



**YAZDA**

A GLOBAL YAZIDI ORGANIZATION

# WORKING AGAINST THE CLOCK

*Documenting Mass Graves of Yazidis  
Killed by the Islamic State*

2018

## **WARNING: GRAPHIC CONTENT**

This report contains content, including images, that may be disturbing to some readers. Reader discretion is advised.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. ABOUT YAZDA

Yazda is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in 2014 as response to the genocide committed by the self-declared Islamic State (“IS”) against the Yazidis in Iraq. Since its inception, Yazda has worked to provide humanitarian and legal assistance to Yazidi survivors to assist in their post-genocide recovery and ultimately improve their living conditions in Iraq. Yazda is present in Iraq since October 2014, and operates out of the main office in Duhok, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and out of the Sinuni office in Sinjar, Nineveh Province. Yazda is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the U.S. and is registered in both Erbil and Baghdad, in addition to Australia, Germany, Sweden, and the U.K.

## B. ABOUT THE GENOCIDE DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

Yazda’s Genocide Documentation Project was launched in October 2015 to gather as much evidence as possible on the genocide committed against the Yazidis. Since then, the documentation team has been collecting evidence in the form of witness and

survivor interviews, in addition to visual material on mass graves and kill sites in and around Sinjar, Nineveh Province, where the genocide took place. The members of the team follow internationally accepted evidence-gathering procedures and guidelines in documenting IS atrocities and are supported by a legal team to ensure adherence to such standards.



The Genocide Documentation Project aims to:

- Document, consolidate, and archive existing survivor and witness testimonies on the genocide against Yazidis as well as the destruction of Yazidi cultural heritage sites in Sinjar prior to the genocide to inform future academic and public inquiries,
- Support the legal work, including that of Amal Clooney, counsel to Yazda, United Nations Goodwill Ambassador Nadia Murad, and other survivors of the Yazidi Genocide, to pursue accountability before international and domestic courts for the crimes committed against the Yazidis,
- Provide support and background information to further domestic and international advocacy efforts that work to improve the conditions of Yazidis.

The Genocide Documentation Project is now generously funded by Free A Girl for a period of six months. Yazda's documentation team is also collaborating with the Forensic Architecture Agency at Goldsmiths, University in London on a training and visual documentation project which is supported by the Victoria and Albert

Museum in collaboration with Art Jameel, as well as by the British Council and Arts Council England.

Documentation of mass graves and kill sites has been a priority of Yazda's Genocide Documentation Project since the project's inception. The need for support by civil society organizations to complement and inform large-scale documentation and preservation efforts by official bodies has rendered Yazda's documentation efforts indispensable.



On January 28, 2016, Yazda published its first report on mass graves in Sinjar, entitled "Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014" ("2016 Report")<sup>1</sup>. The 2016 Report was issued by Yazda prior to the international community's consensus that the atrocities against Yazidis in Sinjar constituted genocide. One of the stated objectives of the 2016 Report was "to collect evidence of crimes of genocide against the Yazidi people in the effort to secure genocide recognition for the Yazidi case."<sup>2</sup> In June 2016, the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic published the findings of its investigation into the

<sup>1</sup> Yazda, *Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014* (28 January 2016), <https://www.yazda.org/assets/uploads/report/y3152034131051.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, p. 3.

Yazidi case. The Commission’s focus on atrocities and enslavement occurring inside Syria had necessitated extending its investigation into Sinjar due to the trans-border nature of the crimes committed by IS. The Commission’s report, published by the United Nations Human Rights Council, was entitled “They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis.”<sup>3</sup> The Commission conducted its own research and relied on a number of resources produced by other research entities, one of which was Yazda’s 2016 Report.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, the Commission’s report made a strong declaration of recognition of the Yazidi case as genocide, after which the term “Yazidi Genocide” gained traction in international discourse about atrocities committed by IS in Iraq.

This report is intended as a complement to the 2016 Report and presents subsequent findings of Yazda’s Genocide Documentation Project in the south of Sinjar Mountain in addition to Tel Afar and Qasr al-Mihrab. As this new report provides data on mass graves discovered since the publication of the 2016 Report—but does not revisit each site reported in the first report—both reports should be consulted together.



