

## **Yazda UK and Ireland submission to Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee, June 15, 2015**

Yazda UK and Ireland wishes to thank the Irish Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for this invitation to address you and to discuss the plight of the Yazidi community in the Middle East.

We greatly appreciate that members of this Committee also discussed our plight at your last meeting and that the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs has indicated a willingness to discuss our situation further and to adopt a flexible approach in evaluating delivery of future supports in the context of limited resources available.

Yazda is a global organization established after the Yazidi Genocide in Iraq in 2014, to support the Yazidi ethno-religious minority and other vulnerable groups.

There are a number of Yazidi refugees and migrants living in the UK and more recently the first internally displaced Yazidi families have been transferred from the Middle East to Ireland.

Our humanitarian mission supports Yazidis and other vulnerable groups in northern Iraq on:

- Trauma treatment for victims of enslavement,
- Health care and education
- Case management for vulnerable individuals,
- Humanitarian aid distribution and entrepreneurship
- Sinjar Outreach humanitarian project.

Our advocacy work deals with:

- Human Rights
- Empowering Yazidi survivors, especially female survivors
- Uncovering and documenting ISIL crimes
- Seek for the establishment of an internationalized accountability mechanism to prosecute ISIL members
- Seek recognition of the Yazidi Genocide by parliaments and governments
- Establishing a secure future for Yazidis and all people living in our region.

Yazda proudly managed, supported and funded the high-level advocacy campaign of Nadia Murad from the beginning of 2015 until it resulted in her winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018. Yazda has also established the Yazidis Survivors Network (YSN) which is a programme that supports and empowers survivors of the ISIL Genocide, helping them to speak out about their experiences, express their needs, fight for justice, and pursue accountability and Human Rights on national and international levels. YSN also advocates for the expansion of effective programmes and services for survivors and their vulnerable communities in Iraq.

## **Yazidi background**

Yazidis traditionally comprised an ethnic group of less than one million people living in northern Iraq, Syria and in the diaspora (Germany, Armenia, Georgia, Sweden, France, Australia) with their own religion, history and culture.

In the early hours of 3 August 2014, ISIL launched a coordinated attack across the Sinjar region of Northern Iraq, directly targeting homeland areas of the Yazidis.

ISIL spread an ideology of hate and intolerance. Those who did not actively support them - Christian, Sunni, Shia or of no religion - were treated with extreme brutality. In the case of Yazidis, there was an additional emphasis in discovered ISIL documents that their aim was to exterminate our entire population, as our religion is outside the Abrahamic 'book' of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

They made promotional videos of their beheadings. They established a formal bureaucracy to administer the sale of women and girls between their fighters.

Approximately 12,000 Yazidis were killed or abducted by ISIL in the week that followed August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014. Under a policy endorsed and regulated by ISIL leadership, they systematically divided those they captured:

- Over 3,000 young women and girls, some as young as 9 years of age, were transferred to and between various holding sites in Iraq and Syria to be used and traded as *sabaya* (sex slaves) or forced wives by ISIL fighters.
- Yazidi boys who had not reached puberty were separated, radicalized and subsequently became child soldiers.
- Older boys and men who refused to become ISIL supporters, and some older women, were summarily executed by shooting or having their throats cut, with over 5,000 bodies left on site or dumped in mass graves. A small number were inducted into forced labour.

250,000 Yazidis fled their homes and farms to Mount Sinjar in temperatures above 40C. ISIL prevented access to food, water or medical care to cause large numbers of deaths. Hundreds perished before international intervention led to the opening of a safe passage to Syria.

Seven years later an estimated 200,000 Yazidis remain scattered in IDP camps across Kurdistan and northern Iraq. They both fear returning home due to ongoing security concerns and the fact that ISIL destroyed homes and shops, polluted water wells, burned olive groves and looted farm machinery and equipment.

Today the main Yazidi city of Sinjar remains largely in ruins.

