

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS COSAINT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Dé Máirt, 15 Meitheamh 2021

Tuesday, 15 June 2021

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 12.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 12.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Cathal Berry,	Gerard P. Craughwell,
John Brady,	Niall Ó Donnghaile.
Sorca Clarke,	
Gary Gannon.	

Teachta / Deputy Charles Flanagan sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Yazidi Community in Iraq: Yazda UK and Ireland

Chairman: Good afternoon members and guests. Our main business this afternoon is meeting with representatives of Yazda UK and Ireland to discuss the plight of the Yazidi community in Iraq.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome Ms Natia Navrouzov, head of the legal documentation project related to the latest UN Investigation, and Ms Nasreen, who is a survivor of ISIS captivity. Both are joining us remotely from Kurdistan. Mr. Ahmed Khudida Burjus, head of Yazda UK and Ireland, joins us from London. We are joined too by Mr. John Gallagher, also of Yazda UK and Ireland. The witnesses are all very welcome this afternoon to our meeting in Dublin.

The format of the meeting is that we will first hear from Mr. Khudida, followed by Ms Navrouzov and then from Ms Nasreen. We will then revert to members of the committee to discuss and engage in a question-and-answer session with our witnesses and guests. As we are quite time limited due to Covid restrictions, I ask that our witnesses be conscious of time constraints when initially addressing the committee in order that we will be in a position to expend the bulk of our time by way of engagement. Following the opening statements there will be a discussion followed by questions and answers with members of the committee. Again, I ask members to be concise in their questions to allow our guests the opportunity to answer questions and all members the opportunity to ask questions.

Witnesses are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make them identifiable or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of that person or entity. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in respect of an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. Of course, it is imperative that they immediately comply with any such direction.

For witnesses attending remotely outside of the Leinster House campus, I remind them that there are limitations to parliamentary privilege and as such, they may not benefit from the same level of immunity from legal proceedings that witnesses physically present in the parliamentary precincts currently enjoy. Witnesses participating in this committee session from a jurisdiction outside the State are advised that they should also be mindful of their own domestic law in the jurisdiction from which they speak and how it may apply to the evidence they give.

I remind members of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against any person outside of the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make them identifiable. I remind members that they are only allowed to participate in this meeting if they are physically located on the Leinster House complex or from the conference centre, where the Dáil and Seanad are meeting today in plenary session. For anybody watching this meeting online, some Oireachtas Members and witnesses are accessing this meeting remotely. Due to the unprecedented circumstances and the large number of people attending the meeting remotely, I ask that everybody bear with us in the event of a technical issue arising. I thank the technical team, who have been working since this morning to ensure that our witnesses and guests are present and audible.

With that, I am very pleased to call on Mr. Khudida, followed by Ms Navrouzov and Ms Nasreen, to address our committee. They are welcome. Mr. Khudida has the floor.

Mr. Ahmed Khudida Burjus: Good afternoon everyone, on behalf of the Yazda and the Yazidi community I thank the members of the committee, the Chair, the clerk and the committee staff for organising this important event and for the invitation. I also thank the members of the committee for the previous discussion of Yazidi issues at its previous meeting. I thank as well the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Coveney, for his positive words about the Yazidi situation at the previous meeting.

The members of the committee will be aware the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham, ISIS, committed genocide and other heinous human rights violations against religious and ethnic minority groups in Iraq and Syria. The Yazidis were specifically targeted for their identity. This systematic persecution led to the mass killing of an estimated 5,000 Yazidis, the abduction of approximately another 7,000 Yazidis, mostly women and children, the forced conversion of countless Yazidis, the systematic destruction of Yazidi religious and cultural sites, homes and farms and the forced displacement of an estimated 450,000 people in Iraq alone.

Since then, little progress has been made regarding the plight of the Yazidis. Around 2,800 Yazidis, mainly women and children, are still missing. Half of the community is still in internally displaced people, IDP, camps facing a miserable situation. In recent days, we saw a very large fire in the Sharya refugee camp which destroyed 400 tents and left more than 1,000 Yazidis homeless. Those who have returned to their home areas have very limited access to the most basic services. Many areas are still extensively mined and have not been rebuilt. Most importantly, there is an absence of justice, accountability and reparations after almost seven years of ongoing genocide. In addition, there is instability in Yazidi areas due to political insecurity and geopolitical conflict between national and regional players.

