prevent the occurrence of such horrors difference nothing must be forgotten.

As human beings, we have a duty to every man, woman, and child who has lost their lives and innocence in these massacres that the international community has failed to prevent. We have a duty to remember their names, to not let oblivion bury the victims a second time. As an international community, we have a duty not to allow this to happen again, a duty to protect the survival of the living. And as educators, as parents, we have the duty to raise our children in the rejection of all fanaticism in absolute faith in the human rights and dignity of man and woman whatever their origins, beliefs, or conditions.

Past, present, and future can never be dissociated. This was therefore the 73rd massacre suffered by the Yazidi community in history.

How could they have been left unprotected? Only by acknowledging the tragedies of the past, only by relentlessly searching for the truth of those of today can we finally prepare a peaceful future for the generations to come. That is why we are gathered here today to write the truth to prepare for the future. And as far as I’m concerned, to tell you that your unspeakable sufferings will always be present in my memory, and that the incredible courage of the Yazidi survivors will never leave my heart. Thank you very much.

[End of speech]
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TERROR & HUMANITY

Thank you so much Lynn for the beautiful introduction and thank you for having me. I would like also to thank all our distinguished guests today. What bring us today is really not only a Yazidi tragedy but, in essence, it is a human tragedy. We, as a human society, should commemoerate, should reflect, and learn so that this does not happen again to another community. Similar things happened to the Yazidis, today are happening to Weegers, Rohingyas, to other places of the world and for that reason it is very important to look to this as a global event.

As someone who worked on this case for the past six years, I can tell you it is too much. It's too much on a personal level, it's also too much on the collective level. We have all really reached our limits. I see thousands of Yazidis who have ruptured souls. I see a level of trauma that just really goes so deep that will probably take hundreds of years just to understand let alone how to heal it.

The Yazidi community was not ready; was not ready for this. The Yazidi community was a simple community that was not ready for this multi-dimensional complex crisis. It was a simple community recovering; was a simple community recovering from the genocide, recovering from many, many atrocities that were committed against it. It was recovering from years of injustice, lack of education, poverty. But it was a community that was looking forward. For the first time, people were building new homes and small factories. For the first time people were sending their children to school, and for the first time, honestly, for many people was just to put enough food on the table.

Now, the thousands of homes that the Yazidis built with their hard work, you know, between the period of 2003 and 2014 are now destroyed in Sinjar, in Bashirqa and other places. The stories of the Yazidi that I could tell you, there are hundreds of stories to tell you, but there are hundreds of stories that will never be told that include the stories of the 500 Yazidis who were massacred and put in a sinkhole in Tal-Afar. That is also the story of Qasr Mhrib and Qizil Qaya the two villages near Tal-Afar where ISIS put 2,500 Yazidis under siege, put them as objectives in a garage sale. They came in and took whatever they desired, and they left whatever they did not desire. I was in touch with these people. I saw their phone calls; I received their phone calls. Many, many phone calls in the beginning but then the number of phone calls reduced with time.

I also spoke with Aziza in 2014, the first week of the genocide. Aziza was one of the Yazidi girls taken from Sinjar along with about 190 other Yazidi girls to Mosul back to Sinjar into Syria to end up in slave markets in Syria. We witnessed them go as whole and as full of life, and we witnessed some of them come back fractured and terrorized. For some, including Aziza, we still wait for them to return. I spoke to Azima yesterday, who is Aziza's sister. I spoke to her brother. They told me Aziza might be somewhere in Syria which could be risky. They also told me about Aziza's brother that who might be somewhere in Persian that he has still not returned.

I can also tell you the story of Sultan who was only 15 when ISIS came to Sinjar. They took his parents, they took his siblings, they took his family away. So, he didn't pursue his dreams as a child, and he also did not pursue his ambitions as a boy. He doesn’t enjoy, today, the warmth of parents. Instead, he speaks of mass graves, of an abandoned farm and home, and a fading family legacy. He wants his family remembered and honored, and not forgotten.

I can also tell you the story of an old Yazidi women who came to me to Yazda center couple years ago. She told me about her son, his wife, and their children who might be in a prison in Syria while they were going, they migrated to Germany through the agency with the other 60,000 Yazidis but they lost in the Asian sea. The mother was in denial. She didn't want to acknowledge that. And, today I can tell you that thousands of Yazidis are in denial because they do not want to know the reality; they do not want to live with the reality.

I must also bring to your attention another ongoing genocide that is taking place today against the Yazidis in Northern Syria, this time not by ISIS of course, where the Yazidi community then of 80,000 persons has diminished to 3,000 or 4,000, and we are talking about the last days for the Yazidi community in Syria. And probably, will be last days of the Yazidi community in Iraq will also come if do not act, and that is why, really, this is important to start working and start working today.

I will not really list all of the demands that the Yazidi community have made. And, a lot of the demands that they made with tears. I toured with Nadia Murad to more than 27 countries and, it was not easy. It was not easy to say what your community is going through; it is still not easy. But I will really say this, if we fail in Sinjar, there is really no success to be proud of. And, there is nothing to be proud of at all. In Sinjar, we must create an example, an example of success. We must achieve justice, co-existence, economic prosperity, and cooperation.

To do that, we need to gather the political will to create a local administration, write a comprehensive economic plan to rebuild the region. And, we must also put all the forces in Sinjar under the rule of law; under the constitution of Iraq where we really do not need militias to be in Sinjar at this point. We also need to give the protection of the Yazidis in their […] with support of Iraq and the international community and that means we need 25,000 people from the locals of the region from Yazidis and then Yazidis to protect this region.

You know, I must also say that our people are courageous people, indeed courageous. We never thought we have this courage; we never thought we have this ability. But we have fought for our rights, and we are still fighting every day. We fight for our homeland to be a livable place, we fight for basic things, we fight to be human beings. We really fight to be treated like human beings, and I think that is a right that we should have. Yazidis are also very grateful people, and we must really thank everyone who stood with the Yazidi community; countries, like Australia, Germany, US, Canada, France, others who have taken Yazidi survivors, other who are working in Sinjar to rebuild the Yazidi home. Other countries, like almost every European country are doing some work in Sinjar. And, I can really just appreciate them for that work. But, that work can only be complemented with some, with action from the Iraqi government and cooperation between the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan regional government.

I also believe we cannot talk about peace in Sinjar isolated from Iraq and the rest of the country. We must build an Iraq, that is fairer, more peaceful and more prosperous for all, an Iraq that treats the weak and the strong alike, the majority and the minority alike. An Iraq that is rich and ancient as its history. Thank you.

[End of speech]
OPENING KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

16:00-17:00 Iraq time / 9:00-10:00 ET

Expert Speakers:

Ms. Lynn Zovighian - Managing Director, The Zovighian Partnership
Ms. Diana Amin Saleh - Human Rights Activist and Member of the Yazidi Survivors Network
H.R.H. Prince Turki AlFaisal - Chairman of the Board, King Faisal Center for Research & Islamic Studies
H.E. Ambassador Samuel Brownback - U.S. Ambassador at Large, International Religious Freedom
H.E. Ambassador Joanne Loundes - Ambassador of Australia to the Republic of Iraq
H.E. Congressman Jeff Fortenberry - U.S. Congressman (R-NE, 1st District)

Moderator:

Mr. Haider Elias - President, Yazda Organization

PANEL 3 SPEAKERS
SUPPORTING THE HEALING OF DA’ESH SURVIVORS THROUGH SURVIVOR-CENTERED JUDICIAL AND NON-JUDICIAL MECHANISMS

17:00-18:10 Iraq time / 10:00-11:10 ET

There have been notable victories with European and American parliaments, as well as international legislative bodies recognizing the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) atrocities against all communities in Iraq, including the Yazidi Genocide since Da’esh entered Sinjar in 2014. However, survivors continue to struggle to take former Da’esh militants to courts of law in their respective countries of origin. Panelists will debate the shortcomings and failures of justice towards the Yazidi cause, and propose survivor-centered judicial and non-judicial mechanisms to bring meaningful personal and community-wide closure to the acts of genocide and crimes against humanity that continue to inflict the Yazidis and other minority communities in Iraq and Syria.

Moderator:

Ms. Carmen Cheung - Executive Director, Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA)

Expert Speakers:

Ms. Nasrin Hassan Rasho - Human Rights Activist and Member of the Yazidi Survivor Network
Dr. Caroline Buisman - Senior Legal Officer and Team Leader of Sinjar Investigations, UNITAD
Ms. Sandra Orlovic - Reparations Officer at IOM, UN Migration
Dr. Mohammed Turki Alobaidi - Representative of the Ministry of Justice, Republic of Iraq
Mr. Matevž Pezdirc - Head of the European Genocide Network

DAY 2
WOMEN AND JUSTICE: PILLARS OF POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND PEACE-BUILDING PROCESSES
16:00-20:00 Iraq time / 9:00-13:00 ET

CLOSING KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

19:10-20:00 Iraq time / 12:10-13:00 ET

Expert Speakers:

Ms. Nadine Maenza - Commissioner, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USIRF)
Ms. Dashni Morad - Artist and Human Rights Activist
Ms. Zinah Khallat Sulaiman - Human Rights Activist and Member of the Yazidi Survivors Network
H.E. Bayan Abdul Rahman - Head of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Mission in Washington D.C.
H.E. M.P. Rezan Shekh Dler - Member of Parliament, Republic of Iraq

Moderator:

Mr. Haider Elias - President, Yazda Organization

PANEL 4 SPEAKERS
EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH INCLUSION IN POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND PEACE-BUILDING PROCESSES

18:10-19:10 Iraq time / 11:10-12:10 ET

Key to the community extermination policy of Da’esh was the enslavement and sexual torture of Yazidi women and girls. Our panelists, including a survivor of Da’esh captivity and sexual enslavement who is now an empowered advocate, will present practical recommendations for the inclusion of women in post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building. The newly-established Yazidi Survivors Network (YSN) will also be presented as an example of how building healing communities of women and girls is crucial for survivorship and the preservation of the Yazidi community.

Moderator:

Ms. Nadine Maenza - Commissioner, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USIRF)

Expert Speakers:

Ms. Dashni Morad - Artist and Human Rights Activist
Ms. Zinah Khallat Sulaiman - Human Rights Activist and Member of the Yazidi Survivors Network
Ms. Katrien Coppens - Director of Programmes and Operations, Dr. Mukwege Foundation
H.E. M.P. Rezan Shekh Dler - Member of Parliament, Republic of Iraq

Master of ceremony:

Mr. Haider Elias - President, Yazda Organization
Good afternoon everyone, from Beirut, Lebanon. Good afternoon to our friends in Iraq, good afternoon to our friends in Saudi Arabia, in the UAE, in the UK, France, Germany, the rest of Europe. Good morning to our friends in the United States and Canada. Thank you for being with us on this most important occasion.

Today is the second day of the commemoration under the patronage of His Excellency President Dr. Barham Salih, hosted by Yazda in partnership with The Zovighian Partnership.

Today is the sixth year of the Yazidi genocide. And, I want us to take a moment of silence for all those who are no longer with us today. All those whom we can still not find, all those who are no longer the same people from when that tragic August afternoon began. (silence for a few seconds)

I would like to take the space in this commemoration to also recognize who the Yazidi people have become. And, I especially would like to acknowledge and cheerlead the Yazidi women, members of the Yazidi Survivors Network who are joining us today from Duhok.

May I take this moment to say hello to all of my Yazidi sisters with us today. Welcome, Zhina, Manal, Adiba, Nisrine, Zina, Diana, Manahel, Hila, Amina, Yusra, and Manal.

I want to talk to you about what we have all been doing together in the last few days. My Yazidi sisters and I have been working on a variety of public speaking, healing sessions, and working sessions together. And, the ladies insisted that they wanted to be center stage during my speech and every one of their speeches today. They taught me, that they do not need the world to speak for them because they can speak for themselves. They insisted that today, it is their strength that takes them forward and not a past of misery that is defined by weakness. And, these are the ladies who are going to be our guides and our teachers over the course of today. I want to take this moment to acknowledge every single one of you and thank you for trusting us and, thank you for partnering with every single ally that Yazda and the Yazidi community have had by their side over the last six years.

