



THERE IS NO FUTURE IN SINJAR WITHOUT SAFETY AND AGENCY

Part 2: Frozen political will and a disempowered public
administration threaten the future of Yazidis and minorities in Sinjar

July 30, 2024

“We cannot return to our homeland,” declared Yazidi survivor, human rights activist, and Yazda Yazidi Survivors Network member Zena Haji at the Seventh Annual Commemoration of the Yazidi Genocide on August 3, 2021.

The village of Hardan was destroyed by a *Da'esh* booby-trapped tanker that was hit by an air strike during the liberation process on December 17, 2014, causing extensive damage even beyond the village grounds. The owners of the destroyed houses seen here on the west side of Hardan are currently displaced in Sinoni, Solagh, Dugore, Gohbal, and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Some of them have immigrated to Europe.

Photo credit © 2021 by Yazda Organization

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Glossary of terms

Gol: Government of Iraq

HPE: Protection Force of Êzîdxan

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

IOM: International Organization for Migration

KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government

KRI: Kurdistan Region of Iraq

PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party

PMF: People's Mobilization Forces

PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

UNAMI: United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

UNITAD: Investigative Team to Promote Accountability
for Crimes Committed by *Da'esh* / ISIL

YBS: Sinjar Resistance Units

YPJ: Women's Protection Units

YSN: Yazidi Survivor Network



About Yazda

www.yazda.org

Yazda is a global community-led institution that protects and champions all religious and ethnic minority communities, including Assyrians, Chaldeans, Kakais, Shabak, Yazidis, other ethno-religious minorities in Iraq, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and Syria. Yazda was founded in 2014 at the onset of the Yazidi Genocide and crimes against humanity towards minority groups perpetrated by *Da'esh*.

Yazda is the lead advocacy organization for Yazidi and minority communities in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Advocacy commitments include legally advocating for survivors to achieve justice in courts of law; documenting community-led evidence of genocide; driving genocide awareness and recognition through the Yazidi Survivor Network (YSN); and ending child militarization. The organization serves as the conveners of the official annual commemoration efforts of the Yazidi Genocide, with the patronage of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi in 2021 and Iraqi President Barham Salih in 2020.

Yazda leads a portfolio of strategic humanitarian and community development projects for minority groups in Dohuk, Sinjar, and the Nineveh Plains, as well as global Yazidi diaspora hubs. Commitments include mobile health clinics; intangible cultural assets preservation; sustainable livelihood development; and securing safe and sustainable return to Sinjar.

The Yazda teams work together with global partners, including United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by *Da'esh* / ISIL (UNITAD), International Organization for Migration (IOM), donor governments, the Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional Governments, and community-based organizations. ◀



Letter to readers

July 30, 2024

Dear friends of the Yazidi Cause and minorities in Sinjar,

The long-term consequences of genocide and war crimes by *Da'esh* in Sinjar have significantly disempowered minority communities. Its lasting effects are being felt by every citizen, family, tribe, and community. Rather than zealously transform governance with innovation and equitability, the public administration in Sinjar continues to systemically exclude diversity and minorities, institutionalizing lack of access to security, services, and a sustainable future for all Yazidis.

This position paper is the second in a two-part series of policy briefs detailing critical challenges that require urgent and dedicated attention. Structured as an actionable policy manual, the featured priorities and recommendations in this paper highlight policy priorities for the Government of Iraq under the Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani and the Kurdistan Regional Government under Prime Minister Masrour Barzani. The Parliament of Iraq and the Parliament of Kurdistan are critical stakeholders to enable rule and enforcement of law. Humanitarian agencies, donors, community partners, and the international community at large are necessary drivers to bring accountability to policy and action. In the indispensable spirit of transparent and self-determined representation of all communities in Sinjar, it

is indispensable that any new policies, legislation, and actionable decisions be made with the direct and regular consultation of all minority groups.

Specifically, this paper urgently presents and proposes solutions to bring proper community representation to the public administration of Sinjar. Without equitable and community-led representation, sustainable socio-economic recovery and development in Sinjar will remain unachievable. With no consistent political will actioned since the territorial fall of *Da'esh*, minority communities continue to serve life terms in internally displaced person (IDP) camps. Some have quit on both Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Sinjar is being left behind.