<sup>3</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, “They came to destroy”: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis, A/HRC/32/CRP.2 (15 June 2016), [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A\\_HRC\\_32\\_CRP.2\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf) (“UNHRC Report”)

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, p. 3, 11, 21.



## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. DEFINITIONS

Forensic scientists and lawyers have set forth many definitions of mass graves and a single definition is yet to be agreed on. The common feature of these definitions is the existence of multiple bodies buried in close proximity, while the exact number required to identify a certain site as a mass grave is debated. The features of disorganization and bodies in contact with one another also contribute to some formulations of the definition.

Similar to Yazda's 2016 Report, this report also distinguishes between "mass graves" and "kill sites", albeit based on a different standard. Here, we use the definition of mass grave coined by Erin Jessee and Mark Skinner:

"A mass grave is any location containing two or more associated bodies, indiscriminately or deliberately placed, of victims who have

died as a result of extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions, not including those individuals who have died as a result of armed confrontations or known major catastrophes.”<sup>5</sup>

While Jessee and Skinner elaborate on their typology by providing additional types of mass graves and mass grave related sites, this report will use the general definition of mass grave as differentiating between further sub-categories is not possible at this point without forensic evidence.

As per this definition, this report identifies sites containing less than two bodies, as well as sites containing bodies of persons killed in combat (regardless of the number of bodies), as kill sites. Mass graves are identified as sites containing two or more bodies, where the victims were killed as a result of executions.



A majority of the sites contained in this report fall squarely under one definition or the other. One of the sites (Siba Sheikh Khidr 1) contains bodies that are reportedly those of civilian Yazidi fighters who were killed while in combat with IS and were later buried, although it is unclear who buried them. This particular site has been identified as a mass grave due to lack of information on the conditions under which the victims were killed and buried.

It was not possible to locate eyewitnesses to the events that occurred in one of the sites (Siba Sheikh Khidr 5) or to detect

<sup>5</sup> Erin Jessee & Mark Skinner, “A typology of mass grave and mass grave-related sites”, *Forensic Science International* 152 (2005), p. 56.

bones on the surface. However, the existence of blood stains and a mound of earth (i.e. large pile of dirt) suggested that this site was indeed a mass grave. As such, that site is listed under a separate section titled "Potential Mass Grave". Forensic evidence is required to ascertain the category of this site.



## B. METHODS

Yazda identifies mass graves and kill sites by physically documenting the sites, and by collecting witness and/or survivor testimonies.

In most instances, Yazda's documentation staff are alerted to the existence of a site by newly liberated survivors or by returning locals who have searched on their own for the remains of their families or who have some knowledge of where their families were killed. A team consisting of a minimum of three persons, who are all familiar with the region and trained in documentation techniques, is then dispatched to the reported site, with documentation equipment. The team films the site and its surroundings, photographs the bones and personal belongings remaining at the site, takes geographical coordinates, and drafts a detailed report with a physical description of the site. The team takes care not to disturb the graves or any other evidence in the sites being documented to ensure preservation of evidence and to enable

relevant experts to conduct their work in accordance with best practice methodologies.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to physical documentation, Yazda staff also collect statements from witnesses of the events that unfolded at that particular site, and/or from those who subsequently discovered the site. In certain cases, survivors of mass killings that occurred at those sites provide their testimonies to develop a detailed narrative. Yazda conducts interviews with witnesses and survivors after obtaining written voluntary and informed consent, in accordance with international documentation standards.<sup>7</sup> While maintaining anonymity, the information contained in this report is provided by those witnesses and survivors who consented to their testimonies being reported.

The fieldwork for the information reported here was performed between July 2017 and April 2018.



