

**Call for input to report on contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities**

*Nadia's Initiative*

1. Is there **evidence** of minorities being subjected to contemporary forms of slavery (e.g., forced labor, bonded labor, forced/child marriage, descent/caste-based slavery, and related practices) in your country/community? If so, please provide information relating to the **profiles of victims and the nature and extent of their exploitation and abuse**. What additional traits and characteristics, including gender, age, sexual orientation, and disabilities, have made them more vulnerable?

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attacked the Sinjar region of Iraq on 3 August 2014 in a targeted and strategic genocide against the Yazidi ethno-religious minority group. They massacred and abducted Yazidis across the region. Many were able to flee, but a vast majority were unable to reach the safety of the Sinjar Mountain or the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. ISIS used sexual slavery as a tactic of genocide and rape as a weapon of war against the Yazidis. They sought to wage war on Yazidi women's bodies to tear apart the community from within and transform Yazidi women into their commodities. Thousands of Yazidi women and girls were forced to be slaves, wives, child bearers, and servants. Women were used as rewards for soldiers, sold and traded for revenue, and forced into marriage. Their enslavement included sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, and forced conversion to Islam. These crimes were codified and part of the institutional infrastructure of ISIS. In 2014, more than 6,500 Yazidi women and children were taken captive. Today, nearly 2,800 women and children remain missing or in captivity. It should be noted that women from other ethnic and religious backgrounds (including Christians, Shabaks, Sunni, and Shia) were also subjected to sexual violence, including sexual slavery, at the hands of ISIS. However, these crimes were primarily committed by individual ISIS fighters and not part of a strategic campaign to commit sexual violence against Yazidi women.

2. What types of personal, situational, and structural factors push minorities into contemporary forms of slavery in your country/community?

Even prior to ISIS' invasion, the situation of Iraq's minorities was already precarious, particularly for those living in the Ninewa Plain and the territories disputed between the Kurdish authorities and the federal Iraqi government. Yazidis are not adequately represented by either government and, without meaningful inclusion in political decision-making, their

needs, challenges, and priorities often fall through the cracks. This was evident in the way ISIS was able to occupy Sinjar with minimal resistance, both Iraqi and Kurdish forces having withdrawn from the area. The lack of representation and spaces for active participation in decision-making processes for minority groups means that Yazidis and other minority groups have no say in their security or protection.

At a structural level, the Iraqi government has provided little administrative or governance-related support to the Sinjar region. The institutionalized discrimination also contributes to a lack of development in Yazidi and minority inhabited areas. Without basic services, schools, and healthcare facilities, these areas are further marginalized. This marginalization and discrimination resulted in Sinjar being a region devoid of protection and extremely vulnerable to security risks. The struggles of the Yazidi people in Iraq continue to this day. They remain vulnerable with minimal international protection or the resources needed to rebuild their homeland in Sinjar. There are nearly 200,000 Yazidis still displaced in Northern Iraq and the 150,000 Yazidis who have returned to Sinjar are struggling to rebuild their homes and re-establish their livelihoods.

3. Are there wider political, economic, social, religious, and cultural factors making persons belonging to minorities vulnerable to these practices?

The Yazidi people have been persecuted for centuries. Yazidi history recounts seventy-three instances of genocide - the latest of which was conducted by ISIS. Yazidism is an ancient monotheistic religion sharing elements with other Middle Eastern traditions but is set apart by its prayer rituals, a belief in reincarnation, and the central role of the Peacock Angel, Tawusi Malek, who is worshiped as a messenger to the Yazidi god. The unique tenants of the Yazidi faith have made them subject to discrimination and persecution throughout history. The constant threat of persecution led many Yazidis to the northern region of Iraq (namely Sinjar), where the mountainous terrain provides some protection. Sinjar is now considered the Yazidis homeland and the Sinjar Mountain holds religious significance to the Yazidi people.

In addition to the ethno-religious discrimination the Yazidis face, the vulnerability of the Yazidi community is also due to the lack of representation or participation in Iraq's governance and ongoing land disputes and competition over the region. Yazidis and other minority groups in Iraq are treated as second-class citizens. They lack representation in government institutions and are excluded from participating in civil and legal systems. Politically, the Sinjar region and its inhabitants remain in limbo. The minority groups who reside in Sinjar continue to pay the price for the power struggles between the Federal Government of Iraq (GOI) and the KRG. Improvements to Sinjar's local governance and security are prevented by political disputes between the GOI and KRG. Although both claim sovereignty over the land, neither is willing

to take responsibility for Sinjar's reconstruction. Without governance, oversight, and administrative responsibility, foreign-backed militias are gaining influence and destabilizing the region, increasing its insecurity.