We count on the continued goodwill and haste of all friends of minorities and communities to ensure Sinjar is given a real chance at a meaningful future.

With our deepest respects,



Ahmed Khudida Burjus
Director
Yazda Organization



Lynn Zovighian
Founder
Zovighian Public Office



Photo credit © 2017 by Yazda Organization



Background

The dual administration of Sinjar between the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) complicates the allocation of essential resources to Sinjar. Historically, Sinjaris, and Yazidis in particular, have been politically disempowered at all levels of political and public administration and governance. This phenomenon extends back to the persecution policies under the administration of the Ottoman Empire and the Arabization campaigns of Saddam Hussein.¹

Following the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, Sinjar became a disputed territory between the KRG and GoI, with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) largely controlling its administration until the genocidal occupation of *Da'esh* in 2014. Following the military defeat and end of the territorial hold of Sinjar by *Da'esh*, Sinjar returned to a state of governance by dual administration between the KRG and GoI. This is despite Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, which called for a resolution of the disputed territory status by the end of 2007. The ongoing uncertainty and chronic political unwillingness for effective policy resolution between the two governments continues to undermine the long-term stability of Sinjar.

The crimes of genocide against the Yazidi people and war crimes and crimes against humanity against other minority groups have dramatically shifted the demographics of Sinjar and further limited its capacity for local governance. Statistics from the General Directorate of Yazidi Affairs at the KRG indicate that over 360,000 of the 550,000 Yazidis in Iraq were internally displaced.² Almost ten years into an ongoing genocide, 200,000 Yazidis remain displaced in the KRI.³ At the village level, this population change is particularly evident. For example, in Ganney village, which is part of the Borek collective, approximately 630 of the 2,775 residents have left Iraq.⁴ In Sharka village, 2,521 of around 4,800 residents have emigrated.⁵ In Ausiva village, 24 of about 700 citizens have fled the country.⁶ In this population sample, 25% of Yazidis have not only left their village or region, but their country of origin, revealing the extent to which villages, regions, and Iraq have changed since the onset of the Yazidi Genocide. There

are growing concerns that inaction is serving as a policy to homogenize Sinjar population and justify systemic non-distribution of seats to minority communities. The demographic shift is especially striking when placed in historical context: An estimated 750,000 Yazidis lived in Iraq in 2005. By 2014, this significantly dropped by 200,000 to an estimated 550,000.⁷ In ten years of genocide, 120,000 more Yazidis fled Iraq and the region.⁸ What remains is only half of the community's historic population numbers.

Since the institutional defeat of *Da'esh*, the Gol and KRG, as well as other armed groups with considerable political influence, functionally control the administration of Sinjar. This includes the Iraqi army, Iraqi police, Peshmerga of the KDP, the KDP-aligned HPE of Haider Shesho, the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF; also referred to as the PMU), as well as two Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)-aligned groups comprised of Yazidis, Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), and the Exidxan Asayish. The conflicting goals of these groups undermine progress and keeps the governance of Sinjar in flux. In the international community, there is a continued lack of political motivation to resolve the political crises in Sinjar, which has allowed local and national players to maintain a political stalemate. This is in part due to the role of regional players, including Iran and Turkey, the latter of whom retains interest in Sinjar with regular military air strikes citing the presence of PKK-aligned groups.

This dual administration has had considerable impact on the distribution of aid and funding into Sinjar. For example, before the rise of *Da'esh*, Iraqi government officials refused to grant Sinjar access to services due to KDP presence in the region. In one instance prior to the invasion and genocide campaign of *Da'esh*, the Gol attempted to build a hospital in Sinjar, but the KDP refused to accept services from the central government. Today, Sinjar is one of the poorest areas in Iraq.⁹

The Sinjar Agreement, signed in October 2020, attempted to open a new political chapter and ease some of the historic political gridlock. Introduced by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and signed by the Gol and KRG, the agreement included appointing a new

mayor, departing armed factions, supporting the recruitment of 2,500 Sinjar community members into the Internal Security forces, and ending PKK presence in the area. Other non-state stakeholders and groups with political powers were not consulted, undermining the effectiveness of the agreement. Importantly, Sinjari residents, activists, and local representatives were not invited as pertinent consultative stakeholders in the drafting of the Sinjar Agreement, reinforcing the legacy of excluding local and minority voices from decision-making for Sinjar.¹⁰