I want to talk to you about my personal story with Yazda and where it all began. In August 2014 when Da’esh began to enter and pillage villages in Sinjar, we just could not understand what was going on. It took several weeks before postulations, presumably so-called theological fatwas, and other declarations began to be published in their various social media channels and in their English-speaking Dabiq magazine. And, only then could we begin to see the corruption, the inhumanity and the un-Islamic catastrophe that was upon us.

I picked up these fatwas and put on my once-upon-a-time hat of a young Islamic History student, and I began to read them. And, I read and heard and felt the calls for extermination. It was not about military campaigns, it was not about a strategic territorial grab, it was not about the establishment of a Caliphate, it was about extermination of community. And, a few months after I began to read those fatwas, the first incredibly strong Yazidi women began to escape Da’esh territory. At the time, unfortified borders allowing them to escape and they were returning not to their homes but to refugee and IDP camps. Unrecognizable to themselves, unrecognizable to their families. But this Yazidi community said, “we never lost you and you never lost us. Welcome home!”

And, it was only then that we were able to begin to collect evidence to understand: were those extermination calls in fact true or were they merely rhetoric on paper?
What is in a recognition? 
Your vote of confidence
in the name of my people
has done little to bring us closer
in the name of collective responsibility.

I shall not stay untitled,
just because you failed to give me a name
that could serve as a mirror
to your own fault lines.

I am not a moment in time,
gone with the past.
I am not just a vote
from a seat in parliament.
Let us talk.
Come to me, and ask me all
about who I was,
and who I have become.
I have a name.
We all have a name.
You too have a name in our story
since that August afternoon.

Haider Elias, my Yazidi brothers, my friends in Yazda, the community at large that is watching us, over 30,000 have dialled in
live from IDP camps and refugee camps around the world: Your genocide is our genocide, and I assure you that it might
have been silent or it sometimes does feel silent on some days, but that silence is deafening and the voices of today are
going to be ferocious. Thank you, Haider, my Yazidi brother, I yield the floor back to you.

[End of speech]

These Yazidi women began to teach us about what it was like to be captured and enslaved in the households of Da’esh,
sold and resold, traded and re-traded, bought and re-bought. And, I will not speak about what would happen in between
every single one of those transactions. And, it was then that we knew that this was extermination. These women were
the evidence, were the testament, proving that this was genocide.

And, it was just then that I began to get to know incredible Yazidi men and women in the United States and in Iraq
who were incubating a start-up organization that they had called Yazda. And, it was then that we sat together, and we
reviewed those fatwas together. And, it was then that we agreed that we will no longer speak of an invasion of Sinjar,
we will no longer speak about the military campaigns of a group of inhumane monsters who call themselves Islamic. It
was the time to say what needed to be said and to call it what it needed to be called: genocide! And, there was nothing
Islamic about it:

At that time the Armenian in me woke up. But that is not the person who has stood by Yazda and my Yazidi friends over
the last six years. It is the Arab in me that insisted to be by the side of these incredibly brave, incredibly courageous
human beings at a time when the rest of the Arab world was absent. Today, I am in front of you as a woman and a global
citizen because neither do I need to be Armenian, nor do I need to be Arab, nor do I need to be a woman to recognize
and bring force and voice to what we are facing today six years after it began.

But, I would like to caveat that and assure you that it is not six years after the fact because the fact is still going on and
Da’esh still exists. And, our Yazidi sisters and children, some of them, are still to be found. But, today the situation of
my Yazidi friends commands not that the Arab World or that the European diplomatic stage, or that the American and
Canadian governments come together in a showcase of solidarity. We do not need a sixth annual commemoration of a
Yazidi genocide to bring us all together.

So, what that means is that today is a new era of an advocacy platform under the leadership of Yazda in the name of the
Yazidi people with our Yazidi sisters in the frontlines, teaching us what we need to know and holding us accountable to
what we need to be achieving. And, not for a moment can we expect that our Yazidi friends must rebuild their community
and who they are by themselves. We all have a seriously measurable responsibility to do our part.

I would like to share with you a poem that I wrote on April 24, 2020 in confinement in Beirut, Lebanon on the occasion of
the Armenian genocide and I titled it: Untitled since August 3, 2014

1.
You require me to re-invent myself.
[Psycho-social therapy?]
And yet you, you do not see
the need to change your ways.
[Diplomacy and humanitarian aid?]

While I have begun my healing in my own way,
you stand stuck in the tragedy
of your global inertia.
MS. DIANA AMIN SALEH
HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND MEMBER OF THE YAZIDI SURVIVORS NETWORK

Ms. Diana Ameen Salih is a 25 year-old Yazidi survivor from ISIS captivity, a human rights activist, and one of the founding members of the newly established Yazidi Survivors’ Network.

Diana lost many of her family members during the Yazidi genocide in 2014, of whom seven persons are still missing. Her dream is to become a lawyer and support her community and the Yazidi cause.

Dear representatives of countries, diplomatic missions, and civil society organizations participants in this conference, good evening and I hope that all of you and our beloved ones are fine. It is really an honor for me to see a lot of peace lovers and Yazidis around the world who are standing by in this painful day to voice out our concerns and the concerns of the survivors of Da’esh atrocities around the world. Without you we do not have any voice, dream, and hope in this life. I would also like to thank all the members of the ‘Yazidi Survivors’ Network’ for their participation in the second day of this conference. Thank you very much to Yazda, and all those who are participating in the organization of this event for giving me the opportunity to make an opening speech on the second day of the sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide.

Yesterday, I was listening with other survivors to one of the most horrific genocide in this era. We also listened to suggestions and promises of the participants in the first day be it representatives of Iraqi and international organizations as well as representatives of the civil society organizations and institutions. When we sat down and listened to all the participants, we really felt hopeful and we hope that this year’s promises will be translated into deeds because your speeches create a hope for the survivors, and this is encouraging for us. However, if they do not happen; this will be dangerous, harmful and cruel because we did not see any change or improvement. So, as survivors we really rely on you. Today we remember the sixth anniversary of the Yazidi genocide by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or what is known as ISIS. Personally, to me, and it is a very painful experience because I have lost dozens of my relatives and hundreds of memories are painful for the Yazidis in general and for me in particular. Before the genocide, I was living a comfortable life with my family in Kuju village, in a simple house, a happy rural life where we rely on agriculture to support ourselves.

I was a good student and like any other girl, I had a dream to complete my studies and have a bright future. However, my dreams were shattered. My life was destroyed after ISIS attacks, my village Kuju which was inhabited by around 200 people was completely wiped out by ISIS terrorism. And, also by true terrorist neighbors during the siege that lasted for around ten days where the most heinous crimes of all times were made. I was enslaved, subjected to the worst forms of physical, psychological, and verbal abuse during the three years of my captivity with Da’esh. Every time I was offended, or I witnessed any abuse, I was asking myself why this hatred, brutality against us, against mankind. And, why do they want to erase us from the face of the earth? We are a simple people. We love peace, and we do not impose our religion on anybody, and we do not harm people around us. Why do they want to annihilate us? When the pain became unbearable, I stopped asking myself those questions then I decided to resist, to live, to move forward to focus on the future to protect my people and to preserve my identity.

My dears, on this day, six years ago, thousands of Yazidis were killed captured. Yet, thousands of Yazidi women were captured in this 21st century they were sold in slave markets, they were physically and sexually tortured. On this day, hundreds of Yazidi children were separated from their parents and they were enrolled in ISIS camps. On this day, my dears thousands of Yazidis were forced to abandon their faith and belief, on this day mass killings occurred in the villages of Kuju, Handan, Sulaj, Tal Azr, and Sibay, and all areas in Sinjar. On this day, hundreds of thousands of Yazidis were trapped in mount Sinjar under a temperature that is more than 45 degrees. And as such, hundreds of children and elderly passed away due to thirst and starvation. On this day, dozens of mass graves were discovered. It is the day where the Yazidis were forced to leave their houses in Sinjar and the region of Shekhan, Bashija, and Bahzani. On this day, our properties were taken by ISIS and their loyalist. It is the day where more than 69 religious sites were destroyed. Da’esh and the loyalist acknowledged that they have committed the most heinous crimes against my people. Today, the Yazidi identity became threatened with extinction from the face of the earth.

Second, adding cooperation of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity in the Iraqi penal code and the adoption of draft law regarding the compensation for all ISIS victims. I also call upon the Iraqi parliament to discuss and approve the ‘Yazidi survivors’ law’ that was proposed by His Excellency President of the Republic of Iraq Dr. Barham Salim earlier for discussion for voting.

I must remember, and I must remind you also that these crimes are now occurring against the Syrian Yazidis and their presence at stake in Syria. ISIS has committed also horrific crimes against Christians and Shabaks in Mosul. A crime in Spiker and ISIS crimes against Shi’a in Turkmen in Tal Afar, and also against Calgarians in Karuk and others.

I, as a Yazidi girl, lived and I still live out of captivity. My suffering is also ongoing because I have lost many of my family members. I was forced to leave my village, and my land, and now I currently live in a torn apart tent under the heat and the severe winter. I suffer from chronic trauma where there is little support and psychological treatment for me and for the rest of the survivors. We cannot sustain ourselves or the rest of our family. The international and national efforts are very limited to find more than 3,000 missing Yazidis. I am not alone in this genocide and suffering and plight, tens of thousands of my people lived it or they even lived worse.

The Iraqi people with all its components is now living in a very difficult situation after ISIS, and especially, after the outbreak of the Corona pandemic. However, the fate of the Yazidis, Christians and other minorities is completely tragic, and they are living on the verge of extinction if in their homeland.

After six years of genocide, more than 3,000 people mostly women and children are still missing. More than half of the Yazidis in Iraq live in camps and IDPs in devastating and unhuman circumstances. The majority of the areas once inhabited by minorities and Yazidis and Christians are totally destroyed.

Sinjar is lacking basic needs such as water, electricity, health, education, and job opportunities. The security and administrative situations in Sinjar are fragile and unstable due to the ongoing political dispute between the central government of Iraq and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. For instance, we currently have two district attorneys in Sinjar one of them is appointed by the government of Kurdistan and the other one is appointed by the local government.

Why don’t we look at this duplication, these administrative problems in other areas in Iraq? The Yazidi and small minorities in Iraq are currently citizens of third degree of even less than their own homeland. And, they are deprived of rights and voice. So, justice for the victims of the genocide has not been achieved yet. And, many of those involved in this genocide are still free, not only in Iraq but also in Syria, Europe, and several countries in the world. In the light of the absence of local and international mechanism to try ISIS elements and bring them to justice, Yazidi immigration is still continuous and today Iraq has lost more than 75% of its original components. On this painful commemoration in the name of all the survivors, the Yazidi community and Yazda organization, I am calling upon the new Iraqi government and the Kurdistan government as well as the international community to work on the following recommendations to help the Yazidi out of this genocide.

First, prosecuting all ISIS members, officers, and those directly or indirectly involved in this genocide committed against the ‘Yazidi: Crimes against humanity as well as all the crimes against all components in Iraq in line with international standards and a fair trial.

Third, increase humanitarian aid and allocations to support psychotherapy and social situation of women, men and
This speech was presented at the sixth Yazidi Genocide Commemoration in the Arabic language and with live interpretation in the English language.
Failure of American political arrangements in Iraq after 2003, the failure of the successive governments in Iraq in building national institutions, and the failure of the international community to deal seriously with the emerging situations of instability, have led to the emergence of Fahish. The ideology of Fahish is transnational and destructive by its nature, and therefore constitutes an existential threat to the concept of the nation-state and the peaceful coexistence of communities. If the Iraq national state were in good shape and functioning as a real state, the Yazidis and all other different communities in Iraq would never have suffered the way they did. This requires that all should cooperate to create the right climate to treat its root causes in Iraq and in the region at large. The discourse of the new government under the leadership of Mustafa AlKadharni gives a sign of hope in dealing with the underlying crises in Iraq. The Yazidi community has a basic human right to feel safe in areas like Sinjar. They have a right to expect ray, even demand effective security and an end to militant attacks on nearby villages.