<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that Article 10 of the Law on Protection of Mass Graves of Iraq dated 2006 provides that, “Any person who disturbs a mass grave or opens it with no authorization from the Ministry or relevant authorities shall be imprisoned for a period of not more than 3 (three) years and fined in the amount between five hundred thousand (500,000) dinars and a million (1,000,000) dinars. The imprisonment penalty applies if the person’s actions led to loss of victim identification evidence or to wiping out of crime evidence.” See English translation by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), <https://www.icmp.int/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/law-on-protection-of-mass-graves.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Documentation staff use the PEACE Model for interviewing and the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict. See UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, *International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict*, 2nd Ed. (March 2017), [https://iici.global/0.5/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/International\\_Protocol\\_2017\\_2nd\\_Edition.pdf](https://iici.global/0.5/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/International_Protocol_2017_2nd_Edition.pdf)



### C. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

As in Yazda's 2016 Report, the information contained in this report should be regarded as developing and not definitive. While Sinjar has been fully liberated of IS presence, there are certain areas where access remains limited especially due to political tensions, safety reasons and unfinished demining efforts. Additional sites may be discovered in the future as new locations are accessed and investigations proceed. Thus, the findings reported herein reflect the information collected by Yazda as of the date of this report.

It should also be noted that the information is based on witness testimonies and photographic documentation, not forensic evidence. Findings on the number, cause of death, age and gender of the victims whose bodies are contained in the sites are based on witness testimonies. The categorization of the sites has thus been determined according to these findings. It has not been possible for Yazda staff to definitively corroborate the data procured through survivor testimonies by examining physical evidence, as Yazda does not exhume remains or handle the contents of the site. The staff documents all sites from a distance in order to not disturb physical evidence. The involvement of forensic experts duly authorized by state institutions<sup>8</sup> is needed to ascertain the number, identities, and causes of death of victims, in addition to categorizations of the sites.

<sup>8</sup> See *Law on Protection of Mass Graves of Iraq* dated 2006.



## III. BACKGROUND

### A. BRIEF BACKGROUND ON THE YAZIDI GENOCIDE

The attacks by IS against the Yazidis in Sinjar since August 3, 2014 constitute genocide under the 1948 Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (“Genocide Convention”), as recognized by the UNHRC<sup>9</sup>, Council of Europe<sup>10</sup>, and the European Parliament<sup>11</sup>.<sup>12</sup> The systematic nature of the atrocities committed by IS against the Yazidis demonstrates that IS acted

<sup>9</sup> UNHRC Report.

<sup>10</sup> Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, *Prosecuting and punishing the crimes against humanity or even possible genocide committed by Daesh*, Resolution 2190 (12 October 2017), <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=24219&lang=en>

<sup>11</sup> European Parliament, *Resolution of 4 February 2016 on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called ‘ISIS/Daesh’*, 2016/2529(RSP) (4 February 2016), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2016-0051&language=EN>

<sup>12</sup> For a full list of states and entities that have recognized the Yazidi Genocide, see <https://www.yazda.org/the-recognition/>

with the intent to destroy the Yazidi ethno-religious community. There is evidence to show that IS acted freely and acknowledged this objective, and implemented a thorough and systematic plan to commit the crime of genocide, in addition to war crimes and crimes against humanity.



Yazda's 2016 Report details the reasons why Yazidis were targeted by IS<sup>13</sup> and these will not be repeated here. Acting on a clearly-articulated -yet immoral and misguided- theological argument, IS fighters 'justified' their campaign of systematic atrocities against the Yazidis as a duty for Muslims.<sup>14</sup> More concretely, these atrocities included forced religious conversions, killing of older men and women, brainwashing of boys who were trained as jihadists and in some cases sent as suicide bombers to attack their own Yazidi community, killing of those with developmental and physical disabilities, and enslavement and rape of women and girls. In their own published rationale for the genocide, IS claimed that Muslims would be questioned by God on the Day of Judgment as to why the Yazidis had been allowed to continue existing within Islamic domains.<sup>15</sup> Both publications by the IS and survivors' account of the events clearly demonstrate IS's intent to target Yazidis specifically, a religious group protected under the Genocide Convention.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 2016 Report, pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> See Islamic State, "The Failed Crusade", *Dabiq* 4 (2014), <https://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf>, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Article II of the Genocide Convention provides that "genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." (emphasis added) Yazidis constitute a "religious group" protected under the Genocide Convention.

While exact numbers are yet to be verified, it is estimated that approximately 3,100 Yazidis were killed, either by execution or due to dehydration and starvation during IS occupation of Sinjar.<sup>17</sup> At least 6,800 women and children were kidnapped.<sup>18</sup> Nearly 3,000 women are believed to remain under captivity.