Since its signing, little progress has been made to strengthen and implement the Sinjar Agreement. Allies to Iraq continue to encourage its redesign and implementation, including the United States,¹¹ Germany,¹² and other EU countries.¹³ The Sinjar Agreement now joins a growing list of so-called agreements between both the GoI and KRG with no progress post-signing. The lack of political will to enable an equitable and safer future for Yazidis is clearly systemic.

While the KDP has not been present in local public administration since the military fall of *Da'esh*, the party still wields considerable political power on the ground through the dual administration represented by the two different mayors in the town of Sinjar. The KDP appointed a mayor, while the PMF supports the authority of another. The same is true in Sinoni, a town located north of Mount Sinjar, where the PMF and KDP both support separate mayors, reinforcing bureaucratic inefficiency and exemplifying the uncertainty caused by the power dynamics of competing stakeholders. As time continues to pass, Sinjar has effectively not had a mayor representing its historic people since 2003.

Notably, no official government documentation mapping public administration governance, policies, and procedures is available in the public domain to ease negotiations and solution-seeking mediation between stakeholders.

In systemic characterization of non-inclusivity and lack of political will, the Iraqi Parliament, in a historic vote in 2023, approved a three-year working budget of \$459 billion, however only allocated \$38 million to Sinjar

and the Nineveh Plains for reconstruction.¹⁴

The political appropriation and intentional policy inefficiencies undercut any recovery prospects for Sinjar. Sinjaris have no confidence in government stakeholders and little hope for a sustainable future in their historic villages and town. Today, the obscure political status of Sinjar has entered a new stage of chronic ailment, creating a political and administrative gridlock that has become a thorny quagmire for all communities who hold no means for political and public self-determination. An incomplete and non-inclusive implementation of the Sinjar Agreement notably increases the threat of renewed armed conflict between the PKK and other local and foreign armed actors. Ongoing insecurity and conflict will re-displace Yazidis and other minority communities who have taken significant risk to return home to Sinjar.¹⁵

Lastly, but very importantly, hate speech and misinformation against the Yazidi people continues to rise.¹⁶ On a single day, more than 344,000 hate speech attacks were documented, instigated by religious leaders, politicians, media, and the public, with no accountability against any of these hate crimes.¹⁷ Pervasive hatred has created new levels of fear for the safety and survivorship of the community in Iraq. Many Yazidis believe they are vulnerable and unprotected and have no legal foundation against discrimination and violence. ◀



Key policy priorities and recommendations: Enable high participatory public administration

The invasion and subsequent occupation by *Da'esh* broke down the public administrative capacity of Sinjar. Ever since, the entire system has operated in a political vacuum with no clarified political mandate, practically no funding, and no re-institutionalization strategy. The systemic lack of political will has further degraded governance and has fostered a decision-making prone to abuses of power and non-inclusivity.

Efforts to strengthen local public institutions must be done in tandem with security and law enforcement multi-stakeholder dialogue, commitments, and reforms. It is important to note that an effective public administrative recovery and a well-governed institutionalized system will require a long-term cycle of funding, capacity-building, and performance management.

Efforts to strengthen local public institutions must be done in tandem with security and law enforcement multi-stakeholder dialogue, commitments, and reforms.

Key pre-requisites are required for any governance model to guarantee a habitable and sustainable Sinjar:

- Ensure the high participation, authentic inclusion, and empowerment of all historic minorities and communities; and
- Equally ensure the high participation, authentic inclusion, and empowerment of survivors of the Yazidi Genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated by *Da'esh*.