Second is reconstruction. Homes were destroyed. Buildings brought down. Sacred places burned to the ground. Human dignity stripped to its barest. The efforts to rebuild the destruction and havoc wreaked on the Yazidi community is important for many reasons but most significant among them is that it helps build community resilience and teach future generations a vital lesson in perseverance and dignity.

It will show them that despite atrocities committed against them and their families, the Yazidi community has bounced back strong and proud. Members of the Yazidi community must play a central role in the construction efforts, and they should form an integral part of the decision-making processes. They should, furthermore, insist on rebuilding the fallen and destroyed, and the building of new services, such as local hospitals, education centres, and ensure supplies of important provisions and services like water and electricity.

Third is memory. I started my speech with the phrase, “It happened again”. I did so because when many decades ago humanity witnessed the worst kind of atrocities and genocides, we promised ourselves to never let such atrocities happen again. But it has happened again. And, it continues to happen again. It happened to the Armenians, it happened in Srebrenitsa in Bosnia, and it happened in Myanmar, not to forget what happened during the Second World War and Rwanda. Genocide ladies and gentlemen is not only the killing of human beings. It is also stripping them of their rights and of their dignity, their history, and their lands, as is also happening in Palestine by the Israelis. Memory is one of the best antidotes to forgetful collectives who deliberately wipe away our recollections of past sufferings. The Yazidi community has already set in motion ways and means to ensure the memories of 2014 are never forgotten, not just in the city of Sinjar, but throughout the world. This will show them that despite atrocities committed against them and their families, the Yazidi community has bounced back strong and proud. Members of the Yazidi community must play a central role in the construction efforts, and they should form an integral part of the decision-making processes. They should, furthermore, insist on rebuilding the fallen and destroyed, and the building of new services, such as local hospitals, education centres, and ensure supplies of important provisions and services like water and electricity.

Fourth is preventive measures. Together we should come up with the preventative measures that impede and stop the lapse into terrorism and violence. We have read in academic studies and learnt from first-hand accounts that terrorists are decultured individuals, frustrated young men and women incapable of formulating their anger civilly, unrehabilitated persons with criminal pasts, and oftentimes religious illiterates, brainwashed by power-hungry ideologues who face their hate-driven views with religious rhetoric and victim narratives. We need to address each and every one of these issues, together and sincerely, locally and internationally, removing all that fuels the flames of terrorism before the fires spread and consume all that stand in their way. I must mention that linking Fahish to Islam is a major mistake. Though they claim the name of Islam, the group is no more than an evil cult that tried to justify their evil behavior. They targeted Muslims more than others. They have gathered renegades from around the world in ten hundreds to do their dirty work. Fahish is the enemy of all, not only the Yazidis. Therefore, I hope that in promoting the Yazidis cause, we should not fall in the trap of stigmatizing Islam and Muslims. Nadia Murad and others were rescued and brought to safety by local Muslim families. Geography and history dictate that we coexist peacefully. Muslims and Arabs stand by your just cause.

Ladies and gentlemen, Saudi Arabia was and still is in the forefront of fighting terrorism, and continues to work with its allies to stamp out this scourge of nihilists who feel it is their right to visit heinous violence upon others in the name of false and destructive ends. Saudi Arabia was the first country to call for the formation of the international coalition that defeated Fahish. In fact, the inauguration of this coalition in 2014 was in the city of Jeddah, in Saudi Arabia.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen’s, terrorism is an old phenomenon and unfortunately, it will be recurring from time to time. However, definitions are a prerogative to meet the challenge of these terrorists. None of these terrorist groups bears anything to what they call themselves. So, let us call them by their true names: Da’esh is Fahish, Al Nu’rah is Al Fajarah, and Al Qaida is Al Ba’idah. The issue is how to fill our lives with the higher human values: respect of human life, justice, equality, and human rights, and to act accordingly.

In doing so, there will not be a vacuum for terrorists to take advantage and to commit inhuman acts against innocent human-beings. The Yazidi genocide must not be repeated anywhere, anytime. Thank you for listening to me.

[End of speech]
It's a great pleasure to be able to join you on this very solemn occasion. And, I remember myself two years ago being in Iraq and meeting with our Yazidi survivors, and many of them telling horrific stories, about children ripped from their arms about being sold multiple times. As a person that's worked on human rights activities for a number of years, I saw— I heard some of the most horrifying sort stories that I've heard anywhere in the world that happened to Yazidis, and it was horrible, incredible, and the world community needs to stand with the Yazidi people to help them and move forward. I also want to thank the Yazidi people for standing up around the world, and helping the rest of us to recognize the need for religious respect, not just tolerance of different people’s ideas about faith, but respect and even love for people that are of a different faith. Nadia Murad spoke at both of our ministerial that we've had on religious freedom who is an outstanding advocate. She has met with the President of the United States, President Trump, about the issues of religious freedom and recognizing and protecting religious minorities which is so important, so critical in a world today. And, I think what you're starting to see now with the movement globally, grassroots, and also at a government level maybe movement of pushing for greater religious respect, and religious freedom for everybody. What you're seeing is global leaders recognizing that unless we protect everybody's faith that's peacefully practicing their faith, no matter where they are, no matter who they are, no matter what they believe in, that we unless we protect that you're going to see the world descend into violence and into carnage, the like of which we saw in Sinjar and for the Yazidi people. And we're going to see this repeated as we have, over the past decades of human history. We've got to stand up as a global community and say that religious freedom as put forward in the UN Declaration of Human Rights is a protected right for everybody, everywhere, all the time, and the world community is going to fight for that, whether it's Yazidis, that's taking place or if it's in Xinjiang for the people Uighur people. We're going to stand up and fight for religious freedom that people have this fundamental right because of the dignity that they are as an individual. This dignity of their soul that they have a right to choose, they have a right to pick, they have a right to practice their faith freely and without persecution. They have a right to be protected by their governments to practice their own faith as they see fit. The United States government and the leadership in this case and Vice President Pence put forward an aggressive plan to help rebuild areas in Sinjar, and also the Christian and the Yazidi community in Iraq put forward $300 million to help rebuild this area. We're going to continue to do that. I saw in that area, many religious sites that were destroyed, I saw hospitals that were destroyed. I saw water supplies that had been polluted intentionally so that people wouldn't have clean water. We need to do as an international community and the United States is committed to this to help in rebuilding those places and to standing for justice. There are also more thousands of people still missing, still Yazidis are missing, and we need to actively push for them to be found and return to their families and for justice to be served for people that persecuted the others' faith and done these heinous activities. Justice needs to be served and these people need to be brought to justice, tried, and to issue the due punishment for what they have done to others. These are outstanding accounts that still exist that must be met and dealt with for there to be justice in the genocide that the Yazidis and Christians experienced in Iraq. And, those accounts are still outstanding. So, in the sixth anniversary it's my hope that by time we get to the seventh anniversary, that a number of these issues are met, that the people that are kept and that we held against their wish are released, and they're back with their families, that people that kind of did these horrific activities are brought to justice and tried before there is a seventh solemn anniversary of what this event that took place. These are the things we need to commit ourselves to now that the rebuilding efforts continue and get close to completion by a seventh anniversary so that the people they can return back to their homes and communities and resume their lives and resume their culture. We're thankful to the Yazidi people a number of which have re-settled in the United States many and state north of my home state of Kansas in Nebraska. I presume some of them are probably listening and watching this webinar. But this is not an issue that's forgotten, it's fresh and very vibrant in our minds. It's just something that we really need to get about the active task of completing and completing before another anniversary date rolls around. Thank you for allowing me to join you. God bless you. And we pray for justice and freedom for the Yazidi people. Thank you.

[End of speech]
Thank you very much. It has been, it’s a little bit intimidating speaking amongst such a group of distinguished, distinguished speakers and particularly I was moved by the earliest speeches of Diane and Lynn.

It’s important, I guess to understand in recognizing and confronting what has occurred previously, not attempting just to make the acknowledgement of the circumstances. It’s a really important part of the Yazidi community attempting to heal from those tragic events that occurred six years ago. As Australia’s Ambassador to Iraq, it’s a really great privilege to not only represent my country at this event, but also to speak to and highlight the importance that Australia plays in supporting the Yazidi community. We’ve had an enduring commitment and an active involvement in assisting Iraq overcome its difficult and trouble past and to navigate a successful and prosperous future.

So, we’ve got a range of programs underway, they’re all focused on finding a solution to and mitigating the impacts of the conflict in Iraq. And, just to go back to six years ago, I am pleased to say that we like to think in a way that did make a difference, pleased to say that the Royal Australian Air Force was part of the international effort to provide the life-saving assistance to those Yazidis who had fled to mount Sinjar to escape Da’esh. That particular humanitarian airdrop was one of the most complex humanitarian aid-drops we had done in more than a decade. And, it was in our first massive delivery of humanitarian cargo since the outbreak of violence in East Timor in 1999. I’m also moving of cause a little bit into the future, I’m very pleased to say that Australian resorts have of course, helped members of the Yazidi community establish new lives in Australia. We have one of the most generous and well-established refugee and humanitarian resettlement programs in the world. But that program is regularly reviewed so that it can be responsive to evolving humanitarian situations and changes to the global need for resettlement. And, recognizing the horrific events that had unfolded in Iraq, we made a deliberate decision and directed that the program needed to include a particular focus on Yazidi women who had survived Da’esh captivity as well as their immediate families. And, so between 2015 and 2019 over 4,000 Yazidis located in Iraq and Turkey have been resettled through Australia’s offshore humanitarian program.

Noting our initial efforts to resettle these women and families, it is pleasing to note that last year our program was able to evolve a bit further and has now begun progressing family reunification cases, and this is after approaches from Yazidis who have resettled in Australia. Of course, resettling to a new home very far away from the homeland, we do recognize and have provided significant settlement services on arrival including things like English language training, psychosocial support, financial support, healthcare, vocational educational trainings, and importantly all those locations do have appropriate torture and trauma services available. And, the connections already that the Yazidi family is making in Australia is really quite impressive as they make their new lives in cities and the regional areas of Australia. Already many have found a variety of roles whether its teacher is starting their own business and applying their agricultural skills in Australia is really quite impressive as they make their new lives in cities and the regional areas of Australia. Already many have found a variety of roles whether its teacher is starting their own business and applying their agricultural skills and, of course, we’ve also have been very pleased to have been part of that journey over the past six years. And particularly, you know, I’ve been very much enjoying engaging with you Haidar. But to finish, I would like to thank you again, for the honor to speak with you today. I feel a little bit, of a fraud with all the such important and powerful messages that have been delivered during the last day and now this session. But we’ve tried in our own way, in our own small way to help this process. And, I hope we can continue to do so. So, thank you very much.

[End of speech]
Isn’t this great in that we can all link one another as a community and solidarity, even though that we are far away from one another. We can continue to discuss the importance of a perspective of vision, a vision that flows out of a great pain, but nonetheless can potentially revitalize the extraordinary gift, the Yazidi culture, the extraordinary gift of nations that can provide stability and the extraordinary gift of how they see the community, particularly in America continues to integrate here, wave the American flag, and yet at the same time, celebrate this ancient culture and faith tradition that has really captured the imagination of the world. And, this is my primary point to you all today. That is so many of the Yazidi community has been terribly traumatized, because of external events that were not fault of your own, sweeping upon you, creating conditions of harm and death. And yet the resiliency, the reserve, the ability to not only flee, regroup, regenerate, leave, for some of you who had to flee and rebuild particularly here in America. To me is an extraordinary story, and it really in the deepest way expresses what we are as a people here in America that we believe in chances; we believe in opportunity; we believe in a fundamental premise called human dignity. So, when the genocide first began to happen, it’s seared in my memory, a group of young men, all of whom had been military translators, and of course, gotten special Immigrant Visa to the United States came to see me and we’re on the verge of tears and understandably, on the verge of anger, saying congressman act, do something, do something my mother, my sister, they’re trapped, they’re trapped. So, this began the long journey I had actually knew the Yazidi community prior to this again, had worked on a piece of legislation earlier in my congressional career that allowed for special Immigrant Visas for those who had risked their lives next to our troops, in translating, primarily translating some of some of whom died. And, so I’m proud of the fact that the Yazidi community through an odd convergence of things actually settled for the most part in Lincoln, Nebraska, my constituency and my home. And, so we enjoyed a good and quiet relationship for a long time, but then the genocide came. So upon the appeal of this young man, we went into action in Congress and did some things with the Obama administration to try to salvage in the moment what could be salvaged, given the horror of what ISIS, ISIS’s twisted ideology imposed upon you and other religious minority communities. With that said several years ago, at the behest of the Vice President, I did visit northern Iraq Nineveh and Sinjar and to attempt to look at and review what our policies were doing in terms of the economic aid, and it was clear to me that the economic aid has potential but it depends upon security, and with so many Yazidis hundreds of thousands still trapped in what I call refugee camps or camps and pressures for migration increasing, it becomes all the more important that the security measures in northern Iraq be undertaken with a robust consideration.