To discuss these issues, we have two speakers from Yazda. The first speaker is Ms Nasreen, a member of the Yazidi Survivor Network, YSN, and a Yazidi human rights activist. The second speaker will be Ms Natia Navrouzov, who is one of the leaders of Yazda and the head of our documentation and legal team, as well as being our legal advocacy director. Yazda is a global Yazidi organisation which tries to bring justice, healing and rejuvenation to vulnerable ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq and Syria who have suffered or been affected by the genocidal campaign of ISIS in 2014. Yazda works on three main missions: humanitarian, justice and advocacy missions. As part of our humanitarian mission for the past six years, we have been providing services and supports to survivors of the ISIS genocide, people in IDPs and refugees. This has included, but has not been limited to, mental health, psychosocial support, case management, education, medical, healthcare, livelihood and legal supports. Our justice mission aims to bring justice to survivors through the documentation of ISIS crimes and filing cases against those accused of persecution. Our advocacy mission seeks recognition of the ISIS genocide and to empower survivors, like Ms Nasreen, to speak out about their experiences and anguish. I hand over now to Ms Nasreen.

Ms Nasreen: Good afternoon everyone. I apologise, my English is not very good. I hope the committee can understand me. I thank the committee members very much for inviting me to participate in this meeting. I am a Yazidi human rights activist and a member of the Yazidi Survivor Network. Perhaps not all the members of the committee may be aware of the Yazidis, so I will begin by defining us as a religious and ethnic minority who live in many parts of the world, but mainly in northern Iraq and specifically in Sinjar. They have been subjected to many genocides, the most recent of which occurred on 3 August 2014 in Sinjar and was perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL, also known as ISIS. As a result of this genocide, thousands of Yazidi men were killed, thousands of women were enslaved, with many sub-

sequently traded by their captors multiple times, children were trained as soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Yazidis were displaced.

I am one of those Yazidi women who has subjected to sexual violence in the form of rape, slavery and physical and psychological torture. In addition, we have lost our beloved family members. More than 5,000 of our fathers, husbands and brothers were shot and buried in mass graves. It has been seven years since the genocide, but about 3,000 Yazidis are still missing, including 14 members of my family, whom I miss very much. There is not enough time to talk about this genocide in detail. I will focus on the Yazidi survivors who have been subjected to one of the most awful crimes in this century. They are also facing many difficulties now following their liberation from ISIL captivity. They have lost everything and they are trying to restore their lives from nothing. Most of them live in tents in IDP camps. Despite all these difficulties, these survivors are very brave and are advocating for their own rights and those of others. They also work very hard in helping the authorities to bring justice for everyone. We are fighting to prevent future genocides from happening to us and everywhere else in the world.

The Yazidi Survivors Network is an example of brave survivors who work on advocating for the rights of Yazidi survivors and the survivors of many other cases. However, to carry out this advocacy work effectively, we require capacity building training courses in different fields. We were deprived of the opportunity to continue our education because of being in captivity. We need more education to be taken seriously and to be part of the decision-making process, especially on topics that are directly about us.

The main issue we now face in developing the Yazidi Survivors Network is funding. I would like to take this opportunity to ask the committee to support the network members in any possible way so that we can support other survivors and our community in general as much as we can. I thank the committee very much for listening. I am sorry my English is not good.

Chairman: I thank Ms Nasreen for her very clear and direct presentation.

Ms Natia Navrouzov: Ms Nasreen did a great job. I thank the Chairman, Deputies and Senators for the honour of addressing the committee today. I wish I could be there in person. I will keep my remarks short so there is room for questions and a discussion with members.

I want to start by giving a little more background about the Yazidi Survivors Network, as mentioned by Ms Nasreen. This network brings together 15 Yazidi survivors in advocating for their rights. The starting point of the network was a draft Bill on reparation for Yazidi female survivors presented by the Iraqi President to the Parliament in March 2019. Although the name of the Bill was the Yazidi female survivors law, not a single survivor was involved in the drafting process. Even though the Bill was for them and was meant to address the harm they had suffered and are still suffering, none of them was consulted. The draft law was a good step in the right direction but it needs improvement.

To tackle these challenges, Yazda UK and Ireland brought together a group of survivors and provided them with capacity building on transitional justice, mainly on the topic of reparation. We explained to the survivors the obligations of the state in terms of reparation and, more importantly, their rights as victims. A core group of this network started to advocate for the improvement of the Bill and the Iraqi Parliament took some of its suggestions into consideration. The law was passed in March this year and by-laws are being drafted to ensure its implementation. The next step is to ensure survivors are also involved in the implementation phase, especially through a monitoring mechanism, which will need to be established.