To determine the best-fit governance model for Sinjar, the following recommendations present a short-term road map for constructive dialogue:

- 1** Re-visit the tenets of the Sinjar Agreement to strengthen its strategic basis for a local governance system in Sinjar and its disputed territories and re-activate its implementation with the respected agency of all its historic communities, survivors, and local experts;
- 2** Establish and fund a multi-stakeholder committee with seats allocated to community-appointed representatives for every local affected community, the Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and all other stakeholders with stakes and power in Sinjar. This must include an independent mediator and secretariat, as well as constitutional and public law lawyers and other legal experts to study and recommend the optimal local self-governance model for Sinjar;
- 3** Define, publish, and independently fund an expert-led standard methodology for the multi-stakeholder

committee to explore, study, and select the best-fit model for local self-governance that would include authentic, comprehensive, and empowered representation of communities, survivors, and diaspora;

Establish and fund a multi-stakeholder committee with seats allocated to community-appointed representatives for every local affected community, the Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and all other stakeholders with stakes and power in Sinjar.

- 4 Incubate the agreed-upon optimal local self-governance model with the opening of strategic vacancies for the recruitment of competent and technocratic representatives from all local communities through a combination of administration appointments and local-level elections;
- 5 Enable international funding for local grassroots campaigning and community awareness building to ensure high local voter participation and minimize risks of electoral obstructions;
- 6 Ensure that elections are conducted independently, fairly, and freely with the careful oversight of competent auditors and a free media that can offer constituents timely access to verified information;
- 7 Allocate long-term budgets and activate programing for the capacity-building of elected and appointed local public servants under the governmental mandates of the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government;

- 8 Allocate long-term budgets for the digitalization of public administration, introducing local e-governance to help transform Sinjar into a trusted, transparent, and equipped region for recovery and growth; and
- 9 Take all necessary steps to de-institutionalize prejudice, discrimination, and violence towards minorities and communities.

A deeply representative public administration for Sinjar is indispensable for both the safe and sustainable return of communities. Administrative and law enforcement development must be coherent with long-term conflict resolution in Sinjar. Doing so will finally help introduce a new balance of power with empowered mechanisms for accountability. This will lay the long-term building blocks for assuring Never Again against genocide and crimes against humanity. ◀

Take all necessary steps to de-institutionalize prejudice, discrimination, and violence towards minorities and communities.



Methodology

This paper brings together the very diverse views and perspectives of Yazidi community leaders and members, as well as key international and local stakeholders championing the Yazidi Cause. These voices were documented during a dedicated moderated consultative session and a community-wide leadership roundtable, as well as two annual commemorations on the Yazidi Genocide, between August 2020 and January 2022, all held on Zoom. Contributions and speeches were consulted from a total of 83 unique participants and speakers, including seven Yazidi women survivors, 18 Yazidi community leaders, 13 Iraqi and KRI government officials, 22 international officials and diplomats, eight representatives from international agencies, and 15 activists for minority communities. 41% represent female voices and 59% represent male voices. A literature review of verified and grounded grassroots, local, and international investigative reporting was also conducted. Community and journalistic accounts from the ground during the latest events in Sinjar in between February and June 2022 were also mapped and integrated.

To honor high participatory and community-centered self-determination research design, all raw data was collected using meticulous methodological notetaking, memoing, transcribing, and translating protocols in the English, Arabic, and Kurmanji languages. Open, selective, and axial coding was conducted following the Boyatzis thematic analysis method of qualitative analysis and coding to ensure a comprehensive capture of voice and the diversity of voices. All data collected and coded was presented in a proprietary collected raw data compilation to facilitate strategic analysis.

The insights and analysis presented in this paper examine key findings from a multi-stakeholder perspective, mindful of the urgencies, sensitivities, and extreme need for deep listening and deep collaboration at this time for Sinjar and its people. The writers and contributors engaged in a policy definition process to identify critical policy problematics, priorities, and recommendations that are featured in this paper.

This methodology applies to all papers in this policy series. ◀



Notes

¹ Nelida Fuccaro, “Ethnicity, state formation, and conscription in postcolonial Iraq: The case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (1997): 559-580. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074380006520X>.

² Saad Salloum, “Genocide still haunts Iraq’s Yazidis,” *Al-Monitor*, August 8, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2018/08/yazidis-genocide-iraq-minorities.html#ixzz7ZPAK1PpZ>.

³ *Humanitarian Situational Report: No. 7* (Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Interior Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, August 2021), <https://jcckrg.org/en/article/read/407>.

⁴ Internal survey conducted by Yazda staff, March 2022.

