

"WE ARE NOTHING AND NOBODY"

- **Desperate situation as Yezidis commemorate five years since Sinjar massacre**
- **Returnees face abuse, exploitation, forced separation**
- **JHK demands action to protect genocide survivors**

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Today marks the fifth anniversary of ISIS' assault on Sinjar, the historic home of the Yezidi people. Over three hundred thousand were forced to flee. Those who did not escape in time were taken as slaves or shot and buried in mass graves.

Last night JHK took part in a ceremony of remembrance and protest with young Yezidi women from Bajed Kandala camp in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Five years on, conditions for displaced Yezidis are deteriorating drastically and the promise of peace and safe return is as far away as ever.

UNLIVABLE CONDITIONS IN IDP CAMPS

In most IDP (internally displaced persons) camps tents designed for temporary emergency use are still the only form of accommodation. Electricity and water supplies are unreliable. Most international aid organizations have reduced their presence or ceased operations. Schools function irregularly, providing their pupils with at best two or three hours of teaching a day for a few months a year, jeopardizing the future of the next generation. For adults the situation is arguable worse. More than half of Yezidis living in camps are unemployed, and JHK's most recent study suggests adult illiteracy as high as 40%. Yezidis are being robbed of the ability to provide for themselves and build their own future.

SINJAR STILL A BATTLEGROUND

Those who have returned to Sinjar face an almost total absence of functioning infrastructure and a dangerously unstable security situation. Attacks by Turkish warplanes, Iraqi militias and ISIS remnants are almost daily occurrences. There is little evidence of a political will to stabilise the situation. Many families tell JHK they are fearing a repeat of 2014 and are giving up hope that Iraq will ever be safe for Yezidis.

'FREED' SLAVES IN LIMBO: ABUSED AND BETRAYED

The plight of Yezidi women and girls taken prisoner by the Islamic state attracted the attention of the world. Many assumed that with the collapse of the 'caliphate' their suffering might soon be at an end. But the truth is far more complicated and more troubling. Women who have endured five years of enslavement, abuse, bombing and starvation find themselves manipulated for political and financial gain, and often forced to choose between their freedom and their children.

JHK has spoken to survivors forcibly separated from children who will be raised as orphans. One told how her newborn child was taken an hour after birth. In spite of many promises made there are no proper provisions for mental health care and rehabilitation for returnees. A number of survivors have independently testified to experiencing sexual harassment and abuse at the hands of 'rescue' organisations and family members. They spoke of their feelings of powerlessness and frustration, of living in a nightmare of one captivity after another.

One survivor told us: "The suffering is never-ending and we are nothing and nobody."

Another described the continued suffering and exploitation of Yazidi women survivors as a silent "second genocide".

CALL TO ACTION

JHK calls on Kurdish, Iraqi and Syrian authorities, the United Nations and the International Community to:

1) Ensure proper care and support for survivors of ISIS captivity.

Freed women must not be separated from their children. If it is impossible for them to remain with their children in the region they must be given the opportunity to travel to a third country.

Human rights must be given absolute priority over political and religious considerations. The needs of survivors and their children must come first.

2) Provide humane conditions for IDPs in camps: proper housing, infrastructure and education, that allows Yazidis to live with dignity and prepare for the future.

3) Work together to ensure lasting peace and security in the Sinjar region so the Yazidi people can return home and rebuild their lives and their community.

JHK is a non profit organisation dedicated to helping victims of disaster, war, genocide and persecution in the Kurdistan region. Our activities include: emergency relief, healthcare, education, women's empowerment, civil society support, and rehabilitation for genocide survivors.

JHK is proudly non-partisan and non-sectarian: we stand with victims of war and genocide without regard to faith, ethnicity or political affiliation.

JHK is a registered non-profit organisation in the USA, Sweden and KRG.

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