After their experience with the Yazidi female survivors law, the survivors realised how strong their voices can be, as individuals but also as a group. The wish to establish a formal network came from them. Having strong voices of survivors is essential in a country where the process is often top-down. However, to ensure these strong voices remain and become louder, we must continue to develop the network. To pursue this important work, the survivors in the network are asking for simple things, some of which Ms Nasreen mentioned. They are asking for further capacity building, with English classes, Arabic classes, IT classes, public speaking and advocacy lessons. As Ms Nasreen mentioned, most of them are not able to go back to school because of the year's gap they had and because of being in ISIL captivity. They are asking for an office space where they can meet to discuss important topics related to their community and develop advocacy strategies together. They need funding for transportation costs, to be able to go from their camps to the office, and for mobile telephone chargers to enable them to speak to each other through WhatsApp groups and for general Internet use.

We have calculated that to fund such a campaign for the network for a year, approximately €370,000 will be necessary. It is a significant amount of money but the impact this network could have would be much greater. Yazda UK and Ireland would welcome the opportunity of a subsequent discussion with the Minister and his officials to explore the possibility of obtaining this funding. Just as the Irish National Teachers Organisation is helping to fund primary education for our community, we hope Ireland will be able to help fund survivor empowerment and capacity building.

I want to give another example showing why it is important to encourage and support strong victims' voices in Iraq. At the end of April this year, the government of the Kurdistan region of Iraq presented a new draft Bill to its Parliament. This draft law is about establishing a special tribunal in Kurdistan to prosecute ISIL suspects for international crimes. Currently, there is no legal framework in Iraq to prosecute ISIL members for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Only trials under antiterrorism laws are taking place. This draft law is a very good step in the right direction. Such a tribunal is needed to enable justice for survivors. Again, however, there is the same risk that the survivors are not being consulted, even though such a tribunal is meant to bring justice to them. Therefore, the survivors will need to proactively seek to be involved in the decision-making process. We can enable this by empowering them. Yazda UK and Ireland is advocating for consultation with survivors and civil society to take place in regard to the draft law.

We have already had initial discussions with the Yazidi Survivors Network on this Bill and one of the main comments from survivors was that the tribunal needs to have strong international involvement because of the local mistrust towards Iraqi institutions. To avoid history repeating itself and this tribunal facing the same challenges as the Iraqi High Tribunal, which prosecuted Saddam Hussein and his party, the international community, including Ireland, needs to be part of the process from the start, which is now. For example, Ireland can lead European Union countries in the discussion on the tribunal to ensure the voices of survivors are heard and that the tribunal has a strong foundation and legitimacy. I am happy to answer any questions related to the draft law during our discussion.

I would like to finish by saying that the fight against ISIL is not over. It needs to continue in courtrooms and we need to arm survivors to face their perpetrators. Survivors like Ms Nasreen have already taken a major step by sharing their story. Yazda UK and Ireland alone has collected more than 2,000 statements of survivors. We need now to take a step towards them and show them we care by empowering them and enabling accountability. The UN Security

Council did this in 2017 by creating UNITAD and the international community needs to do so again by supporting the creation of a tribunal in which all the evidence gathered can be used.

ISIL is not only an Iraqi or Syrian issue but a global one. Initiatives such as the one in the Kurdistan region of Iraq need global support and survivors like Ms Nasreen need to see that international crimes receive an international response. I know that at the previous meeting of this committee, the issues affecting Yazidis were raised in members' discussion with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was presenting before the committee. I very much welcome the points raised by a number of members on behalf of our community and their understanding of the challenges facing minority and ethnic groups in many parts of the world today. I also put on record my appreciation for the positive responses from the Minister, Deputy Coveney. I hope our delegation can provide further information and detail to assist the committee in any further deliberations. I thank members very much for their attention.

Chairman: I thank both witnesses for their very concise and compelling presentations. I will now take questions from members, starting with Deputy Brady.

Deputy John Brady: I welcome our guests to the committee, in respect of what I imagine is a harrowing and traumatic experience for all of them. I was particularly struck by the testimony of Ms Hassan. It was truly brave and remarkable of her to make that statement given the lived experiences she has had to endure. Like her, so many other Yazidi people have suffered at the hands of the barbaric terrorist organisation ISIS. I commend the witnesses on their bravery in speaking out to try to get justice for their people.