This is why I pressed the State Department in the recent bilateral meeting with the Iraqi government to continue to raise the issue of the plight religious minorities as to how the communities that are there can be fully integrated into perhaps regularized security forces, and that there’ll be special considerations for minority status, given the pressures that there are to, to leave, but the desire for many to remain and to reclaim their land and to rebuild. This also would have to involve the negotiations with the Kurdish government. So, the point of all of this is to please be aware of three things. One is, I consider myself a friend of the Yazidi communities. I’m proud to represent you in United States Congress. I’m proud that the largest Yazidi community here is here in America, in Lincoln, Nebraska. Second, there is still much to do from the trauma of war. Third is, your organization and your efforts are critical to maintaining what I call a consciousness and awareness of the ongoing work that’s left to do, not only to help the communities here in America who are rebuilding and preserving extraordinary tradition, but to help the communities back home, who do have the chance and possibility to stay and rebuild. And, that means integration into government processes, security forces, as well as fairness and economic dealing. So, if you can continue to make the case that this is an important part of America’s foreign policy consideration, it helps those of us who are in these positions who understand the subtleties and nuances and still the trauma that remains. One last thought when I was there with the community in northern Iraq, I met a person who said, you know, you can rebuild buildings, but it’s hard to rebuild a person. The trauma suffered by so many in the community, particularly women who were captured by ISIS, some of whom may still remain captive, again, is a compelling story that

the world needs to hear because it keeps alive again, the ongoing trauma that happened to the community and the need, for all of us internationally, to continue to raise consciousness about this, yes provide support funding, but also ensure the community has proper integration into healthy nationalistic Iraq. Thank you very much.

[End of speech]
Hello everybody. As Haidar said I’m Carmen Cheung, the executive director at the Center for Justice and Accountability. We work with the Yazda’s documentation and analysis team to support their efforts in seeking justice for atrocity crimes committed against the Yazidis, and it is my enormous privilege to be moderating this important discussion today. Many thanks to Yazda for the invitation, and for their partnership. Just very briefly, a few words to start this conversation. As Haidar mentioned, this panel is entitled “Supporting the Healing of Da’esh Survivors through Survivor Centric Judicial and Non-Judicial Mechanisms”. Its framing reflects the important role that justice and accountability play in healing individuals and communities. It also underscores the important role that survivors and impacted communities must also play in justice and accountability processes. Key components to justice are remedy and reparation for survivors. Remedy and reparation can take many forms as our expert panelists will discuss today. At core, however, the right to remedy requires that survivors have equal and effective access to justice, reparations that are adequate effective and prompt, and importantly, access to information. Reparations are what ultimately make the individual and society whole. These can range from restitution and compensation for survivors to criminal prosecutions of perpetrators, and even transformative social change, to prevent future violations. Today our speakers will share their insights on survivor centric justice from a variety of perspectives. We will follow their brief presentations with a moderated conversation.

Our first speaker is Nasrin Hassan Rasho. Nasrin is a survivor of Da’esh captivity, a Human Rights Activist, and one of the Founding Members of the Yazidi Survivors’ Network. She lost most of her family members during the 2014 genocide, and now works to seek justice for her community and other religious minorities in Iraq. Nasrin, over to you.

[End of panel introduction]
Thank you so much for allowing me to participate in this online commemoration of the sixth Yazidi Genocide. Six years have already passed since the start of this painful memory, yet the genocide still continues. The Yazidi live in despair. They lost hope in the system, in the State, and in their neighborhoods. They live outside their lands in torn tents, subjected to the winter cold and to the summer heat. There is no State plan to facilitate their safe return. Our regions are subjected to political and military struggles, the villages remain almost ruined and they lack the most basic human needs.

The result of this genocide was fatal to the small and peaceful Yazidi community. We account for more than 10,000 victims since the first day of the genocide. We have been killed, taken into captivity and kidnapped. More than 300,000 civilians are displaced after the brutal killing of ISIS and that of nearby extremists. We account for more than 7 mass graves and thousands of orphans, in addition to the destruction of houses and property. We’ve been dealing for the past 4 years with the absence or the duplication of the Administration and the absence of the State and authorities in Sinjar. Our regions have fallen to the occupation of various armed groups, including foreigners. They seem to fight over the bodies of our women, our children, our men, over our suffering, our land and people. As if ISIS crimes were not enough, some came to complete the crime by neglecting our rights, marginalizing our existence, oppressing us, manipulating our wounds. When we reach to the various stakeholders, we do not find people listening to our suffering.

The painful truth, ladies and gentlemen, is that six years have passed, and we still experiment a new genocide every day. Around 2,900 abducted women and children remain of unknown whereabouts, while the whole society lives in poverty, shock, and hopelessness. The political authority in Iraq has not found one real program to assist the victims. There is no serious campaign to search and to find the kidnapped ones inside and outside Iraq. There’s also no national plan for transitional justice in order to establish peace, compensate the victims, achieve justice, and hold accountable those who failed their duties and those responsible for the Yazidi genocide.

Six years have passed, and the government hasn’t established any council or committee to reach out to the displaced Yazidis, to collect their needs, to understand their suffering, and to discuss modalities that facilitate their return to their villages, to achieve reconciliation and peace. No one cares about them or about their cause, we don’t feel citizenship, and we feel we are second- or third-class citizens. We know nothing about our future. His Excellency the President of Iraq presented to Parliament the only law proposal regarding the survivors. The text is still under discussion even though it is a small initiative to reconfirm the rights of the victims, simply and symbolically. It has been procrastinated and neglected. It seems the law will not pass anytime soon for unsubstantial reasons. We don’t even know if it will be reconsidered. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, as a Yazidi survivor, I have been subjected to the worst forms of psychological and physical torture and to the most severe levels of persecution, abuse, and injustice that the human mind cannot even imagine or condone. Today, I call upon you in the name of humanity, freedom and life, in my name and in the name of all the victims and survivors. I call upon you to work towards achieving our legitimate demands for justice and the restoration of our rights, dignity and freedom.

I demand the Iraqi State adopt a national project for transitional justice that explicitly and clearly includes a legal recognition of the Yazidi genocide and that of other minorities, in addition to victim compensation.

Justice is served when we arrest and prosecute ISIS and pro-ISIS members, be them Iraqi or Arabs or from other nationalities, wherever they are, and according to local and international laws, norms and the international criminal law. Likewise, justice is served with the prosecution of those responsible and those involved in the genocide, those who committed crimes against humanity, against our people, including the Yazidis, the Christians and the other people who rejected ISIS criminal ideology. This issue is both the responsibility of Iraq and of the international community, especially countries which citizens have joined ISIS. Likewise, justice is served when we hold accountable those who provided logistical and financial support to extremist terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq. They do bear the responsibility for our extermination.

The necessity of searching for, and uncovering the fate of thousands of kidnapped people, of compensating survivors, and those affected by terrorism, and of providing support, psychological assistance and material care for them and for their families.

Rebuilding the areas of the Yazidi, of the Christians and of the others, and restoring life to them. We also demand that the Sinjar district be transformed into a governorate with its administrative specificity so that our people feel safe and secure.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Yazidi people is one of the most peaceful ones. We extend our hand for good, love and peace for all, we love coexistence in brotherhood and peace with our neighbors on the basis of the respect of privacy, freedom of identity, belief of the other, and our mutual human values. We need your constant support to bring justice to the victims of this genocide and to achieve peace.

Glory and eternity to all the martyrs of the genocide, to the civilian and military martyrs of Iraq who defended their land and fought ISIS and the forces of darkness everywhere in the world.

[End of speech]
Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak and to engage with you all. I am grateful to see so many civil society groups, representatives of countries that are involved in achieving or trying to achieve justice and accountability for the Yazidi people and to see so many Yazidi survivors. On this very significant day, the third of August 2014, I don’t want to repeat everything that has been said before, but it is too significant today to think about all the tragedy that fell on the Yazidi population. The lives and livelihoods of a very peaceful nation that are destroyed. Six years ago, and they remain destroyed, as we’ve heard people say, people still live in IDP camps. It’s difficult, challenging to go back to Sinjar. So many people still missing. So many beloved ones, and the evidence we so far collected clearly demonstrates, so many crimes that were committed. Massive killings, enslavements, sexual abuse, in any other form and shape, dehumanization, and of course, the children forced into the army. And those who actually managed to escape on the third of August, and to reach the mountain, also they, they were besieged, they couldn’t leave a lot of them died from starvation, dehydration, exhaustion, especially the elderly and the young.

So, it’s crazy. The crimes are so immense. It’s hard to have words for it. And, of course, we as UNITAD, we’re here to collect the evidence and preserve it in a safe and secure manner. If we cannot undo the past, we can only look at the future. And I’m really looking at all of you to do this collaboratively. We want to, we are building cases against ISIS members. We’re trying to build cases against ISIS members. And we need to do this on thorough, and evidence. And I need all of you to help us to do this. I’m calling upon the survivor groups to keep on speaking out and loudly, about what happened to you. It is thanks to you that UNITAD came into existence. I’ve got five or six people from the Yazidi community, and they’re helping me now on moving these investigations further. And that will speed up justice.

But I do have to warn you that justice does take time. We want to build an accurate record of the accounts; we want to give you the voice that you deserve. We want to bring these people to justice that is Iraq, that is elsewhere. But we also want to create a record that stands the test of time, accurate and thorough. So, we need the evidence, and it needs to be fair, and only then we can hopefully achieve some level of reconciliation and future peace. I’m calling upon all the countries to work with us to bring these, the ISIS members wherever they are to account, so that they can jointly work towards justice and accountability and contribute to the rule of law, which is very important for a positive and sustainable peace. And as I said, the collective memory that we need to create so that future, future generations will also remember the atrocious events that the Yazidi people were subjected to. And on that note, I also ask you for patience. We know things take longer than maybe people would hope. We are looking forward we’re moving forward with the needed testimonial evidence, for collecting it. We’re very grateful to Yazda for being such a thorough partner in this collaborative effort to fight for justice and accountability. And I hope we will continue to work together, because this can only be done together. And it will not be tomorrow. But hopefully, as soon as we can, we can bring those responsible to account. So, I thank you for that. And I also thank you for your patience to ensure that this is done in a thorough manner. Thank you.

[End of speech]
Good evening, thank you for this kind invitation to this conference commemorating the sixth anniversary of the Yazidi genocide. I would like to greet all the panelists and attendees in solidarity with the Yazidi victims of this horrendous genocide. Here, I would like to greet the Ministry of Justice in Iraq for all the efforts exerted in this regard since it is the institution responsible of protecting human rights.