4. What has your government done at the local, national, or regional levels to protect minorities from being subjected to contemporary forms of slavery in your country? Please share examples.

The Iraqi government passed the Yazidi Female Survivors Law in 2021, known as the "Reparations Bill." It is a significant gain in minority representation in the Iraqi legal system. The ambitious Bill targets Yazidi female survivors of ISIS captivity (and other minority groups) and aims to compensate survivors financially, rehabilitate and improve care for survivors, secure a decent life for the survivors, restore the infrastructure of survivors' areas, and integrate survivors back into society. The Bill also includes provisions on legal assistance, psychosocial counseling, economic empowerment, access to job opportunities, a monthly salary, a plot of land or accommodations, and access to education. Importantly, the Bill also recognizes the Yazidi community as survivors of genocide, which must be addressed through criminal proceedings. However, there are many shortcomings of the Bill, not including the major challenge of political will and impetus to implement the Bill. Yazidi women's groups have identified several other shortcomings that need to be addressed – at the center of which is a lack of survivor consultation in the drafting process. Aspects, such as finding missing family members and amending Iraqi laws that forcefully require children to be registered under their father's religion, which impacts children born of rape, were not included. The ambitious bill does not encompass the needs of survivors, nor does it provide a clear procedure for facilitating access to justice.

5. What have non-governmental entities, including businesses and educational institutions, done to provide equal access to decent work and quality education in your country? Please share examples.

ISIS destroyed the means for the Yazidi people to survive by systematically destroying their livelihoods, healthcare facilities, water and sanitation infrastructure, schools, businesses, and homes. There are very few organizations working in the Sinjar region of Iraq. Most redevelopment efforts are focused on Mosul or the Kurdistan region. The southern parts of Sinjar remain without adequate and basic services. Nadia's Initiative is one of the few international organizations that focuses solely on the redevelopment of the Yazidi homeland. Nadia's Initiative works with the local community and a variety of implementing partners on the ground in Sinjar to design and implement projects that promote the restoration of education, healthcare, livelihoods, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), women's empowerment, and

culture in the region. One of the core elements of Nadia's Initiative's strategy is to establish sustainable livelihoods to decrease the community's reliance on international aid and create opportunities for women and men to be self-sufficient and provide for their families. Women in Sinjar have suffered from marginalization and inequitable access to opportunities in the job market. Nadia's Initiative implements business incubators that help women establish small businesses by providing them with grants, vocational training, mental health support, digitization training, savings groups, and continuous guidance to ensure the sustainability of their businesses. Before ISIS, the Yazidi community was predominantly an agricultural community. Nadia's Initiative's agricultural projects empower women and men to develop more sustainable farming practices, while increasing their income-generating capacity. Another core element of the organization's work is to reduce poverty in the Yazidi community by increasing access to education. Education is an entry point to breaking cycles of poverty. Nadia's Initiative has built, rehabilitated, and reopened dozens of schools in the Sinjar region. The organization has also developed programming to improve Yazidi youth's access to higher education opportunities, thus increasing their ability to obtain income opportunities after graduation.

6. What has been the role of civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, trade unions, and human rights defenders in protecting minorities from being subjected to contemporary forms of slavery? Please share examples.

On a national and local level, civil society organizations continue to advocate for the redevelopment of the areas destroyed by ISIS, implementation of the Yazidi Survivors Law, provision of reparations, and ending conflict-related sexual violence and modern slavery globally. Nadia's Initiative is a member of the Coalition for Just Reparations (C4JR), an advocacy-based organization pushing for the implementation of the Yazidi Survivors Law and for the Iraqi state to establish a hybrid court to prosecute ISIS members. Nadia's Initiative, along with other international organizations, works on raising awareness of the Yazidi genocide and finding ways to help survivors heal through memorialization and commemorating the resilience of the community.

Internationally, Nadia Murad, the organization's founder, meets with world leaders, heads of state, and high-level officials to change national and international policies and increase awareness. The organization, Nadia's Initiative, advocates for more organizations to utilize a multi-sector approach to development and security – a tandem system to ensure long-term sustainable, community-led solutions to redevelopment and to respond to security crises in a human-centric way to eliminate cycles of dependency. The organization also serves as a member of key advisory boards and working groups, as well as consultants to the US government, United Nations, and other international organizations working in Iraq and globally. Nadia's Initiative invests in establishing and growing partnerships with INGOs,

NGOs, CSOs, and governments to push for legislative reform and implement strategies that benefit the communities we serve and prioritize their needs on the global agenda.