I have a number of questions. For a number of years, I have been following what was happening to the Yazidis at the hands of ISIS and, similarly, the people in Syria, Northern Iraq and Kurdistan. It is appalling. Similarly, the slowness of the international community to step in and try to provide assistance to the people when they were being slaughtered by ISIS was appalling. What happened has left an awful lot of trauma legacy issues. Suicide is prevalent given the extent of the trauma, the displacement of the Yazidi people and the uncertainty as to where loved ones are. It was striking to hear from Ms Hassan there are still 3,000 people missing, including 40 members of her family. That must serve as a message to the international community to step up to the mark and provide assistance to reunite families and find loved ones that are missing and to provide the tangible assistance laid out by the witnesses in their statements.

I have a number of specific questions. For me, what happened to the Yazidis was genocide, pure and simple. It is important that when a genocide takes place the international community calls it out for what it is in order that we can learn from it and hold people to account. I will touch on the need for a tribunal later. On the specific issue of genocide, am I correct that the UK Government is the only government that has declared what happened a genocide and how helpful would it be for the international community to state it as it is?

As a member of this committee I had the opportunity to put questions to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Coveney, when he was before us a couple of weeks ago. I am struck that Ireland is one of a few countries that has not contributed to alleviating the difficulties and plight of the Yazidi people. As I am aware that Concern is active on the ground in parts of Iraq and that there are particularly sensitive security issues around that, I will not prise the witnesses for information on that. In terms of assistance from the Irish Government, what more can be given? I note the witnesses have a specific request for €368,000 to assist the excellent work they are doing. Sinn Féin will support that. It is the minimum the Irish Government should do. I am sure the committee will come back to this issue in terms of some of the specific requests

from the witnesses, on which, I hope, all committee members will be able to agree.

Other than financial aid, what more can Ireland do? Ireland has a seat on the UN Security Council and is a member state of the EU. There is a specific request that Ireland would lend its voice in regard to the tribunal. It is critically important that survivors are listened to. What message would the witnesses send to the Irish Government in terms of the tangible assistance needed to ensure Yazidi voices are heard within the tribunal? Given our own conflict and attempts at conflict resolution and the peace process within Ireland, what role could Ireland play in terms of trying to negotiate a settlement? I am aware of some of the issues in regard to Kurdistan and in terms of the international support for a tribunal. Kurdistan still has the death penalty, as does Iraq. That might be a problem. The witnesses might address that issue. If that is a problem in terms of the international community getting involved, given Ireland's involvement in the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement, what role could it play in terms of trying to get agreement and having the death penalty set aside to ensure accountability can be heeded.?

I have a couple of other questions. Sinjar is still in ruins and the Yazidi people are dispersed across many different countries. In terms of the rebuilding of Sinjar, for example, what commitments have been given by the international community and what work is happening on the ground to help people to rebuild their communities, livelihoods and lives in general? In terms of recommendations, the committee should consider putting forward a recommendation on the funding to Department and the Minister in regard. On the tribunal, Ireland needs to use its voice to ensure the voices of survivors and victims are central in that process and it is essential there is recognition that a brutal genocide against the Yazidi people was perpetrated. I again commend the witnesses and thank them for being here, in particular Ms Hassan, whose statement was truly powerful and touching.

Chairman: I will take questions from a number of members before reverting to the witnesses.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I welcome the witnesses and I thank them for their incredible and powerful statements. My first question relates to the international process needed for the courts. I ask the witnesses to highlight precedents where such a process has happened previously. I refer, for example, to Rwanda where the international community and the UN Security Council has done something similar. I would also like to know about the impediments to the international process in terms of the courts. Would the absence of legislation in Iraq to deal with an international court hold up such a process and, if so, what can we do to encourage the Iraqi Government to pass the legislation that will be needed to collaborate on such a process?

My next question in relation to the international court pertains to Ireland and its position within the EU and on the UN Security Council. What would the witnesses strongly encourage our State to do to assist in this plight?

Will the witnesses tell us about the education work that they take on and the support they have been receiving from the INTO in that regard, and what we can do to help support that essential work?

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I thank the witnesses for their contributions. Ms Hassan's English is more than suitable for conveying the horror that she and the Yazidi people have experienced. She should feel incredibly proud of the statement she made and the dignity she showed when making it.