Since the early spread of Da'esh gangs across Mosul and spread across a lot of regions, this has led to a lot of systemic destruction, killings, kidnappings, abductions. Such crimes are described in the UN Convention of 1948. The UN has described such crimes as crimes against humanity as a genocide crime and talked about the protection and help of Yazidi children, women, and survivors. In addition to that, in September 2014, there was a discussion of the reports related to the crimes of ISIS, and an Investigation Committee was established in order to deliver a report to the UN Human Rights Council. Indeed, a report was submitted, and those crimes were described as genocide crimes. Then, the UN Council of human rights has decided to establish a committee for inquiring and probing such crimes thus UNITAD. But since the Iraqi laws do not contain any provisions related to war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, the Ministry of Justice took the initiative in 2016 to prepare a draft law in coordination with legal experts and with the Council of Ministers to draft a law in line with the UN 1948 convention while highlighting the status of non-limitation of laws. In addition, other draft laws were submitted to the Iraqi parliament. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice has identified the Iraqi government’s position regarding the prosecution of ISIS criminals and fighters. And this is in line with the UN Security Council resolution 2379/2017 related to UNITAD entrusted with the investigation of such crimes. And, there was also a plethora of decisions related to the Ministry of Social Affairs and to the Ministry of Justice, and there was a focus on cooperating with neighboring countries, the UN agencies, international community, in order to establish reports in this regard to project the ownership of properties and real estate in addition to other things related to the contribution to the local peace and to the return of the Yazidis. The Ministry of Justice is emphasizing the need to hold accountable the perpetrators and all those criminals. We are working on rebuilding national peace on promoting social and national integration and today, the Prime Minister of Iraq has reiterated the Iraqi position in this regard.

Today, we are commemorating the sixth anniversary of the Yazidi genocide perpetrated by Da’esh, and I am, we are seeking solutions. We hope that by the following conference next year, we will be able to devise solutions related to the prosecution of Da’esh members as indicated by the panelists of yesterday and today, and we hope to find sustainable solutions to this tragedy. Thank you for your attention.

[End of speech]
these issues in our report we have recently published. It’s available publicly on Eurojust website. And basically, it’s also gives a lot of case examples, into which directions prosecutions can go.

And, I’m proud to say that we have several jurisdictions in Europe that are forerunners in prosecuting ISIS members for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. And, I hope that more international authorities will join in this effort to find impunity for the crimes that have been committed. Thank you.

[End of speech]
Thank you, Lynn and to Yazda and to The Zogheian Partnership for organizing this important conference and for inviting me once again to participate. And, thanks to all of you for joining us on this solemn day as we remember, and we also look to ways to move things forward to strengthen this important community. I have the honor of representing the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF. We are an independent bipartisan US government body. But we are a watchdog for religious freedom around the world. And, we at USCIRF feel strongly about this issue we have not forgotten that thousands of Yazidis whose lives ISIS terrorist cruelly destroyed simply because of who they were in what they believed. We have not forgotten about the 2,800 abducted women and children whose whereabouts remain unknown. And, we have not forgotten about those who have survived who persevered through unspeakable horrors and who have been rescued and live to tell your story. I’m grateful for the opportunity to do a few things. First, I am going to share some of USCIRF’s findings and our recommendations, and then moderate this panel of esteemed experts who can shed light on how best to empower women through inclusion in post conflict reconstruction and the peace building process.

USCIRF has repeatedly warned about violations against the Yazidis as early as 2003. We were among the first government bodies to call for the recognition of ISIS atrocities as genocide. In the subsequent five years, we have made every effort to keep the eye of the U.S. government, and by extension those of the American people fixed on the Yazidi community and the long-term displacement and collective devastation that the Yazidis have experienced. I’m sure that many of you here share in our relief to see a recent uptick in returns of Yazidi families back to Sinjar, even as some 200,000 members of the community still remain displaced inside Iraq. However, we are simultaneously troubled by reports that those families are returning not because of significant improvements in Sinjar, but rather despite a lack of such development. It is disappointing that after all the attention, the speeches, the genocide designations, and the money spent, that so little has been accomplished. I was honored to speak at this event in Baghdad just a year ago, and yet so little has changed on the ground since that time. The US government and the International community must prioritize support for Yazidis in Iraq and in neighboring Syria, to help them rebuild their homes, schools, infrastructure, and lives. The US also needs to take bolder action to address the existential security threats that Yazidis and other religious minorities continue to face today, from the Irani and backed Hash’d Al-Shaabi are popular mobilization forces in Iraq as well as from Turkey and its allies in Syria. In Iraq, the U.S. and the international community cannot just look away at the government’s inaction. The Prime Minister has the opportunity for a fresh start, and the US and the international community should encourage him to substantially engage with the Yazidi community. If he was to include a Yazidi in his cabinet or as a senior advisor, it would go far towards showing his commitment to inclusion in Iraq.

In justice, the religious diversity of Iraq must be reflected in the rebuilding process to accurately represent its citizens. Gender parity is also paramount to creating a lasting peace. Given that women make up half of the population, a larger amount [number] of women must be meaningfully included in negotiations. Multiple studies show that women’s inclusion in peace talks is directly correlated to success. Not only is it the right thing to do, it’s the smart thing to do. The voices of Yazidi women are especially important to build a prosperous, safe community. Perhaps more than any other audience, those of you here today understand the profound horrors so many Yazidi women and girls faced under ISIS. Their voices must be amplified to advocate for their futures. As we look back at this trauma on a massive scale, it is clear that emotional and psychological support is needed as well as practical support for food, shelter, and clothing. We acknowledge Yazda as one of the strongest NGOs on the ground providing this crucial support. But let’s also look ahead to rebuilding Sinjar, building real governance, stability, security, and peace. How can we ensure that women are included in this development and all levels of decision making, especially those who have overcome so much to survive and now deserve the opportunity to thrive?

[End of panel introduction]
Thank you. Zoveghan Partnership and Yazda for this sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide. On this very dark day, we remember, honor, respect all of the victims of the Yazidi genocide. We need to victims of this terrible war, the Yazidi genocide to know that the world has not forgotten about them. And through my activism, I have focused on sharing stories to empower women and girls and to empower myself under a hashtag female voices of the world. And the last four years, I’ve experienced the power of storytelling. We learn from each other when we share our stories. As women we take back our voices and power when we tell our own stories.

This is so empowering, and I will [...] the international media and the institutions to amplify more Yazidi voices to tell the story in their own words. Now coming to this subject, I believe that we can empower women in post conflict, reconstruction, and peace building process when we also think of [...] There is so much disagreement in this world we live in, but we all can agree on a beautiful piece of art. Or when we tell our stories in creative terms, like my previous activity and exhibition supported with [...] Foundation and the Canadian government. We remembered women who were killed in 2019 by Femicide. It was a dark room with all of their names written and you have to light up a candle to enter, and you would hear their stories [...] Every person that came out understood better and was committed to help better. So, to me peace means understanding each other better. And, we can use these creative ways to help understand each other’s words, needs and struggle for justice, freedom, and the protection of identity much better. And once we understand each other better, we can help one another to achieve justice, because without justice, there’s no peace. Now since the Yazidi genocide and the Mosul invasion, I’ve seen how the social role of men and women changed during war. I’ve seen women becoming first responders and determined to building peace, especially within the Yazidi community. So, we need to continue acknowledging their efforts and support their important role that we women have during conflict and now post conflicts. Like you are doing during this conference, but especially the Yazidi survivors, they have become leaders and activists, an important voice who works so hard for justice and peace building. We also need to continue creating a better and safer space where we can all communicate like this now and listen and learn. We also need this, sadly, I feel that it’s missing, we need better partnership from civil society because change happens through collective action. Now through my work as an activist, I had the honor to work with Yazidi survivors in Duhok and in Europe. I could see the tremendous impact they had on their environment, but what I see is that not enough activists are supported, and especially not for a long term. It’s important that we create hundreds of Nadia Murad within the Yazidi community. And if the international community wants to continue transforming our societies and bringing peace to the region, they must commit financially and strategically to a large group of female activists, because they are the one who will become part of the negotiation table of peace and rebuilding. We need more women to be a part of this national dialogue, and it’s these young leaders, voices, activists, within the Yazidi community who are teaching us that that’s the way forward.

I met female activists from Libya, Syria, Colombia at a UN Woman workshop in Lebanon, and they showed us data that there’s so much success that can be achieved during peace process when peace builders, female peace builders are part of it. Now, if we want to continue to empower women, it’s so important that we provide them with all of the tools they need for a long term, not just a handful group of Yazidi activists or activists in this region, but a large group. This is the way forward to empower them, but also to achieve justice and peace. And what’s also important is we must continue looking for better, a new constitution that tackles many challenges we women face in this region, so that we can finally do our job better. And, be a part of the national dialogue.

Another point I like to raise is reconciliation and finding common ground that is so important in this divided region. I know there are NGOs and the international community working on it, but I haven’t seen big success efforts in this reconciliation and finding common ground. What I believe that can help is while we empower women, let’s bring women together in Iraq and the Kurdistan region to find common ground and to work on reconciliation.

This helps us to also be empowered, why? Because I feel like people around the world share a collective biography, but so do women all over the globe. We share a common heritage of suppression, patriarchy, emancipation, and quest for gender equality. And this has no boundaries and no ethnicities. So, we need to do better to gather these female activists and peace builders and together while we empower each other, we can find common ground in this divided region.

[End of speech]
Good evening, everyone. I want to take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this important event. Thank you for inviting me and allowing me to participate in the discussion on empowering women. Today, I am a witness to the courage and strength of women, not because of our physical strength, but because of our determination to continue fighting until the last breath. History has failed us repeatedly, especially that we are a religious minority living in a conflict-ridden area where women are subjected to the most extreme forms of sexual violence, kidnapping, abduction, and human trafficking. When ISIS attacked my peaceful community in 2014, women were further abused and assaulted and used as toys of war. While evidence and effects of genocide began to appear to the world, especially by ISIS, who glorify their crimes… Nightmares and suffering of thousands of Yazidi women began during the first hours, many of them were separated from their families, and they were sold in the largest slave market in the 21st century. Women and children up to the age of nine were raped repeatedly until one of them became worth a pack of cigarettes.

In such difficult times, they have a role to play, and they have to be provided the needed opportunities and to obtain the needed resources. Empowering women means participating fully in decision-making processes related to life, and they should be given as soon as the right to make decisions.

In civil societies, women occupy an integral part of life. And, they give birth to children and they teach the second half of societies. As such, they have a role to play, and they have to be provided the needed opportunities and to obtain the needed resources. Empowering women means participating fully in decision-making processes related to life, and they should be given as soon as the right to make decisions.

We, therefore, need to invest in the survivors' capacities and autonomy with a mixture of mentoring, coaching, personal healing to be able to share that experience and find their voice. Survivors need to be seen as experts in their own experiences and needs, to fight for justice, to pursue legal questions, and to implement human rights principles. Such effective programs create stronger, more determined women, and are one of the best ways for us to fight injustice and prevent injustice from happening in the future.

[End of speech]

This speech was presented at the sixth Yazidi Genocide Commemoration in the Arabic language and with live interpretation in the English language.

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Ms. Zinah Khallat Sulaiman is a 23-year-old Yazidi survivor from ISIS captivity, a human rights activist, and one of the founding members of the newly established Yazidi Survivors Network.

Zinah lost many family members during the Yazidi genocide in 2014, with nine of them still missing. Her dream is to be reunited with her family members and become a lawyer to defend her community and prevent another genocide against them.

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Good afternoon to you all and especially the Yazidi survivors. I'm very honored to participate in the sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidis' genocide. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to share the experience of global survivor network SEMA, and how it has contributed to the empowerment of survivors. As many of you only know too well, sexual violence in conflict is uniquely destructive. It's a horrifying and effective tactic to terrorize, destabilize, and destroy entire populations. Beyond injury and disease, the psychological and social impacts of humiliation and shame are corrosive for victims and their communities alike. When survivors are silenced, shamed, and excluded, impunity becomes entrenched and the cycle of violence is hard to break. Therefore, we believe that for change to happen, it's crucial that the silence around sexual violence as a weapon in war is broken.

The SEMA story began in June 2017, when 22 survivors from 14 countries came together. With tremendous courage, survivors come together to speak out, tell their truth, and seek solutions for themselves and their community. SEMA, which means speaking out in Swahili, gathers victims and survivors of war-time sexual violence from all around the world, acting in solidarity, mobilizing collectively to speak out, and advocating for change. The global network is rooted in survival at activist networks at both national and local level and represent thousands of survivors. The international dimension is essential. Bringing survivors from different generations, continents, and cultures together to learn from each other. Their journey so far has been incredible from joint statements and inspiring speeches at national and international events, the survivors speak out powerfully and actively.

