

Yazidi Women, Children, and ISIS

Research

Yazidi in Iraq

1. “Although there is a dearth of reliable statistics on demography, community estimates state there are about 550,000 – 600,000 Yazidis in Iraq.⁸ Yazidis are considered the second-largest religious minority in Iraq, after the Christians.”¹
2. “When IS captured the city of Mosul on June, 10th 2014, they gave other religious minorities - such as Christians - three options; (1) accept dhimmi status¹⁹ and pay the Jizyah (a special tax), (2) convert to Islam, or (3) face death. For Yazidis however, the ‘privilege’ of dhimmi status was denied leaving only the latter two options. IS murdered hundreds of Yazidi and Shia prisoners in Badush prison.”²
3. “In the weeks following, IS advanced towards the area of Shingal and the Iraqi Army and the Peshmarga retreated from Shingal, costing thousands of lives and large-scale destruction. When IS attacked, they attacked without mercy. Yazidis in Shingal area were subjected to mass killings, forced conversions, the abduction of young children and the sexual enslavement of thousands of women and girls. The UN estimates that no less than 5.000 men were executed,²¹ while another 7.000 women and girls were forced into sexual slavery.”³
4. “The staggering levels of violence prompted a massive wave of displacement into the Kurdistan Region in Iraq and Syria. This campaign of ethnic cleansing through mass killings has been widely recognised as an act of genocide.”⁴
5. “It has shattered trust and relationships between communities. Between those who were formerly neighbours, friends and colleagues. Moreover, the controversial withdrawal of the Peshmerga preceding IS’ attack has seriously damaged the relationship between the Yazidi community and the KRG – in particular the image of the dominant political party in the region, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). This relationship has not yet been mended despite victories against IS by the Peshmarga.”
6. In the wake of ISIS’ territorial gains, the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Sinjar did not stop ISIS from advancing in the summer of 2014. This left the Yazidi community largely unprotected as members of ISIS mercilessly attacked entire families in Sinjar.⁵
7. ISIS previously disenfranchised the Yazidi community when they took two nearby small oil fields and the town of Zumar. This was part of a plan to seize Mosul's hydroelectric dam. ISIS then captured Sinjar and the surrounding towns.⁶

¹ Domle. K. (2013) Yazidis: A Deep-Rooted Community in an Unstable Present.

² Human Rights Watch (2014). ISIS Executes Hundreds of Prison Inmates. Accessed: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/30/iraq-isis-executed-hundreds-prison-inmates>

³ UNAMI & Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2015). Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 1st May – 31st October, 2015. United Nations.

⁴ “Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization” *Yazda* (2014) Available at: <http://www.yazda.org/yazda-issues-public-report-on-yazidi-mass-graves-in-sinjar-shingal/>

⁵ OHCHR. (2014). Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

⁶ IBID.

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The Plight of Yazidi Women

- “Many, though not all, of the women have returned home, as the extremist group's "caliphate" in Iraq and Syria has been brought down. While some of them want nothing to do with babies born of rape and slavery, some, like Umm Maria, want to keep them. But Yazidi families most often reject the children.”⁷
- “The Yazidis' spiritual leader, Babashekh Khirto Hadji Ismail, issued an edict in 2015 declaring women enslaved by the militants to be "pure," with their faith intact. The declaration allowed the women to be welcomed back into Yazidi society. But not the children.”⁸
- “The Yazidis were estimated to number about 700,000 before 2014. Since the ISIS onslaught, nearly 15 per cent are believed to have fled the country, mostly to the West. Nearly half of those still in the country live in camps for the displaced, scattered around northern Iraq.”⁹
- “About 3,000 Yazidis remain missing or in captivity. Of these, experts believe only a third may still be alive.”¹⁰
- In Tal Afar, 200 Yazidi men and five elderly Yazidi men were executed for refusing religious conversion.¹¹
- Women and girls above the age of five were taken captive and transferred to Mosul.¹²
- Two hundred women and children were taken captive in Tal Binat.¹³

Umm (“Mother”) Maria:

“Yazidi. Woman. Casualty. Mother. Daughter.
Mother of a two-year old girl, fathered by her captor- an ISIS fighter.
Daughter of parents... who reject their grandchild’s existence.
Daughter of a people... brutalized by her child’s father.
Forced by *him*, into slavery.
Forced by *them*, to leave her daughter.”

"My heart bursts from my chest every time I think of leaving her. She is a piece of me, but I don't know what to do," she said, speaking at a camp in northern Iraq for displaced Yazidis.¹⁴

⁷ “Yazidi Mothers of Children of Isis.” *The National*. Last Modified October 2018.

<https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/yazidi-mothers-of-children-by-isis-face-heartbreaking-choices-1.785077>

⁸ IBID.

⁹ IBID.

¹⁰ IBID.

¹¹ OHCHR REPORT, supra note 90.

¹² IBID.

¹³ IBID.

¹⁴ IBID.

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The Aftermath:

“Academics and practitioners active in the field of peacebuilding widely recognise the need for increased clarity in research, programming and policy regarding what is meant by reconciliation. Without such clarity, some critics warn, we run the risk of ‘expending millions of dollars and considerable effort on buzzwords that have no consistent definition or conceptual clarity and promoting mechanisms to achieve these obscure outcomes with little evidence that they will make a difference’.¹⁵

External Conflicts¹⁶

1. Conflict 1: Yazidi – Sunni Arab Campaign of violence and sexual slavery perpetrated by IS and supported by local Sunni Arab tribes.
2. Conflict 2: Yazidi – KRG Many Yazidis feel the KRG is merely pursuing its own interest in the area, as distinct from the needs of the Yazidi community. They see the lack of rebuilding efforts in liberated areas and the withdrawal of Peshmerga prior to August 3rd as examples of this.
3. Conflict 3: Yazidi – CGI Community feels abandoned and ignored by the central government of Iraq. The absence of formal recognition of the genocide reinforces this sentiment. Intra-community divisions
4. Conflict 4: Ethnic identity A minority of Yazidis consider themselves a separate ethnic group rather than Kurds. This sentiment has grown stronger especially in parts of Shingal after relations with the KRG soured since 2014.
5. Conflict 5: Political Representation There is a gap between the community and political representatives. Many Yazidis do not feel represented as a result of the political affiliations of their leaders.
6. Conflict 6: Armed actors support A large number of armed groups is now active in Nineveh. Yazidi support for groups such as the PKK linked YBS and Iranian-backed PMFs lead to worrying friction between part of the Yazidi community and the KRG.

¹⁵ Weinstein, H. M. (2011). The Myth of Closure, the Illusion of Reconciliation International Journal of Transitional Justice 5(1), 1-10.

¹⁶ Zoonen, Van Dave. (2014). The Yazidis Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict. *Middle East Research Institute*.