I do not want to go over areas that have already been covered, but I will add something further on the question of the court system. It is vital that survivors have their day in a court of law and see the perpetrators of the crimes against them stand before that court. For that to happen, though, survivors need scaffolding. They need multiple layers of support around them. They need to be physically capable of standing in a courtroom. They also need to be psychologically prepared to be there and to rebuild afterwards. That is not an easy task.

The female survivors law is really disappointing. It is beyond disappointing to hear that women were not included in its drafting. That makes no sense whatsoever. Sadly, we know from experience that sexual violence is used as a weapon in conflicts. How likely are women to engage in the process and utilise this law if the proposed amendments are not taken into consideration and included in the final legislation? One of the key issues for survivors is that they do not feel like they have got justice if they are not involved. They do not feel like they have been represented if their voices are not heard. If their voices and lived experiences are not included, it can sometimes create a barrier to utilising laws. How do the witnesses see that playing out? How can it be ensured that those who most need this law benefit from it?

Education was mentioned. It is right to say that education is key. It is the cornerstone that will change the lives of people who have experienced conflict, as it allows them to develop into fuller people. Will the witnesses give us more detail in that regard, please?

Mention was made of the Kurdistan draft legislation. Due to the nature of ISIS, we know that many people will have fled. How many countries are likely to need to pass similar legislation? If multiple countries must pass multiple laws, what impact will it have on the timeline for delivering an end result for the Yazidi people?

My final point is on the project's funding. The project is a wonderful idea and could make a major difference to people's lives. Will the witnesses give us more detail about it? Will they tell us more about the potential service users, its location, its potential structure and the governance that will be put in place?

Mr. Ahmed Khudida Burjus: Does Ms Navrouzov wish to respond to the questions on the law?

Ms Natia Navrouzov: Yes. I thank the Deputies for their questions, which were relevant. I tried to write down as many as I could, so if I forget any, they might let me know.

I will focus on accountability and the tribunal. Turning to Deputy Brady's comments, Ireland could provide support through diplomatic channels, particularly given that Ireland now sits on the UN Security Council. It would be great to remind the Security Council that, while establishing the Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL, UNITAD, was a good step, it was not enough. What is the point in having an investigative team gathering evidence that cannot be used in Iraq? It comes down to spending billions of dollars without serving justice to survivors at the end of the day.

I am unsure as to how aware the EU is of the draft law. It was presented at the end of April and matters are moving forward quickly. The Kurdish Parliament is conducting various consultations, but consultations with survivors are not scheduled yet. Ireland and the wider EU could push for these consultations with survivors, but also for consultations with the international community, including Ireland. ISIL is a global issue and needs to be addressed globally. From my experience as a lawyer, Ireland has great judges. They could sit on the tribunal or advise

it. Unfortunately, due to the lack of a legal framework, the Iraqi judiciary does not have the expertise to prosecute international crimes. As such, capacity building is needed. Funding for the tribunal is also much needed.

A good point was made about the death penalty. It will be a sticking point because, with a death penalty, there will probably be no international support. We saw the same with the Iraqi High Tribunal, for which there was a great deal of goodwill. There was the will to prosecute international crimes, but because of the death penalty, the lack of transparency, the lack of involvement by survivors and the hearings not always being fair, the international community did not support the institution. We need to ensure that the same does not recur if a tribunal is established.

Deputy Gannon asked about the example of Rwanda and what had happened previously. There are different ways to have an accountability mechanism. It could be the same one as was used in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia, for which there was agreement between the UN Security Council and those countries through resolutions to establish a court. That is still an option in this case if Ireland and other countries negotiate it with Iraq at a diplomatic level. UNITAD is an example of Iraq's will in this regard, but Iraq might be too scared to deal with the issue alone. As such, the support of the international community is much needed.

Another solution could be the International Criminal Court, ICC. Unfortunately, Iraq is not part of the Rome Statute, but it could agree to be. That would enable such trials in the ICC. This is something else that Ireland could look into with Iraq.

Another option is a hybrid tribunal, that is, a mixed national and international process. This is actually what is being suggested now. There would be some international involvement under the draft law, in that some of the judges could be from the international community. Unfortunately, the number is not specified. If there was a majority of Iraqi judges and a minority of international ones, it could reduce the decision-making power of the international judges.