Survivors consistently emphasized the tremendous value they experience from having direct contact with each other. As one survivor recently told me, I was inspired by the other survivors, and they encouraged me to establish my own national network. And another one said, it was so powerful to listen to survivors from different parts of the world. They took away my fears and empowered me by listening. The pain and the tears were shared, it gave me courage. Survivors' voices as we have heard in the past two days, bringing human understanding of the consequences of war-time rape can explain the true needs of victims and survivors. They propose concrete ideas for change. “Nothing about us without us” is therefore critical to ensure a survival presence, not only at the international level, but especially at the national level, where policies, programs and legislations are designed to support them. The SEMA network was able to play a very active and key role next to Dr. Dennis Mukwege and Nadia Murad in the establishment of the global survival fund in October 2019. This fund aims to ensure survivors of conflict-related sexual violence have access to reparations and other forms of redress. The core principle of the fund is its survivor centered character. Placing voices of survivors at the center, ensures programs are initiated locally, and outcomes benefit the individuals and communities they are designed to serve. We have learned so much from working alongside survivors to build that movement.

The following lessons, I want to share with you today: inspiration, hope, and solidarity are essential building blocks to maintain motivation and momentum. Connecting [...] with survivor networks and regional clusters, and international network enables the success of the one to be the success of all. Time and again survivors have shown us that face to face gatherings have the power to deepen connections and accelerate learning. Of course, this poses a great challenge in today's COVID world. Sustaining through connections and strong connections between the local, national, and international levels are essential to forge a sharp vision and amplify survivor voices. Online connections, media opportunities, and translation support are the bread and butter basics needed to gain visibility and reach. Survivors are the best advocates for their own needs and rights. They need safe space, non-judgmental support, sufficient time for personal healing to be able to share that experience and find their voice. Survivors need to be seen as experts in their own lives. We, therefore, need to invest in the survivors' capacities and autonomy with a mixture of mentoring, coaching, learning exchanges, skills development approaches. Survivors will need sustained psychological support, good self-care, and financial support for the time and lost income as preconditions to undertake advocacy so, can they set the
Good morning from Washington, and thank you Nadine, and I would also like to thank Yazda and The Zovighian Partnership for inviting me to participate in this anniversary conference. I know from experience that the pain of loss and trauma is with us every day of the year, but anniversaries do bring that pain into sharp focus, and I want to express my heartfelt condolences to our Yazidi brothers and sisters. My family is from Sinjar, and while we’re not Yazidi, I feel a special kinship to our Yazidi brothers and sisters.

The subject of our panel, and I’m honored to be part of this very distinguished panel, the subject of our panel is to make practical recommendations for the inclusion of women in reconstruction, and peacebuilding. So, why should women be included in post conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding? Well, the most obvious answer is because women are half of the population, and it’s strange that sometimes we have to remind our men folk that that is the reality. But also, women often whether they are working, or caregivers at home are the caretakers of the family. They are often responsible for education, health, and taking care of their family. Women have a different experience of conflict and their experience is often excluded when it comes to peacebuilding and reconstruction. But, women quite often before the conflict has begun have already been disadvantaged, already women often have unequal access to education, to economic opportunities, to jobs, and to status. And as Nadine, you said earlier, it’s been proven over and over again that women’s direct participation and peace negotiations increases substantially the quality of the peace, and the sustainability of the peace. One final point, men have been trying for decades and centuries to establish peace. It’s about time that women were allowed to have a seat at the table, and to be part of that peacebuilding. What I’ve said applies to women around the world, but it applies even more clearly to our Yazidi sisters. And so, these are the reasons, some of the reasons, I’m sure there are many thousands of other reasons why Yazidi women should be at the negotiating table.

So, the Yazidis as we know, have been the victims of sexual conflict, their experience of violence at the hands of ISIS has been different from that of their merfolk. Everybody is traumatized whether you’re the husband, the brother, or the father of a woman or a girl who’s been sexually abused you are also traumatized. The Yazidis clearly have repeatedly said that they want some kind of protection for their community to be able to survive. They want to rebuild Sinjar, their homes, their villages, their city. They want support for justice to be addressed. Even those who are in the camps and are relatively safe, they need education, healthcare, and other opportunities. The KRG is doing its best to provide this, but it’s not able to do it alone. The Yazidis themselves have repeatedly said they want their voices to be included, and they are right to demand that, and it is incumbent on all of us, the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Iraqi federal government, the international community, the United Nations to listen to that and to respond not just with speeches, but also with practical steps.

So, there are many challenges to including women in the post conflict negotiations, reconstruction effort, seeking of justice. As I mentioned earlier, women often already are starting at a disadvantaged position, but also when it comes to peace negotiations, when it comes to discussing reconstruction, justice and accountability, women are often perceived as unskilled, as lacking the know-how, or even lacking the status, so that their input in those discussions is not valued as much. This frankly requires a change of mindset in the leaderships of international and regional, and national organizations. It needs a change of mindset, by all of us. Women are the victims of conflict, they need to be at the table, and they need to have a practical input in what their future will hold. They may need support in achieving that status, gaining those skills, [that] I would argue many of them already have skills to negotiate, because they do that every day in their lives. So, there are many thousands of other reasons why Yazidi women should be at the negotiating table.

H.E. BAYAN ABDUL RAHMAN
HEAD OF THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT (KRG) MISSION IN WASHINGTON D.C.

H.E. Bayan Abdul Rahman is the Kurdistan Regional Government Representative to the United States of America, working to strengthening ties between Kurdistan and the United States, advocating her government’s position on a wide array of political, security, humanitarian, economic, and cultural matters, and promoting coordination and partnership. Ms. Abdul Rahman was previously the KRG High Representative to the United Kingdom. She was elected to the Leadership Council of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in 2010.

This speech was presented at the sixth Yazidi Genocide Commemoration in the English language and with live interpretation in the Arabic language.
So, what can I recommend? These are my humble opinions and my humble recommendations to my Yazidi sisters and brothers, but they also of course are recommendations to the KRG, my own government, and I represent that government, to the Iraqi government, to the United Nations, to our partners, the United States, the UK, France, Germany, all these other countries, and my recommendations to civil society and NGOs. My recommendation, the Yazidis already have incredibly powerful female advocates. Look at who champions you. It’s Nadia Murad, it’s Fery Ibrahim, it’s the speakers that we’ve heard today and yesterday, it’s the Yazidi Survivors’ Network. You have so many powerful women, Vian Dakhil, who was a Member of Parliament in 2014 and spoke out in the Iraqi parliament calling on the then Prime Minister to hear about the genocide that was being perpetrated against her people, you already have so many powerful female advocates. They are powerful advocating for you, internationally. We need that power to be also existing in Iraq, and in Kurdistan. So, we need to find a mechanism where your voices are just as powerful domestically as they are internationally.

While most of the political parties, governments in Iraq and Kurdistan have very few female representatives, I have to say in Kurdistan we’re doing better than Baghdad, but still we can do better to. You need to build up your grassroots organizations you have so many powerful organizations already, but keep building up those grassroots organizations, reach out to women’s representations and organizations in Iraq and in Kurdistan, reach across that divide and find a wider support network for yourself. One recommendation for international mediators whether it’s the UN, or coalition partners, all of those donors who support the humanitarian situation in Iraq and Kurdistan, you can insist that Yazidi women be included, you should insist that their voices should be heard. You should insist on quotas. Force us to do this. And, you should fund the participation of the Yazidi women if for some reason or another, they are not able to afford to leave their jobs or their families to participate in these discussions. And, you should support the women experts who are already working in conflict resolution. I think all of us, all of us need to raise awareness of the importance of involving Yazidi women and women in general in post conflict, peace dialogue, and negotiations. Male mediators of course, need to be at the table, but so do the women, and that needs to be understood. It’s hard to put grassroots organizations, throw them into a mediating situation when many of the political leaders have been experienced at doing this for decades. So, it would be unfair to expect a grassroots civil society organization to walk in and have the same clout and be heard in the same way that is the reality. So, the best thing is to build up your network, practice your lobbying which you already do so powerfully and so well and be ready, prepare yourselves to be at the table, prepare what are your demands, what are your red lines, what do you go into the negotiating room with that you are not prepared to give up, what can you negotiate on? Prepare yourself for that day.

Again, these are my humble opinions, my humble recommendations, and I hope you accept them in the good spirit that they are meant. Thank you once again for allowing me to participate in this important discussion.

[End of speech]
In general, we are currently commemorating the sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide which is applied for humanity as a whole. I would like to talk about the Iraqi parliament during the last four years since 2014 until 2018. During this period, we were able to enact a law to criminalize the crimes of ISIS.

And, here we are talking about genocide. However, we know that within the Iraqi government we know that we acknowledge this crime as a genocide. This does not have any echo, or it does not resonate in the Iraq government because the crime of genocide needs to be acknowledged by an international court and Iraq currently did not join the international court yet. So, this decision was taken by the Iraqi government only, and this is only a decision that does not have any echoes on the ground. Today, we are commemorating this painful event. We have listened to the speech delivered by the president, but unfortunately after six years, there is nothing, nothing on the ground, no decisions have been taken, no decision has been taken to implement this law. During these six years nothing has been done. We do know that this crime needs a strong state, and we have a Prime Minister who should work on collecting the evidence. Between 2014 and 2018, a court has been created in Dohuk to collect evidence regarding the genocide perpetrated by ISIS, we know that this is a small scaled court. It is a small court, but we need a special court to collect evidence. Unfortunately, there is no specialized court that has been created. As for implementing the resolution enacted by the Security General in 2017, it is true that the resolution has been taken in 2017, the resolution 2379, it has been taken by the United Nations and a committee has been created, composed of judges, of experts, and unfortunately, a dentist was in this committee instead of having people who are specialized. Unfortunately, we did not have the appropriate persons in this committee. So, this is very unfortunate.

We should also know that until today the draft law regarding the survivors has reached parliament in 2018, however, until now, until now it has been only revised once. So, there is a paragraph controversial. Regarding the persons or the children who were born out of rape. The children born out of rape, and these children should be, of course, taken into account in this law. These children should be taken into consideration in the personal status law. And, of course, this is very much linked to the laws in Iraq. If a child is born without a father in Iraq, technically this child is Muslim. However, what about the children born out of rape? Let’s say that a woman who is not Muslim who delivered a baby and who would like this baby to follow her religion. This is really a problem currently at the level of the personal status law. So, this is a problem we do know, we do acknowledge that this is a problem, we have children currently without any identification documents. We are talking about children born out of rape, and these women want to raise their children, these children born out of rape.

I would like to emphasize on the fact that of course this should be taken into consideration from a legal aspect, and unfortunately there is no law there is no will to take this aspect into consideration. Unfortunately, unfortunately this is really unfortunate. If we are to talk about a legal point of view, this is what we have currently.

Something else that is extremely important. We are talking about victims, victims who were able to escape from Da’esh, I would like to tell you that the majority of the victims were bought by their families, so there was total neglect from the Iraqi Government. These families had to buy again their daughters, their girls their women, and personally, they had to buy their relatives, and they had to pay a huge amount of money to have them back safe and sound to Iraq. So, unfortunately there is a total neglect to this important point. So, if this government has a comprehensive plan, these victims should be also included. And did the government do for these victims since 2018? We have a social security law. We have worked with the Social Affairs Ministry, and we have requested also from the minister himself to include these victims in the Social Security Law, we requested formally and officially. However, unfortunately until now the majority of the victims be it women and girls did not benefit from this law because of all the disputes between the local government in Baghdad and the government in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. So, the government in KRI is sharing the list of the names with the local government. So, the law should take into consideration these women, these girls, and we all know that the majority of the Yazidis are currently living in camps unfortunately six years, six years without any progress, without any practical steps taken, whether at the level of the local government or the government of KRI.

We are only collecting evidence, we have a specialized court collecting evidence and proof, but this court needs a strong state to activate its work. Since 2005 and 2003, we have established a specialized court looking into the offenses of Saddam Hussein, and the perpetrators of offenses. So, we need a specialized court not only to collect evidence, but also to take robust action. So, if Iraq did not join yet the International Court of Justice, two years ago, the Former Prime Minister Boustani, and also the speaker of the KRI were able to collect evidence and they went to the International Court of Justice. However, from a legal point of view, even though they presented these evidence[s], this is not enough because Iraq is still not part of the International Court of Justice. Here we are talking about the genocide, about war against humanity.