## B. BRIEF BACKGROUND ON THE KOCHO OCCUPATION AND MASSACRE

Though IS committed atrocities acts against Yazidis in many towns throughout Sinjar, the siege and massacre in Kocho village (located south of Sinjar City), following a period of occupation, was particularly heinous, as demonstrated by the numerous mass graves and kill sites discovered in and around Kocho village. The events that occurred between August 3 and 15, 2014 are corroborated by several survivor accounts. A brief summary of those events is provided below for context.<sup>19</sup>

IS fighters reached Kocho village on August 3, 2014. They placed armed guards at the checkpoints to prevent anyone from leaving the village. Kocho was under siege for 12 days, during which the mukhtar (head of village), Ahmed Jasim Qasim (known as Al-Jaso) tried to negotiate with the IS fighters headed by Abu Hamza al-Khatuni, an IS amir (com-

<sup>17</sup> Valeria Cetorelli et al., “Mortality and kidnapping estimates for the Yazidi population in the area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A retrospective household survey”, *PLoS Med* 14(5) (2017).

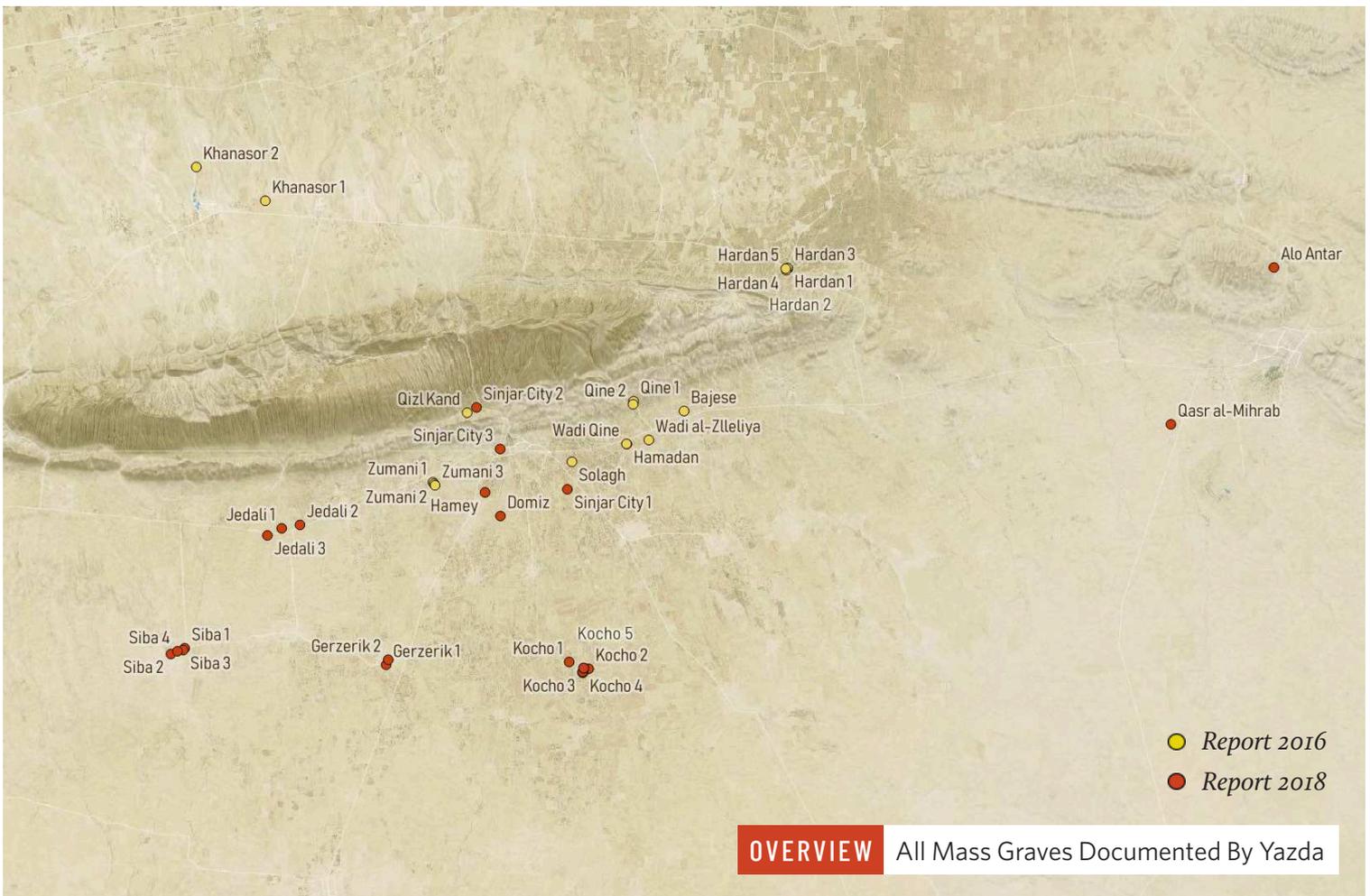
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed account of the occupation and massacre of Kocho, see Nadia Murad, *The Last Girl* (Penguin Random House 2017).