Regarding the Yazidi survivors Bill, it was sad to see that the survivors themselves were not involved in the process. We really advocated for that. At the end of the day, some of our recommendations were taken into consideration. Currently, in the by-law drafting process, Yazda along with 31 other NGOs have formed a coalition that is working on reparation, which has provided a set of recommendations to the Council of Ministers in Baghdad. We are currently working on the by-laws.

Our main point was to have a survivor-centred approach and put the survivor in the centre of everything we are doing. We start by doing outreach. Many survivors in Iraq do not know even know this law was passed. It was discussed two years ago and it was passed in March this year. Outreach is, therefore, needed. It is important to ensure that survivors understand the process and know where to go to submit their paperwork. These are very practical things whereby if no-one really deals with them then this will not enable the survivors to be part of this reparation programme.

Another question was regarding the Sadiki initiative and how many other countries would need to pass such laws. I am not sure. I know that in Europe, some trials against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL, members for crimes against Yazidis are taking place. There is no need as European countries already have the legal framework.

Other countries might need that but I am not able to tell the committee how many. Since

most of the victims are in Iraq and most of the crimes happen in Iraq and Syria, it is very important to ensure there is a legal framework in this country. Otherwise, trials can be scattered like what is happening now. Only a handful of trials are being conducted, for instance, in Germany. If, however, there is no legal framework in the country where victims are or where the crimes took place, there will not be much justice served for the survivors.

There should also be accountability. Iraq needs to deal with the issue in terms of broader transitional justice to enable trust-building again between the society and the country. As I said, at the end of the day, survivors, unfortunately, do not trust the institutions anymore because they are saying the institutions did not protect us. Having a court would, therefore, send a positive message to the community.

One final point from my notes was about the funding we are requesting for the Yazidi Survivors Network. This funding would enable us to continue to empower the survivors. Currently, we have a group of 15 survivors who are willing to get further capacity-building on public speaking, IT, Arabic, and English so that they are able to carry the messages they want to carry in Iraq but also globally.

As I said, unfortunately, we are not able to be there physically with the committee. One of the things survivors want to do is travel and explain what has happened to them. Some survivors have done that and Ms Nasreen is a great example of that. There are, however, so many other survivors who are willing to do so and there are so many things that need to be done. We need hundreds of survivors to be able to speak up.

In terms of localisation, these activities will be mainly based in Duhok, Kurdistan, where we would want an office where we would be able to build out these capacity-building sessions where survivors could meet. This was one of the issues. They are currently scattered in different camps. They are not even able to meet physically to discuss what is important to their community and what they need to advocate for. Sometimes, they are not even able to communicate virtually because they do not have the money to buy the communication methods. As I said, the cost would be €370,000. It is a lot of money but it would also have a great impact on these survivors. Members will see the results quite quickly and for many years. I thank the committee. I hope I covered the questions that were for me.

Chairman: I thank Ms Navrouzov very much. I acknowledge the manner in which she dealt with some of the questions. I am not sure if we have any further engagements from members. As Chairman, however, I acknowledge what Deputies Brady, Clarke and Gannon said as to how we might assist. I propose that immediately following this meeting, we write to the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Minister, Deputy Coveney, to ask that a sum in the amount of €368,000 be made available from the Department.

I note that among the documentation furnished to this committee was a detailed proposal for practical support, which has been broken down under a number of headings. I believe that is quite transparent and will be helpful for us. I ask, particularly following the contributions of members earlier, that we pass a resolution now seeking such assistance from the Department of Foreign Affairs and engage further on the matter with the Minister at the earliest opportunity.

I see that Senator Craughwell is offering. I believe it is important that we follow up this meeting with concrete practical steps, one of which would be an exhortation to the Department from the committee that such funding be made available. We can also engage with the Minister of State, Deputy Brophy, as well as the Minister, as to the channel through which these funds

would be made available and targeted. I call Senator Craughwell.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I thank the Chairman very much. I do not have any questions. The witnesses have been fairly questioned up until now. I want to add my voice to those of support. The Chairman has laid out what he sees as the way forward. I totally agree with and support him on that, as I support Deputy Brady and all others who have spoken. It takes courage to speak out. Anything we can do to help the victims to speak out, we need to do. I thank the witnesses very much for appearing before the committee and sharing their experiences.

Chairman: I thank the Senator. Before I ask our witnesses to leave us with some closing messages, I ask members to immediately agree proposals Nos. 1 and 2 supporting the provision of resources for the recently established Yazidi Survivors Network, having regard to our consideration of the specific budget and costs included in our appendix.