Unfortunately, six years, I cannot stress enough on the long period, six years it’s a huge time that has elapsed. So, we have evidence and proof, so after six years if we reach this international court maybe the atrocities will not be shared genuinely.

So, the problems are ongoing, are the same for years and unfortunately the Iraqi parliament did not take robust measures to counter these problems and to adjust these problems. Another important point, these victims have and are facing a lot of problems in the camps, I have personally visited several camps. We know that some victims returned back to their villages, however their personnel and legal identification documents were lost or burnt. So, for instance, these survivors re-made their life, they got married but unfortunately, they are unable to issue a marriage certificate, they have children these children are lacking identification documents. So, unfortunately, we are still facing these problems and every year we are only commemorating this painful event. Today I heard them all, they are all living in denial, they are all very sad. But that’s it.

Another important point, and we should be proud of as Yazidi women, we were able to make our voices heard worldwide and these are the genuine voice[s]. Like, for instance, enslavement, human trafficking, rape, we are not talking here about simple offenses and crimes. The Yazidi women were able to share this plight worldwide because they were able to voice out their concerns. We are proud of Nadia Murad, of all the leaders who were able, really, to make our voices heard, to make the offenses and the crimes known by the world. So, the stories were heard by Yazidi women, Yazidi women were strong and are even stronger now. But we really want the government to acknowledge the victims, to acknowledge the depth of the suffering. And, the Yazidi women will be able, once again, to voice the concerns, and to voice out the necessity to share the evidence with the international justice. So, we ask our Ambassadors really to share the insights, the problems, the needs, and the offenses perpetrated by the terrorist group that is known as Da’esh, and we really call upon the governments of all the countries to acknowledge this offense as a genocide. And through all the activists, through the limited evidence, we will really be able to achieve a progress because if there is no specialized court to collect evidence, how can we voice our issue? How can I prove that this is a genocide? We do have legal evidence, but we need to reach to the international court. And, we can only achieve this through the Iraqi government. The Iraqi Government has the responsibility to share all the evidence with the International Court of Justice, and we also count on the assistance of other countries, and we really need the international community to acknowledge these offenses as genocide. We only have an acknowledgement by the Iraqi government or the Iraqi parliament that this is genocide, but we are lacking legal evidence because it is also up to the Iraqi government to provide reparation for the survivors and
The survivors do not only need an acknowledgement, they need legal laws. They need to return back home safely. The majority of the Yazidis are still in camps, unfortunately, even after the liberation of these areas. So, these survivors need to go back to their normal life. The majority of the women until now, are suffering from the psychological aftermath, and they are not being followed up at a psychosocial level. These women in the camps I do know some organizations or activists who are working on the psychosocial support, but unfortunately, as an Iraqi government we are lacking a real program to include the survivors. Today, we saw the Prime Minister who met a group of survivors, of Yazidi survivors, and I really hope that this step will not merely be a meeting, it will lead to legal measures. We owe it to the survivors, frankly, and this is also a way to guarantee that this will not happen again in Iraq. I, of course, respect to the Iraqi government and the fact that all the minorities are respected as components of this Iraqi society. Once again, I say I hope, I hope, I hope that next year we will have an acknowledgement through our government that this was a genocide, I really hope that the international community would acknowledge this offense as being a genocide. And, I hope that also all the components of the Iraqi society will also acknowledge that this is genocide. And, I hope that next year the Yazidi women that will be empowered in their areas in Shingal because they are endowed with skills, with courage, with strength. I really want an international community to acknowledge this as being a genocide and thank you very much.

[End of speech]
Firstly, I would like to give blessings and prayers for your personal suffering through the terror of ISIS and after, and for the success of this two-day conference, and God bless you and many thanks to all the participants and the organizers. During your periods of suffering, the Yazidi people have shown great courage to remain faithful to their ancient traditions and their own identity. You are a people of immense courage and faith. God bless you all.

I would like to talk today about three things: justice, security and dignity. Justice should not be an empty word. Justice is a key component of civic society that cooperates together for the betterment of all. The Armenian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac genocide in 1915-17, had no apology but simply denial and the total removal of 2000 years of Christianity from Turkey. No one has been brought to trial and this remains the case for the genocide of the Yazidis. The example to the German and the world in respond for the Jewish genocide during World War 2 were the Nuremberg Trials justice was meted out to the leaders and not just some scapegoats. What then does the world do when an ancient people like the Yazidis, when their culture is being systematically eradicated because of their faith? The aggressors brutally took their present while seeking to wipe out their history and destroy their future. Christianity in Iraq, one of the oldest faiths, is dangerously close to extinction. The Church in Iraq has been and continues to be a martyr church. Since 2003, 61 churches and shrines have been destroyed; 25,000 homes seized, 150,000 Christians displaced, countless Christians have been kidnapped or murdered. One bishop, three priests, and six deacons were murdered. No killers were brought to justice as we, like the Yazidis, do not count as a people.

Genocide needs accountability, ownership and repentance, as it heals not only the victims but those who inflicted it. The German nation healed themselves by acknowledging their Jewish genocide; they grew as a people and international nation. The Rwandan government knew that forgiveness and reconciliation would be key components in building a united Rwanda. I would hope that the minorities could hold a conference in Iraq where those who have suffered and created genocide they can come and speak about how the world educates and informs generation after generation about genocide and its provisions. I would also encourage Yazda to build a genocide museum in Sinjar that could encompass a wealth of things, justice, protection, wealth, women empowerment, property right...the list could go on, but we need to always focus on the sanctity of life and the person.

Security: As long as security remains unaddressed it remains a source of instability, insecurity and eventually the extinction of the people and their cultures. The Christians fled from Baghdad and Basra to the safe Kurdistan. However, the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar are not secure and everyone in this conference knows that. A lack of collective will, both internationally and locally, to right the wrongs of the persecution and to protect the unprotected will see our eventual demise within the coming years.

And, when it comes to dignity, we do not want the minorities to flee their country; we want them to stay and rebuild their lives and their country in a long-term safe environment. We thank the humanitarian aid agencies for their aid in this crisis, but it would have been better if they had a concerted and concrete plan. We need this plan rigidly. Seventy percent of the Yazidis have been systematically violated and displaced. They are now left traumatised and unemployed with an unknown future without structure or the possibility of cultural survival. A society in a social fragmentation which has to be humbly applied via the lottery of international concept notes for survival. And, it's really a very difficult case here. When we address a problem, to any of the international agencies, we have to bring concept paper, proposal, and we to be humbly applied via the lottery of international concept notes for survival. And, it's really a very difficult case here. When we address a problem, to any of the international agencies, we have to bring concept paper, proposal, and we have to really address and answer lots of questions. By the time of accepting our proposal, we have another problem. Social issues arising problems, so we have to address again. So, it needs to be really readdressed, this is sure to be readdressed again.

Christians have suffered similar abuse by ISIS leaders leading to the present situation of 70% unemployment where there was little before. Without the aid of Christian humanitarian agencies, some overseas churches could not have survived the on slaughter of ISIS. Latter on, the Hungarian Government and other agencies greatly added their support. It is only in the last year that we have had money directly as churches from the US government through USAID, and this was through the Catholic University in Erbil.

Minorities have to compete for an ever decreasing resources of overseas aid, and especially now with the Covid-19 crisis. However, we need a united and collective response from Humanitarian Aid agencies to deliver livelihood programs and not piecemeal attempts, as it is obviously not working with such high levels of unemployment.

In conclusion, it is not acceptable in any society to have such suffering that has been inflicted on the Yazidis. There has been a concerted willingness to invest in the livelihood programs, education and health care and last but not least, human rights and human dignity. It is with justice and security that people can feel valued and safe. It has to be a holistic approach. We appeal for a united EU, UK, and US to collectively help us or it will be the end of our ancient minorities. Your consulates are two to three hours’ drive from Sinjar and the Nineveh Plains, yet we are disappearing from our homeland in front of you. Something is clearly not working. We would ask you to think about it and give us your collective answer. We are very happy for the international community to come to the Catholic University in Erbil to share your ideas and plans for the minorities. And, it should not be just nice talks and promises. It should be really a concrete plan, an immediate one! Constant dialogue must be brought to bear in divided societies to transform them into civil and cooperative ones. We admire the Yazidi people for their steadfast resistance against those who wish to deny them and their existence. We ask for prayers for the minorities to work even more closely together because working together would empower us all. Remaining faithful and steadfast to their origins and traditions, in securing a rightful and dignified future in Iraq. Thank you, and God bless you all.

[End of speech]
To this day one year ago, I had the honor to be invited to a commemoration event in Zuidkade. We gathered to mourn the dead, to remember the crimes and atrocities. Today, I am very pleased to be part of your event. And, may I also convey to you the kind regards of Prime Minister of Baden-Württemberg Mr. Kretschmann.

We all remember the terrible images of the atrocities committed by the self-proclaimed Islamic State in the Sinjar region. Thousands of people were murdered, tens of thousands fled into the mountains. These images of violence and executions of men, women, and children remain etched in our memory and will be never forgotten. We are also very aware of the current challenging situation of the Yazidi people. More than 300,000 Yazidis are still living without any future prospects in refugee camps around Duhok. Only a few internally displaced persons have been able to return to their hometowns in recent years due to the unstable security situation. Some of those affected who saw protect in another country and now stranded on the Greek Islands with thousands of other refugees. Since the Corona crisis reached Iraq in March 2020, a return of the exiled to their cities has become a distant prospect. The economic crisis which has intensified as a result leads to the loss of income, opportunities, and also the psychological situation of the people becomes even worse.

But this might be the most important thing I can say to you today, the Yazidi people are not alone. The state of Baden-Württemberg will continue its support for the Yazidi survivors. We will continue our support to improve living conditions in the refugee camps. Of course, our humanitarian aid projects in Duhok will continue to run. In view of the Corona pandemic, we will also provide emergency Corona aid for the partner region Duhok. We will continue our support for the women and children of the special quota project who have been living in Baden-Württemberg for over five years by now, and we will continue our support for justice. We very much welcome the fact that the federal prosecutor in Germany has initiated investigations against ISIS for genocide and crimes against humanity.

Many Yazidi women from the special quota project have had the courage and have already made themselves available as crucial witnesses. And in April this year, the world’s first trial in connection this genocide against the Yazidis was opened at the higher regional court in Frankfurt. One testimony collected by Yazda in Iraq was crucial to initiate the trial. This bears an important message. When we all work together, we can move things to the better. Together, we are aiming to prevent what happened in Iraq and Syria from being concealed or forgotten to future generations. I am convinced that this is a crucial pre-condition for long-term peace and reconciliation in the region. We know however that the war is not yet over, that ISIS is not yet finally defeated, and that there are still captives. That is why after six years, we assure you that we are still at your side today. Your fight will not let us rest, we will not tolerate genocide, we will not forget, and we will do our best to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and thank you Yazda for putting together this important conference. I wish us all much strength and success for the future and our common commitment for the Yazidi community in the coming years.

[End of speech]

Thank you, and your royal highness, and your honorable excellencies, dear attendants, it is with great honor that I speak to you here at this sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide. Although it is an occasion of sad remembrance it is also time to talk about the future of the Yazidi people. I have spoken on different occasions in remembrance of the genocide, and I always get filled with sadness and sorrow. But, I also see the strength in the Yazidi people, and that fills me with hope. The fact that an NGO like Yazda can manage to arrange such an important event is proof to me that my hope is not in vain. Da’esh did not manage to eradicate the Yazidi people and I must be our common goal never to let them or anyone else try it again. It is the world’s responsibility to stop horrors like this from happening. To many times have we said never again and still we keep adding names to a terrible list. Auschwitz, Rwanda, Srebrenica and Sinjar are all places that will be remembered for eternity. Let us do our utmost to never add any more names to that list.