mander), to let the Yazidi villagers depart towards the mountain without being hurt or forcefully converted to Islam. IS fighters initially led the Yazidis to believe that they had accepted this request and would allow them to leave. In the morning hours of August 15, 2014, IS fighters requested all residents of the village to gather at Kocho's school building, telling them that they would be taken to Sinjar Mountain from there. Once everyone was gathered, men and women were separated in different floors of the school building and all valuable items were collected. Men were then separated into groups, boarded on cars and trucks and taken to nearby sites, where they were shot and then buried using mostly bulldozers. Back in the school building, elderly women and younger women were separated, as well. Elderly women were also killed and buried in mass graves, while girls and younger women were sold into sexual slavery, some of whom remain in captivity until this day. It is estimated that a total of 477 people were killed in Kocho and 656 people are still missing, although exact numbers are unknown.

Findings in this report that are relevant to the atrocities committed in Kocho replace the preliminary estimates included in the 2016 Report, which was published when IS still had control over Kocho.







# IV. FINDINGS

## A. MASS GRAVES

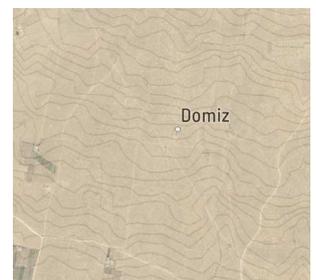
Below are the mass graves newly discovered by Yazda after the publishing of the 2016 Report. Throughout this sub-section, the term “site” refers to mass grave sites.

### 1. DOMIZ



Located approximately four kilometers east of the center of Domiz, this site is a natural well with a diameter of about five meters and a depth of four meters. Remnants of bones and burnt clothes are visible and the site has been burned.

While there were no eyewitnesses found for the events that unfolded at this site, a local Sunni villager called his Yazidi neighbor and told him that in case he returns to Sinjar one day, he wants him to know that IS fighters killed over 40 Yazidis (mostly women and children) and threw them in this well. The fact that the well was deeper in the past, and that the locals found four skulls near the site (which are no longer present at the scene for unknown reasons), makes it highly likely that this account is true, though professional exhumation of the site will be required to verify the account.

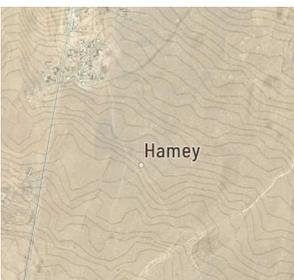


#### VICTIMS

*Approx. 11 men*



## 2. HAMEY



This mass grave is located in Hamey village, near to the road heading to Ba'aj. The grave is within a natural well with several bones, including a piece of a pelvic bone, women's dresses made of white fabric worn by traditional Yazidi women, and a traditional headcover visible on the surface. The clothes are stained with blood and there is a metal wire connecting the clothes, which suggests that the victims were tied together.