## **The Future:**

Yazda is currently engaged in two primary areas of work:

- Seeking to bring ISIL perpetrators to justice
- Seeking to rebuild devastated families, communities and economic activity

### **Seeking to bring ISIL perpetrators to justice:**

Last month the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) presented its [sixth report](#) to the UN Security Council (UNSC). The UNSC, through [UN Resolution 2379 \(2017\)](#) established UNITAD to support domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable by collecting, preserving, and storing evidence in Iraq to deliver evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

In the Report, the Special Advisor and Head of UNITAD, Karim Khan, stated there is now “convincing evidence, that the crimes against the Yazidi people, clearly constituted genocide.”

Considerable progress is being made on this investigation:

- The UN investigative team has gathered thousands of witness statements, ISIL travel documents, medical records, payment logs, DNA and data from mobile phones and computers. They used facial recognition alongside this evidence to identify a staggering 1,444 potential perpetrators including 14 principals who are the focus of detailed case files.
- In February this year, the Iraqi government held, in the presence of Iraqi officials, representatives of the international community and family members of the victims, the first official commemorative ceremony in Baghdad for mass grave victims. The event was followed by an official burial in Sinjar for these victims, specifically honouring 104 victims from Kocho village whose remains were then transported back to their village and buried.
- The Kurdistan Regional Parliament is discussing a draft legislation to establish a special court to prosecute ISIL suspects for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. A similar law is also being considered in Baghdad.
- Last April the Higher Regional Court of Düsseldorf convicted a German woman and ISIL member of war crimes and aiding and abetting crimes against humanity for abuses against a Yazidi woman in Syria.

### **Seeking to rebuild devastated families, communities and economic activity:**

Yazda runs a wide range of programmes in the area of health, education, therapy and entrepreneurship to enable shattered families, individuals and survivors to recover and resume life with some level of 'normality'.

In this regard support is provided by a number of governments and organisations:

Examples of government level provided:

- Netherlands: MHPSS and case management, livelihood and legal support.
- France: Resettlement of survivors, rebuilding of Sinjar, providing humanitarian support. Plus genocide recognition.
- UK: genocide recognition, demining, collection of evidence and humanitarian support.
- United States: Support to the return of internally displaced persons (IDP), rebuilding, livelihood, MHPSS, collection of evidence and strong political support.
- Germany: resettlement of around 100,000 Yazidi, including around 2,000 survivors and their family members. Humanitarian, development and rebuilding support. Yazda operates a livelihood project with German support.
- Australia: settlement of around 5000 survivors and their family members, MHPSS, rebuilding of Sinjar and other work.

No direct support has been provided by the government in Ireland yet. However we are delighted at an increasing awareness in Ireland of the plight of the Yazidi community:

- In August, 2019, President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins issued a tweet stating: "On Yazidi Genocide Remembrance Day we are asked to remember the brutal 2014 attacks, in which thousands were killed, abducted or forced to flee. As President of Ireland, I pay tribute to those who highlight their plight and that of the victims of rape and war crimes."
- The Irish National Teachers' Organisation provides supports for early stage education for children in the Sinjar region through Yazda.

### **Our requests to the Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee:**

- MHPSS and case management support: Yazda has been supporting 1,100 survivors with MHPSS, case management, legal and livelihood support in Sinjar and IDP Camps in Duhok in the past three years. These services were provided under two projects but one of the projects ended last January and the other one will end by the end of this month. These services are very crucial for survivors as almost all of them have no income or get no support from anywhere else.
- Empowerment of women survivors of ISIL/DAESH GENOCIDE: Yazda has established a Yazidi Survivors Network (YSN) in February 2020. The YSN has currently 14 members who were all trained on Transitional Justice, Reparation

and Advocacy. Thanks to these training, the members are able to participate in conferences and workshops and to advocate for their rights. However, more capacity-building is needed to continue to empower them and ensure that they are involved in the decision making process related to topics regarding the Yazidi community. To stay on top of what is happening in Iraq, the members need to meet regularly and to strategize their advocacy. For that, the YSN has asked Yazda to provide them with office space, transportation fees and other costs. To support the YSN activities for 12 months, xxx EUR are needed (see budget attached).