⁵ Internal survey conducted by Yazda staff, March 2022.

⁶ Internal survey conducted by Yazda staff, March 2022.

⁷ “The Yazidi Rescue Office: 360 thousands displaced, 82 mass Graves, 6417 kidnapped,” *Shafaq News*, February 15, 2021, <https://shafaq.com/en/Kurdistan/The-Yazidi-Rescue-Office-360-thousands-displaced-82-mass-Graves-6417-kidnapped>.

⁸ “KRG says over 120,000 Yazidis migrated from Iraq since 2014” *Rudaw*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/people-places/31052023>.

⁹ Ghaziri, Osama, “Struggle for Sinjar: Iraqis’ Views on Security in the Disputed District” *United States Institute of Peace*, April 5, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/04/struggle-sinjar-iraqis-views-security-disputed-district>.

¹⁰ Hanar Marouf, “The Sinjar agreement has good ideas, but is it a dead end?” *Atlantic Council*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-sinjar-agreement-has-good-ideas-but-is-it-a-dead-end/>.

¹¹ Mylorie, Laurie, “U.S. Calls for ‘Full Implementation’ of Sinjar Agreement” Kurdistan24, May 11, 2024, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/34883-U.S.-Calls-for-‘Full-Implementation’-of-Sinjar-Agreement>.

¹² “German Embassy emphasizes importance of implementing Sinjar agreement” Shafaq News, April 11, 2024, <https://shafaq.com/en/Iraq/German-Embassy-emphasizes-importance-of-implementing-Sinjar-agreement>.

¹³ “YAZIDI: Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the situation of the Yazidi community in Iraq” European Council, August 3, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/08/03/yazidi-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-situation-of-the-yazidi-community-in-iraq/>.

¹⁴ Rasheed, Ahmed, Azhari Timour, “Iraq approves record \$153 billion budget including big public hiring” Reuters, June 12, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraq-approves-record-2023-budget-153-bln-with-massive-public-hiring-2023-06-12/>.

¹⁵ Navrouzov, Natia, Ismael, Murad, Ibrahim, Pari, “The 10th Anniversary of the Yazidi Genocide and Iraqi PM’s Historic White House Visit: Key Discussions for Biden and Al-Sudani” Wilson Center, April 13, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/microsite/8/node/118845>.

¹⁶ “French embassy to Iraq condemns hate speech against Yazidis” Rudaw, May 3, 2023, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/03052023>.

¹⁷ Saad Salloum. “رصد الكراهيات في ازمة سنجار. وصلت نسبة الرصد الى معدل ٣٤٤ الف رسالة كراهية يوميا في مدة الازمة” Facebook, May 22, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/saad.salloum.5/videos/1587450985086107?checkpoint_src=any. ◀



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About Wilson Center

www.wilsoncenter.org

The Wilson Center, chartered by Congress in 1968 as the official memorial to President Woodrow Wilson, is the nation's key non-partisan policy forum for tackling global issues through independent research and open dialogue to inform actionable ideas for the policy community. The Wilson Center's Middle East Program serves as a crucial resource for the policymaking community and beyond, providing analyses and research that helps inform U.S. foreign policymaking, stimulates public debate, and expands knowledge about issues in the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. ◀



About IOM

www.iom.int

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the United Nations Migration Agency. IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants. ◀



About USAID

www.usaid.gov

Support to the Yazidi community in general and to Yazda's advocacy efforts are part of a larger project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which aims to promote recovery and resilience for communities in West Ninewa and Ninewa Plains. USAID is supporting the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons in Iraq, with a focus on communities most affected by the recent conflict. USAID is the international development agency of the Government of the United States of America and its work is made possible by generous support from American people. ◀



About the Zovighian Public Office

www.zovighian.org

The Zovighian Public Office was established in 2015 to serve communities facing crises and crimes of atrocity. We are dedicated to amplifying their voices through research, advocacy, and diplomacy. We are deeply committed to justice and accountability for the Yazidi people of Sinjar. ◀

The main branch of Yazda is registered in the United States as a non-profit organization conducting charitable activities outside the United States under Article 501(c)(3). Yazda is also registered in Iraq, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Australia.



www.yazda.org