### VICTIMS

*Six women and girls*

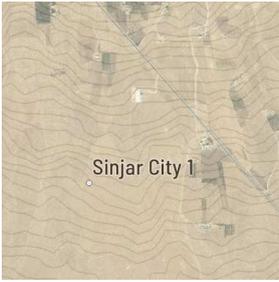
A Yazidi eyewitness who resided in Hamey village informed Yazda staff that Muslims residing in Hamey took three elderly women and three young girls, all Yazidis, on August 3, 2014. They later invited IS fighters, who reportedly

forced the women and girls into marriage under Sharia law and raped them repeatedly until August 15, 2014. On August 15, at around 4:00 p.m., IS fighters killed the women and girls and threw them in a well close to the village. Another witness told Yazda that Sunni tribes in Hamey reportedly had a meeting with IS fighters where they agreed to work with IS against Yazidis, after which they placed a checkpoint outside of the village to capture fleeing Yazidi families.



### 3. SINJAR CITY 1





Located in the south of Sinjar City, this site contains approximately 40 pieces of bones (including skulls), handcuffs, several shoes, and about 30 clothing items, including a traditional Yazidi headcover.

### VICTIMS

*Approximately 11 men*

A local Yazidi man informed Yazda that he and his family escaped from Tel Azer village on August 3, 2014, only to be captured on their way to the mountain. The IS fighters attempted to force them to convert three times, but the Yazidi family refused. Several members of the family were taken away, while the witness with whom Yazda spoke to survived. After Sinjar was liberated, locals found the mass grave which also included identification documents belonging to the victims. The Yazidi man was informed by those locals that members of his family were contained in this grave. The witness visited the grave and identified the victims through identification documents as well as their clothing. All victims were members of the witness' family.



## 4. SINJAR CITY 2



The site is located above Sinjar City, near the first switchback of the road that winds up the mountain towards the Çel Mêra Shrine. A tractor cart with a pile of large rocks and dirt, clothes belonging to men, women, and children; and shell casings are visible.

A local farmer informed Yazda that a Shi'i family of 17 people from Sinjar City, together with one Yazidi man, were captured in the Qandil checkpoint while trying to flee towards the Çêl Mêra Shrine on Sinjar Mountain. They were reportedly brought to the switchback in the afternoon hours of August 4, 2014, where they were executed and buried. The existence of a tractor cart indicates that the victims were most likely buried by using heavy machinery.

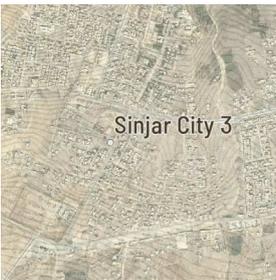


### VICTIMS

*18 men, women, and children*



## 5. SINJAR CITY 3



This site is located in Sinjar city, close to the police station. It contains bones (pelvic bones, skulls, jaw bones and spines) believed to belong to three people, as well as men's and women's clothing.

This site was discovered in February 2018, when a bulldozer operated by state officials was clearing the area. The circumstances under which they were killed are unknown.

### VICTIMS

*Approximately three  
men and women*



## 6. JEDALI 1



Located in the south of Jedali village, this site contains an unknown number of victims. There are 30 pieces of bones, including fragments of two skulls and a piece of a jawbone, clothes, and shoes scattered in a large area.

While no eyewitnesses were found for the events that unfolded at this site, a military captain informed Yazda that he discovered the site in October 2017, and that he had seen patches of blood, bones and shell casings during the discovery.



### VICTIMS

*Unknown*





The site is located at the crossroads between Jedali village and the highway, and contains bones of a woman and a man, together with some blonde hair and a pair of pants.

A local Yazidi who discovered the site informed Yazda that he found the remains and personal belongings, which he buried afterwards. In the pocket of the pair of pants, he found a phone and a SIM card, which contained photographs of a man and a blonde-haired woman, a newlywed couple that he knew personally.

**VICTIMS**

*Six women and girls*





This site is located across the road from Jedali village, approximately 150 meters south of the main road. The diameter of the site is about 100 meters. Clothing items belonging to men, women and children, bones, shoes, shell casings and blood stains are visible on the surface.

A Yazidi man from Tel Azer informed Yazda that he had escaped towards Jedali village with his nephew to try and get their sheep out before IS arrived. Three of the witness' brothers and their families were loading up their cars to escape as well, and the witness was on the phone speaking to them, when IS arrived to the village. His family informed the witness that they were captured by IS, while the witness saw from a distance his family being captured by 13 cars full of IS fighters. The family was then taken to this site, where some members were executed.