- Ireland recently became a member of the UN Security. Irish Ambassador to the UN, Geraldine Byrne Nason, was one of the first people to speak following the UN Report by Kamir Khan indicating ISIL had committed genocide against the Yazidis. Offering strong UN leadership, including supporting Iraqi and Kurdistan authorities initiatives, would be an appropriate priority over the next two years.
- Reconciliation between the diverse communities, traditions and cultures in northern Iraq, comprising Sunni, Shia, Christian, Turkmen, Shabak as well as Yazidi, is essential to deliver a secure future for the region. Utilising the expertise and learnings of all those involved in the Irish Peace Process would be an invaluable development in future.

Specifically we propose that the Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee:

**1/. Support provision of resources for the recently established Yazidi Survivors Network (Specific budget and costs included in Appendix)**

**2/. Request the Department of Foreign Affairs, at EU and international level, to enable delivery of initiatives such as the Kurdistan Regional Government proposal to establish a Tribunal on ISIS.**

**3/. Hold a further discussion on how Ireland, drawing on its internal experience, could support a future peace and reconciliation initiative at political and community level in Iraq.**

Finally, we were very pleased that in August 2019 a letter highlighting our plight was signed by all political parties in Ireland and published in the Irish Times. We would very much welcome the continuation and development of support at Irish Parliamentary level, composed of members of all political parties, to support the work for justice, healing and reconstruction for Yazidis and the broader communities in which we live and wish to co-exist in the Middle East.

One of the survivors of ISIL atrocities, will present her own testimony to you separately.

We thank you again for your time.

**Appendix 1:**

**Yazda proposals for practical support by Irish government funding for the Yazidi Survivors' Network:**

Total Project Cost : €368,000.

<b>Annual Budget projection cost</b>									
<i>Organization's Name: Yazda</i>									
<i>Project Title: Building Coexistence &amp; Effective Governance in Iraq through a Survivor's Network</i>									
<i>Project Duration: 1 year</i>									
<i>Currency: EURO</i>									
		Unit Cost				Annual Budget projection cost.			TOTAL
		Unit	Number	Amount	Rate	Units	Base/Rate	Amount	
<b>A</b>	<b>Personnel</b>	months or years		salary (month or year)	% effort				
A.1	<i>Field Personnel</i>								
A.1.1	Project Manager / Survivors Network Coordinator	month	1	1,300	100%	12	1,300	15,600	15,600
A.1.2	Project Assistant	month	1	1,100	100%	12	1,100	13,200	13,200
A.1.3	YSN core members	month	15	500	100%	12	500	90,000	90,000
A.1.4	Psychologist for MH-PSS	month	1	900	100%	12	900	10,800	10,800
A.1.5	Media and Advocacy Officer	month	1	900	100%	12	900	10,800	10,800
A.1.6	Office Guard	month	1	600	100%	12	600	7,200	7,200
A.1.7	Office Cook and cleaner	month	1	620	100%	12	620	7,440	7,440
								<b>155,040</b>	<b>155,040</b>

<b>B</b>	<b>Advocacy trips (local and international)</b>								<b>40,000</b>
	Including accomodation, fights, security etc.								
<b>C</b>	<b>Equipment</b>		# units	unit cost					
C.1	Generator for office		1	6,700	100%	1		6,700	6,700
Subtotal Equipment								<b>6,700</b>	<b>6,700</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>Supplies</b>		# units	unit cost					
<b>D.1</b>	<b>Project Supplies</b>								
D.1.1	Laptop for YSN members	each	15	700	100%	15	700	10,500	10,500
D.1.2	Printer	each	3	700	100%	3	700	2,100	2,100
D.1.3	Projector	each	2	200	100%	2	200	400	400
D.1.4	Antivirus for laptops -5 users yearly package	each	3	250	100%	3	250	750	750
D.1.5	Zoom	month	12	200	100%	12	200	2,400	2,400
D.1.6	Video and photo equipment	each	1	5,000	100%	1	5,000	5,000	5,000
D.1.7	Hard disks - 2 TB	each	6	70	100%	6	70	420	420
D.1.8	SD cards for media advocacy	each	6	50	100%	6	50	300	300
D.1.9	Transportation of participants from camp to office	month	12	100	100%	14	100	16,800	16,800
D.1.10	Telecommunications	lump sum	12	500	100%	1	500	6,000	6,000
<b>D.2</b>	<b>Office supplies</b>								
D.2.1	Office rent	month	12	1,100	100%	12	1,100	13,200	13,200
D.2.2	Office utilities - Water	month	12	90	100%	12	90	1,080	1,080
D.2.3	Office utilities - Electricity	month	12	125	100%	12	125	1,500	1,500
D.2.4	Office internet	month	12	170	100%	12	170	2,040	2,040
D.2.5	Office fuel and oil for gnerator	month	12	420	100%	12	420	5,040	5,040
D.2.6	Office supplies	month	12	330	100%	12	330	3,960	3,960