7. What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on minorities, including the related adopted measures and its social or economic effects with regard to contemporary forms of slavery? What actions has your government taken to protect them?

The Sinjar community was devastated by the pandemic and the Yazidis living in IDP camps remain especially vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. Many IDPs cannot return to their homes or prefer not to due to a lack of resources and access to basic needs like shelter or livelihood opportunities. They reside in cramped, unsanitary conditions – an environment that is not conducive to practicing social distancing and sanitary measures. In some camps, thousands are sharing common latrines, showers, and water taps. In Sinjar, the under-resourced health sector, lack of equipment and resources, and scarcity of healthcare professionals make the region particularly vulnerable to the pandemic. The already weak healthcare infrastructure was burdened by the pandemic and could not meet the needs of the community. More so, even before the pandemic, Iraq faced political, economic, and security challenges. These challenges continued and small businesses struggled to remain open, negatively impacting the livelihoods of many families. With minimal intervention from the government, organizations intervened to provide resources and equipment to these areas and reduce the impact of the pandemic. Nadia's Initiative was able to quickly respond to the pandemic alongside other international NGOs. Communities affected by conflict were, and still are, at a disadvantage when it comes to mitigating the spread of COVID-19

8. What are persisting obstacles/challenges in preventing minorities from being subjected to contemporary forms of slavery? What mechanisms exist in your country to report instances of contemporary forms of slavery as affecting members of minorities? How actively are such mechanisms used by members of minorities and to what extent have they been able to access justice and remedies? What are the main obstacles/challenges in this regard?

To a large extent, the federal government of Iraq has shown that it is either unable or unwilling to protect the safety of minorities. Seven years after the genocide, there are 2,800 Yazidi women and children still missing or in captivity. To date, there have been no collective efforts to search for and rescue them. With decreasing media attention, survivors are left feeling like their plight has been forgotten and they are no longer important. Additionally, there are numerous mass graves in Sinjar that have yet to be exhumed. Survivors live in a state of limbo without closure and are unable to provide burial rites for their loved ones. So far, in Iraq, there

have been no prosecutions or trials of ISIS perpetrators. In many cases, investigations are not properly conducted and the perpetrators of attacks on minorities are not apprehended. Currently, there are no state mechanisms for minorities to access justice.

Minority groups remain vulnerable to security threats and, with little administrative assistance, have limited access to basic services. The redevelopment needs of minority inhabited areas like Sinjar are overlooked by the Iraqi government and many Yazidis remain in IDP camps in northern Iraq unable or unwilling to return to Sinjar due to a lack of infrastructure and safety concerns. Marginalized regions rely on international and humanitarian assistance to re-establish themselves in their homelands and continue to advocate for justice and the prosecution of ISIS members by the Iraqi state.

9. What mechanisms exist in your country to report instances of contemporary forms of slavery as affecting members of minorities? How actively are such mechanisms used by members of minorities and to what extent have they been able to access justice and remedies? What are the main obstacles/challenges in this regard?

No state mechanisms exist in which minorities can report instances of slavery. Although there are state directorates that register missing Yazidis, there has been no state impetus to pursue these cases and rescue those who remain in captivity. Additionally, there is no reporting mechanism to hold ISIS perpetrators who reside in Iraq accountable for their actions. The Iraqi government has started the process of establishing a Survivors Directorate as the first step to implementing the Yazidi Survivors Law. However, accessing reparations and redress through the Survivors Law will be a long process and survivors need tangible support today.

10. What recommendations do you wish to propose in order to effectively address these ongoing challenges and protect minorities from contemporary forms of slavery?

The Iraqi government needs to commit to holding ISIS perpetrators accountable for their crimes, ratify the Rome Statute, allow the International Criminal Court jurisdiction over Iraq, and enact national legislation criminalizing war crimes and crimes against humanity in line with international standards. The government needs to commit to the tangible redevelopment of Sinjar and work towards rescuing the missing Yazidi women and children. The land dispute over Sinjar needs to be addressed, as the redevelopment and protection of Sinjar is prevented by political disputes creating a governance vacuum and increasing vulnerability and insecurity.

National legislature that reinforces discrimination and marginalization and excludes minorities from participating in decision-making processes must be amended to allow minorities to play

a role in their security and represent their communities and the vulnerabilities that need to be addressed at a state level.

The international community needs to put pressure on the Iraqi government to implement the Yazidi Survivors Law, provide reparations to survivors, and establish a hybrid court to prosecute ISIS members for international crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity, etc.) with an international jurisdiction to achieve justice for survivors.