

October 26, 2020

With respect to:

The Right Honourable Prime Minister
The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister
The Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs
All Members of Parliament

Re: Request for intervention in the Yazidi humanitarian crisis in Sinjar

Dear Mr. Trudeau, Ms. Freeland, and Mr. Champagne,

We are writing to follow up on our letter of September 15, 2020, signed by the Women Refugees Advocacy Project, World Refugee and Migration Council, and other organizations across Canada. We have urged the Government of Canada to protect and aid the Yazidi refugees, victims of genocide by ISIS, who are now leaving the refugee camps to return to their destroyed homes in Sinjar.

Have you taken action on behalf of the Yazidi? We have not heard back and the situation in Sinjar is becoming worse; conditions of illness and deprivation will be further exacerbated as winter comes.

The Yazidi are being pressured to leave the refugee camps they fled to in 2014, despite the life-threatening conditions in Sinjar. Due to the pandemic, the camps themselves are described as “death row” and the Yazidi are motivated to leave. An estimated 150,000 Yazidi people have returned to Sinjar with more arriving each day.

Sinjar is a land shattered by ISIS: bombed out buildings, infrastructure destroyed. Oppressive Covid-19 policies and procedures interfere with already deeply inadequate medical care. Yazidi women and girl survivors of ISIS enslavement are suffering severe trauma. On top of this, ISIS planted hundreds of thousands of landmines as they retreated from Sinjar during the war. As of August 2020, the UK Mines Advisory Group has deactivated 17,000 of them.

A doctor in Sinjar describes the current situation:

“The water here in Sinjar is bad; you have to buy drinking water. People who cannot afford to buy water are drinking from the wells and are suffering gastro-intestinal diseases. Electricity is a big problem; you have to have a generator. The one hospital here has only 20 beds, with no operating theatre and staff. The suicide rate is the highest in the world. There are Yazidi who are trying to clean up and rebuild their destroyed homes but it is dangerous because of all the landmines.”

The Canadian military has 2,000 troops stationed in Iraq who could help. Canada has extensive expertise in dealing with landmines; we are renowned for our efforts to prohibit landmines¹ and remove existing landmines.² Further, our military has special units that can purify large volumes of water during an emergency.³

¹The Canadian Parliament initiated what became a worldwide ban on mines in 1997:

https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVI-5&chapter=26&clang=en

² Canada announced new initiatives to eliminate landmines:

https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/12/canada_announcesnewinitiativestoeliminatelandmines.html

³ The Canadian military uses a reverse osmosis water purification system that produces drinking water from nearly any water source during humanitarian and disaster relief missions: <http://www.blumetric.ca/rowpu>

We call on you to take the following measures:

- Put pressure on regional governments including Iraq, Kurdistan, and the Security Council, to ensure that the Yazidi can return home and live in Sinjar without harassment or harm.
- Provide immediate humanitarian assistance and offer practical help by providing safe drinking water and clearing land mines in the Sinjar region.⁴
- Consult with Nadia Murad. *Nadia's Initiative* is already working to alleviate the crisis in Sinjar. After safety and security, WASH is one of their key goals – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.⁵
- Work with France and our colleague, a doctor in Sinjar, to design and build a new medical centre there. The French government has invited the doctor to submit plans to build a desperately needed medical facility.⁶ (To preserve his safety, we are not naming him publicly.)

Nadia's Initiative is making exemplary efforts to provide support in Sinjar, and yet, "ISIS left behind a community that will not recover without the support of the International community."⁷

Canada has the ability to save lives and alleviate suffering during the post-war crisis in Sinjar. Please take action.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Christine McDowell & Barbara Shuman
Women Refugees Advocacy Project
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wrapforjustice@gmail.com

Sept 15 Open Letter: <https://womenrefugeesadvocacyproject.ca/open-letter/>

Open Letter Signatories: <https://womenrefugeesadvocacyproject.ca/open-letter-signatories/>

Sept 15 Press Conference: <https://womenrefugeesadvocacyproject.ca/live-stream/>

CC

Lloyd Axworthy, Chair, World Refugee & Migration Council
The Honourable Robert Rae, Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations

⁴ Currently, it is estimated that MAG, the UK Mines Advisory Group who are working diligently with the Yazidi, will take years to remove the landmines from Sinjar; if they face no interference. But the Yazidi must rebuild now.

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WASH>

⁶ Yazidi Dr. in Sinjar, October 21, 2020

"The situation in Sinjar is very bad medically and mentally. We have thousands of [Covid-19] cases in Sinjar infected and a hundred deaths until now. Last two days in one day we had five suicidal cases. The oldest one was younger than 25 years old. I talked with the French government and they are happy to see a proposal to build a mental center to save many lives in the future. So I'm going to write a proposal I will show it to them, they hope that Nadia will help. I didn't mention Canada. But it would be great to work together to support this big project. My way it will not only help Yazidi people but ... will be for all people. So I hope if you can do something you will take care of this seriously. I'm going to talk with the UK Embassy also."

⁷ Nadia Murad, CIFAL Newcastle, July 31, 2020: ...Today 2,000 Yazidi women and children are still in captivity, including my sister-in-law, my niece and my nephew. We have more than 85 mass graves in Sinjar right now.

<https://cifal.newcastle.edu.au/nobel-laureate-nadia-murad-joins-trevor-noah-to-remind-the-world-2000-yazidis-remain-in-captivity/>