I ask that we agree that now and agree a further request to the Department of Foreign Affairs, at EU and international level, to enable delivery of the types of initiatives that have been mentioned, such as the proposal to establish a tribunal on Isis in the Kurdistan Region. I ask members to agree these proposals now. I will then ask our witnesses for closing comments. Is Deputy Brady agreed on that?

Deputy John Brady: I will comment briefly so as not to prolong the meeting. Could our witnesses when summing up touch on the issue of genocide, on which I asked a specific question? I have read through some of the notes and I stand corrected. I believe France has also recognised that genocide has happened. In their concluding statements, the witness might address how important it would be for parliaments and countries to adopt that position.

Chairman: I thank the Deputy. I take it that we have agreed the course of action as I specified. With that, I will revert to our guests for closing comments.

Mr. Ahmed Khudida Burjus: I thank the Chairman. I believe the Deputy asked a specific question so and I will quickly answer. In terms of genocide recognition, parliaments or governments in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Armenia, Portugal and the European Parliament have recognised the genocide. We hope, therefore, that Ireland will follow these countries and recognise and acknowledge not only the genocide but also Isis crimes against all communities, especially the minority communities in Iraq and Syria. This would be a moral support for all victims and all communities there. It would also help as an important step towards justice. We hope the committee will include this on its agenda.

There were a couple of questions about education, what we are doing now and what the needs are on the ground. Basically, even before the ISIS attacks, Sinjar had been neglected and persecuted systematically by the current Government and, before that, by the Government of Saddam. For example, I graduated from Sinjar. We have almost 5 million people there, including in the surrounding area. There is no university there. We have an institute. We have what we call villages. In the village I lived in, there were approximately 30,000 people and we had only three or four schools.. This is for all the people in all the region. What was there ISIS has destroyed and we have been left with a broken education system. It was already broken before ISIS. This is why the needs are very great in terms of education.

I will give a few examples. In an assessment over six months in Sinjar, we found that almost 30,000 students in primary, middle and secondary schools had only 120 formal teachers and 400 volunteer teachers. For instance, a school of 600 students has only a few teachers. There

has been general spending from the international side and it has supported the provision of 35 teachers in high schools between 2018 and this January. There have also been other initiatives from other organisations. These are all temporary solutions, however, and only help for a short time. We need funding to rebuild schools. We need to hire more teachers. We also need school supplies. We receive very small but generous support from Irish teachers' organisations, which support informal educational programmes to help children to learn English and other activities after school.

There was a question about other countries. I would like to acknowledge some of the work that has been done by international organisations and countries, including the US, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and other countries. For example, the US has been heavily involved in providing mental health support and psychological support case management. The Netherlands has also helped over the past two years in providing these types of supports. There have been 700 beneficiaries, mainly survivors. The UK has helped with demining the area. I cannot mention all of the activities supported by all of the countries. We thank all of them and we hope Ireland will also come forward and get involved in some activities. What has been done is appreciated but it is really not enough. It is very little compared to the needs of people. As I have said, all sectors are destroyed and we need to rebuild.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Khudida Burjus. Would Ms Navrouzov like to make any concluding comments?

Ms Natia Navrouzov: I would like to thank the Chairman and members for their time, empathy and the support I can see already. I also thank them for taking some practical steps and considering the activity we have suggested. I know the Covid restrictions are making things difficult currently but I hope that, next year, some of the members might be able to visit us in our offices and meet our survivors. It is so impressive how much power they still carry in them and how much willpower they have to change things. I am doing a lot of work on these issue but I do not enjoy anything more than working directly with the survivors. I hope to see the committee members very soon and I thank them very much for their kindness and support.

Chairman: I thank Ms Navrouzov. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution and ongoing work of Mr. John Gallagher of Yazda UK and Ireland. I thank our witnesses, Mr. Khudida Burjus, Ms Navrouzov and, in particular, Ms Nazreen for her very moving testimony. I propose that the committee take up some of the issues that have been part of the discussion this afternoon and that we engage further on this matter, both domestically with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the various other committees in which members are involved, and by way of further engagement with the witnesses. I thank Mr. Gallagher and his team. We will now go into private session.

The joint committee went into private session at 1.37 p.m. and adjourned at 1.52 p.m. until 12.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 22 June 2021.