D.2.7	Monthly food	month	12	330	100%	12	330	3,960	3,960
D.2.8	Generator Maintenance	month	12	90	100%	12	90	1,080	1,080
Subtotal Supplies					100%			<b>71,490</b>	<b>76,530</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>Contractual</b>								
E.1	<i>Contracts</i>								
E.2	Consultant to build structure of survivors network	lump sum	1	8,300	100%	1	8,300	8,300	8,300
E.3	Training consultants (Communication, Journalism.. )	lump sum	1	8,300	100%	1	8,300	8,300	8,300
E.4	Legal fee for International consultant	lump sum	1	17,000	100%	1	17,000	17,000	17,000
E.5	Consultant for Yazda Advocacy Strategy and Fundraising	lump sum	1	17,000	100%	1	17,000	17,000	17,000
Subtotal Contractual								<b>50,600</b>	<b>50,600</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>Capacity-building and developping YSN</b>								
F.1	Online Arabic and English courses app yearly cost	item	12	200	100%	6	200	1,200	1,200
F.2	Branding, logo and website expenses	lump sum	1	2,000	100%	1	2,000	2,000	2,000
F.3	Meetings (Venues, transportation and refreshments)	meeting	12	750	100%	8	750	6,000	6,000
F.4	Workshops and meetings in Baghdad	each	4	1,000	100%	2	1,000	2,000	2,000
F.5	Workshops and meetings in the region	each	4	1,000	100%	2	1,000	2,000	2,000
F.6	Commemoration of the genocide in Baghdad	each	2	20,000	100%	1	20,000	20,000	20,000
F.7	Commemoration of the genocide in Sinjar	each	2	3,000	100%	1	3,000	3,000	3,000
F.8	Inter-communnity workshop	each	4	3,000	100%	2	1,500	3,000	3,000

Subtotal Other Direct Costs									39,200	39,200
	<b>Total Direct Costs</b>								323,030	368,070
	<b>Total Project Cost</b>	(must match award amount)								368,070

**Appendix 2:**

**Extract of UN coverage of the Irish UN Ambassador’s response to the the 6th Report to the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD), May 2021:**

‘The representative of Ireland commended the Team’s use of artificial intelligence, machine learning and translation to gather and analyze evidence, as well as its cooperation with Iraq’s authorities in the excavation of mass grave sites. “Accountability is essential to heal the wounds of conflict and build sustainable peace,” she stressed. The manner in which justice is pursued is equally important. Noting that the UNITAD Gender Crimes and Children Unit has started an investigation into ISIL/Da’esh crimes against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer+ (LGBTQ+) community, she also cited interviews with survivors of sexual violence and the appointment of focal points within field investigations units. She called for moving beyond evidence-gathering to prosecution and conviction of crimes of sexual violence committed by ISIL/Da’esh, stressing that “Ms. Murad and all survivors deserve nothing less.” She commended UNITAD’s support to Iraq in developing a domestic legislative framework that would enable the domestic prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, calling for continued training for the judiciary to assist in the development of case files against ISIL/Da’esh for atrocity crimes.’

ENDS