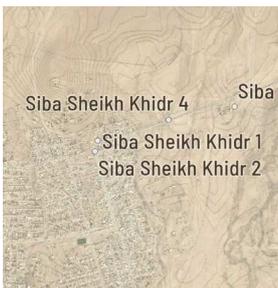


**VICTIMS**

*Unknown number of men, women and children*



## 9. SIBA SHEIKH KHIDR 1



This site is located at the crossroads of Siba Sheikh Khidr village. Two pieces of elvic bones and leg bones, burnt clothes, and a mound of earth is visible. The site has been burned.

An eyewitness informed Yazda that on August 2, 2014, security forces left the village, leaving behind heavy weapons stationed on the roof of the police station in the village. The next day, when IS fighters entered the village, they immediately took over the weapons on the roof of the police station and with them were able to assume control of the road leading in and out of the village. Seven members of the same family were killed at this intersection while fighting IS, when IS opened fire on them from the roof of the police station using the weapons they had seized. The bodies were buried, although it is unclear whether this was done by IS.

### VICTIMS

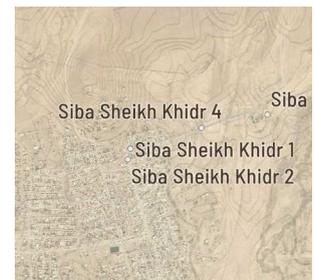
*Seven men*





This site is located in the center of Siba Sheikh Khidr village, about three meters from the street. Approximately nine pieces of bones, a mound of earth, and patches of blood are visible on the surface. The site has been fully burned.

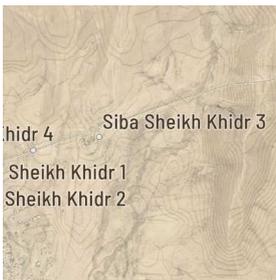
According to the testimony of an eyewitness, security forces left the village around 3:00 a.m. on August 3, 2014, and IS fighters entered the village shortly thereafter. IS fighters then surrounded the roads and blocked exit routes, thus capturing Yazidi families fleeing the village, while some Yazidis remained to fight IS with whatever weapons they had. The witness informed Yazda that he and his family were among those who were captured while hiding in their homes. IS fighters, some of them Sunnis from neighboring villages whom the witness knew personally, forced the Yazidis into the rear ends of trucks and took them to the center of the village, near the market place. That is when the eyewitness saw and counted the bodies of the 52 Yazidis lying on their backs in this mass grave who were killed before the witness arrived near the scene.



**VICTIMS**

*52 men, women, and children*





This site is located north of the electricity station in Siba Sheikh Khidr village. A mound of earth is visible next to a hole that is two meters deep, presumably dug using a bulldozer.

A survivor from Siba Sheikh Khidr village informed Yazda that IS fighters attacked the village on August 3, 2014. Many locals refrained from fleeing, thinking that the security forces could prevent IS from taking over the village. However, once the locals saw the security forces leaving, they started to leave as well, although some had to remain in their houses due to heavy fire from IS fighters. IS fighters then captured about 30 locals and started to shoot them next to the electricity station. The fighters also forced some Yazidis to load bodies of other Yazidis onto trucks. They later discovered other Yazidis who were hiding and brought them all to the police station in the village, where the survivor witnessed the killing of the six people whose bodies are contained in this mass grave.

### VICTIMS

*Six people*



## 12. SIBA SHEIKH KHIDR 4



This site is located in Siba Sheikh Khidr village. White clothes are visible on the surface.

An eyewitness informed Yazda that he was trying to flee the village in the morning hours of August 3, 2014 but the road was blocked by a tractor. He was then captured together with his family by IS fighters from the neighboring village whom he recognized. While under captivity in the village, he witnessed three men and an elderly woman being killed on this spot.



### VICTIMS

*Three men and one woman*



## 13. GERZERIK 1



This site is located in Gerzerik village. Barrels, a tractor cart, scattered bones believed to belong to more than one person, clothing items and shell casings are visible.

The number or identity of victims or the conditions under which they were executed are unknown.