In order for us to ensure a future without genocide, I find some matters very important to stress. Justice is essential. Sweden has been one of the strongest advocates for tribunal to convict Da’esh members. A sustainable peace must be built on justice. Those responsible and those who have committed crimes against humanity must be judged. Resources is of course a big concern, of that I am very well aware. Sweden is one of the biggest donors to the UN programs in the area. We have also been part of the coalition fighting Da’esh. My personal opinion is that we could, and can do more. But that doesn’t make what is done unimportant. I also wish for Sweden to take a bigger and larger responsibility in helping the victims of the genocide as well as the kidnappings. Much good has been done, but it is not enough. I will keep raising the question within the Swedish government in order to help Yazidi people. I consider it to be my duty.

I want to highlight three areas that I find of utmost concern for the rebuilding of the Yazidi society and to have lasting peace. It is the matter of women’s rights, fighting corruption, and it is democracy and rule of law. To me it is essential that gender equality is enforced when trying to rebuild a society that has suffered so greatly. What Da’esh and all other extremist organizations are trying to do is to destroy the core of the people, the women and the children. Strengthening women’s rights is to defend a people. It is essential to have a female strong in the process of peace. Women have different focuses compared to men and are in many cases the bearer of culture. Therefore, no sustainable peace, and no real justice, can be achieved without a strong female commitment. For a sustainable development to take place, corruption must be fought in all areas of society. It doesn’t matter how much core resources we’ve put into a place if corruption is prevalent. We have seen that so many times throughout history. We have many cases in the present time. Female participation is a good start to stop corruption since a fair division of the resources are more likely to happen if women are allowed to take part on equal terms. The last matter of concern is democracy and the rule of law. As a Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe I can’t stress this matter enough. No lasting peace or sustainable development can be achieved without democracy and the rule of law. The Yazidi people has seen discrimination throughout history and know what it is like to not be treated equally in the face of the law. The hatred fostered in societies where minorities are ill-treated is the seed to genocide. So, to be able not to add more names to that terrible list mentioned before, democracy and rule of law has to be at the core and center of rebuilding the society.

In closing, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the organizers in Yazda for letting me speak at this great and important occasion. It is a true honor, and I am still thankful for being a part of such a strong movement for a cause is so important. I wish you the best of luck, and I will try to do my part. I’m sure that the Yazidi people will prosper and live in peace in near future. Thank you all.

[End of speech]
Thank you Haidar and dear friends in Iraq, and elsewhere. I want to start by saying how honored and privileged I feel of being able to speak to you to be on this sixth anniversary of the start of the genocide, the genocide that of course still goes on in some ways day against the Yazidi people and as we hear earlier, other minorities in northern Iraq. You’ve gathered today to commemorate and to remember victims and the war crimes that were carried out. And, we should therefore of course, start by celebrating and saluting the bravery of the survivors and remembering those who are no longer with us. And, I want to also stress that I believe that this commemoration, this event also shows the strength of the Yazidi culture and, the Yazidi communities. And, that gives hope for the future. We are not just commemorating the terrible events of the past, but in the title of your conference yesterday and today we are also bridging a gap to humanity, and to a much better future. We need to do this for what it is. It was a genocide, it was planned. It was organized. It was executed, it didn’t happen by accident, it wasn’t the actions of a few rogue men a deliberate attempt to wipe out a culture, and communities. And, I bring with me today solidarity from the United Kingdom from Scotland, and those of us who have followed the work of Yazda and the other organizations over these past six years and who raised with our own government and with others that need to do more. I want to assure you that we will never forget that we continue to demand justice. We want to help rebuild the communities, and perhaps most of all we want to prevent similar genocides happening again in the future. So, can I congratulate Haidar and Murad and of course, Ahmad here in the UK for their work as Yazda over these recent years and for organizing this event today and of course, The Zovighian Partnership does such a fabulous job supporting Yazda and in the course of these commemorative panels and speeches, over the last two days. I want to thank those who have contributed from other countries and agencies and especially Karim Khan who I think gave a very inspiring address yesterday showing how important the work of his team and the United Nations is at uncovering evidence that can then be used in future prosecutions. But most of all, I want to salute the bravery, perhaps even more importantly the dignity of Farida and Diana, of Nesrine and Zinah, and the other women from the Survivors’ Network who’ve spoken over these last two days. And, I am humbled by your actions and by your words and inspired by your bravery. And, as other speakers have said, I want to assure you that we do not intend to let you go, we intend to continue to stand with you. I visited Duhok again last year, and I was aware of the numbers and aware of the current situation, I was staggered find the hundreds of thousands of people still in IDP camps, after all these years. The conditions they were living in, the trauma they had gone through, the lack of psychological support services, as well as the lack of a potential for a safe return to Sinjar, the pain that was felt by those relatives of women and girls who were still missing, and, the damage done to young boys who were taken away and brainwashed by Da’esh. The international community has done much over the last six years and the Iraqi Government has of course taken various actions that have been highlighted today and yesterday. But finally it’s not enough, this is not good enough, as Murad said last night in the closing session, this has gone on to all, support needs to be stronger, those needs to be more not just resources but real support for the survivors, for the IDPs for the safe return, for the services that are needed to rebuild communities. In the UK, there are many of us members of both Houses of Parliament, who continue to pressure government to do all that it can. We support on a cross-party basis in parliament, the support from the UK in northern Iraq has elsewhere in Iraq, for education for safe returns, and for humanitarian relief. And, on a cross-party basis we also support the UK government’s leadership on preventing sexual violence and conflict, and what could we have done over the past year with Nadia Murad in terms of developing the draft Murad code for the collection of evidence in the future. But we are disappointed too. I salute the governments of Australia, and Germany, and France, and others who have helped resettle so many Yazidi people into safe homes. Our government has not been good enough on that front yet, but we continue to praise them. And, I believe that as a member of the UN Security Council, with other major international nations the UK and others should be doing much more to rescue and return those who are still missing. We will continue to praise our government to do its best on that. The conference commemorative event yesterday and today is titled “Bridging the gap between terror and humanity”, and I think there are certain fundamentals that are needed if that is going to happen. You need both security and governance, better governance in Sinjar and the surrounding areas. These services both community services, but perhaps even more important those personal services including psychological support for those who have been traumatized. It is the safe returns for those who are missing but those hundreds of thousands who are still living in IDP camps and elsewhere in northern Iraq. And, looking to the future we need to start celebrating diversity more, not tolerating diversity, not just understanding each other but celebrating the differences that make us all stronger in our individual countries and around the world. And, it’s only I think by understanding genocide and understanding the way in which it can be prevented that we will genuinely prevent atrocities and genocide in the future. And, one key element of that has to be justice real justice or real crimes where the victims are hailed and the survivors are hailed, and we are those who committed crimes are prosecuted for the crimes they carried out not just for those who are the easiest to prosecute. So, I believe that justice and accountability are vital, not just for the survivors and those who have been killed in the Yazidi genocide, but also to prevent future genocides and ensure that others know that they will be held accountable for their crimes. And then, all of that, the topic that we’ve had today, inspiring topic of women and peacebuilding is absolutely central. There is no doubt whatsoever around the world in every continent that peace processes, peace building and conflict prevention work that has women at the center of it is more successful, and more likely to be sustained. And, there’s absolutely no doubt that peace processes and peace building and conflict prevention work that does not have women at the center of it is more likely to fail. So I hope, I hope I sincerely hope that perhaps, out of all this carnage and dismaying and terror and horror, that you have experienced that perhaps your right could lead the way here in a short example in involving women and girls, every level of this rebuilding effort that has to take place. What a legacy that would be for the horrible events of these recent years. And I hope genuinely and sincerely, that we can support you in achieving that. I hope that the government of Iraq, and the KRG government, and Erbil will resolve their differences and ensure that they support you rebuilding your communities and having a safer future. And, I salute all the work that you have done so far, and what to just reiterate that we will stand with you again in the future. [End of speech]
Thank you so much. I am very honored to be able to speak today on this somber but hopeful occasion. Formal recognition of the genocide by the entirety of the international community is the minimal first step in ending it, bringing justice to the Yazidi people and ensuring that it doesn’t happen again. So, on behalf of the people that I represent, I begin my remarks by recognizing what happened six years ago and given the number of Yazidis that are still unaccounted for. This is a genocide against the Yazidi people. And, we stand with you in solidarity. This means strongly supporting the calls made by Yazda and other organizations to bring justice to the Yazidi to end the genocide, and to rebuild.

While we commemorate the beginning of the genocide, the international community must collectively hang its head in the shame that is wrought, in the heel dragging of prosecuting and punishing, all those complicit in the genocide, be it those who raped, those who killed, those who spread propaganda, and those who stood silent while it happened in their full view but did nothing to stop it. That we are six years in, and still fighting the inertia, bureaucracy, and politics of seeing justice through is a stain that rests on all humanity. No Yazidi should have to wait through another year, another set of commemorations while politicians, diplomats, and lawyers get platitudes and speeches while the perpetrators of these crimes walk free.

The international community must have an action plan with finite timelines to achieve this goal. If the global multilateral organizations, that are designed to help facilitate this, continue to be impotent and their ability to do so then they must be reformed because they are not serving their purpose. Justice for Yazidis should be a key focus of every UN member country and for the entire UN. Bureaucracy carefully crafted speeches and niceties set over cocktails will not bring closure to the Yazidi community. Those world leaders who allow political posturing, fear of offending an ally, a trading partner, or a theocratic regime with similar religious sympathies to get in the way of justice, are no better from a moral perspective than the genocidaires themselves. This is a matter of political will and moral courage. In this matter, I encourage all world leaders to be courageous in our support for them and compassionate, in our love towards the Yazidi people. The international community must also honor the Yazidi people by making permanent changes that currently discriminate against victims of genocide.

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And for those who are listening, and who may feel uncomfortable by that list. Good! You should feel that way! That discomfort is a deep acknowledgment that what I have said is true and that no culture or person on earth has been free from at least one or likely many more of those norms which have been pervasive throughout human history. It is your responsibility, our responsibility to move beyond discomfort, to acknowledge that these problems are pervasive and exist rather than to explain or defend them and to personally affect change within each of our spheres of influence. The greatest women I know, the most powerful beautiful and strong, are Yazidi women who have survived genocide but refused to allow it to define them and have chosen to fight for their people. Every day in my role as a legislator, I am inspired by them and driven to stand behind their cause because it is all of our cause. If we think that crimes against the Yazidi people are not crimes against us all, humanity will never move forward and genocide will occur again. We must be courageous in our support for them and compassionate, in our love towards the Yazidi people. The international community must also honor the Yazidi people by making permanent changes that currently discriminate against victims of genocide.

The Yazidi genocide exposed weaknesses in the UN, and international community’s processes for selecting and resettling victims of genocide that must be improved for their sake and the sake of many others. The inertia that I had to overcome in Canada, and getting genocide acknowledged, or a program in place to resettle genocide Yazidi genocide survivors shows that no country is immune from politics and pedantry when it comes to doing what is right. The genocide showed that we have to develop international systems to provide immediate and long term support to women whose bodies have been used as tools of war, and the Yazidi genocide showed that never again happened again, and will happen again in the future if we don’t take a more difficult, but worthy permanent corrective action within the collective of humanity. So, while today we honor the work of many who have fought for justice for the Yazidis and the Yazidi people themselves, while we celebrate what is overcome, we must not lose sight of these truths and continue to fight for them, which I commit to doing so today.

[End of speech]
We would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the Yazda-ZP working team for their dedication and hard work:

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The Zovighian Partnership is a family-owned social investment platform, established by father and daughter in 2013. Deeply invested in R&D, we are committed to delivering ethical, inclusive, and innovative design, research, and prototypes.

Our team of researchers, strategists, and analysts serve communities, nation-builders, organizations, and governments.

Our venture and the family re-invest our financial, political, and intellectual capital into our growing peace-building impact portfolio. The Yazidi Cause has been at the centerpiece of our efforts, in partnership with Yazda since June 2015.

On the occasion of this Sixth Annual Commemoration of the Yazidi Genocide, our operations, research, and strategic communications teams are truly honored and blessed to serve Yazda and the Yazidi people.

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