### VICTIMS

*Unknown*



## 14. GERZERIK 2



The site is located near the entrance of Gerzerik village. There is a large mound of earth, which was presumably made by IS fighters who put soil over the bodies using bulldozers. The site is three meters wide and one-and-a-half meters deep. Scattered bones and clothing items are visible.

Local Yazidis informed Yazda about a villager's house adjacent to the mass grave, where blood stains are visible on the walls. A survivor further told Yazda that she witnessed IS fighters murder Yazidis in this house and later bury them in the mass grave next to the house.



### VICTIMS

*Unknown*





Two adjacent mass graves are located in this site, northwest of Kocho village, approximately 800 meters from the Kocho school. There is a mound of earth and only one bone is visible on the surface.

#### VICTIMS

45 men

A Yazidi man from Kocho who survived the shooting at this mass grave informed Yazda that he encountered four IS fighters on July 11, 2014. They asked him whether he was Yazidi or Sunni, and asked him to get in the car after he replied that he was Yazidi. He ran away but was shot in the leg and kidnapped.<sup>20</sup> The IS fighters gave him three options: he could convert to Islam, his family could pay a \$50,000 ransom, or they would kill him. He denied to convert. He was held by them until August 11, 2014 in Ba'aj, during which he also encountered Abu Hamza al-Khatuni. Abu Hamza had told him that IS would be attacking Sinjar on August 3. On August 11, IS fighters took him back to Kocho, where he stayed until August 15, when the entire village was gathered in the Kocho school. At 2:00 p.m. that day, IS fighters started to gather people into groups of 40 to 50 people. One group, consisting of 45 Yazidi men, was taken to this site, where they were shot and killed. IS fighters videotaped the killing. The Yazidi man Yazda spoke to survived the shooting wounded, and hid in a nearby farm, escaping to safety afterwards.

<sup>20</sup> This kidnapping and the events that unfolded afterwards are also explained in detail in Nadia Murad's memoir, *The Last Girl*.

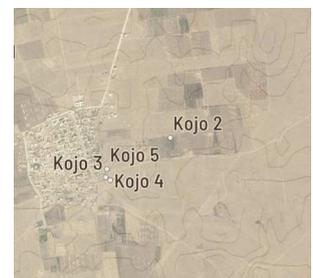


## 16. KOCHO 2



This site is located 200 meters east of Kocho village. It is approximately 40 meters long and 15 meters wide. Several bones (leg bones, pelvic bones and a jaw bone) and clothing items are visible on the surface.

A Yazidi man who survived the shooting at this mass grave informed Yazda that he was in the first group consisting of approximately 50 Yazidi men that were taken to this site after the residents of Kocho village were gathered in the school building on August 15, 2014. The villagers were lined up and seven IS fighters shot them while yelling “Allahu Akbar!” (God is the greatest) and videotaping the killing. The man survived the shooting, after which he hid in a nearby farmhouse and witnessed IS fighters burying the bodies using a bulldozer.



### VICTIMS

*Approximately 50 men and children*

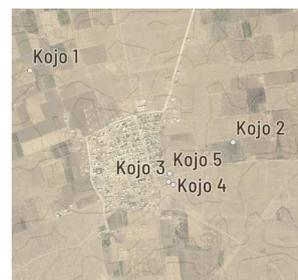


17. KOCHO 3



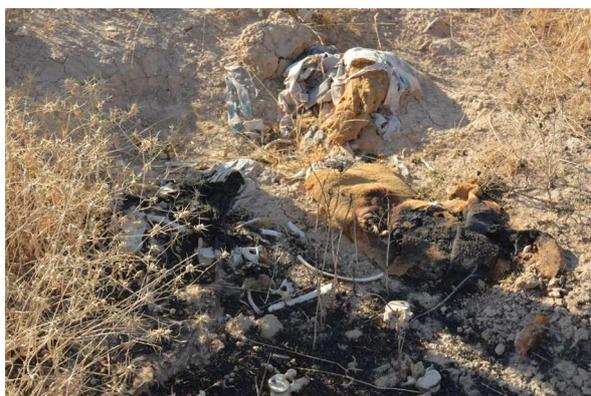
This site is located in Kocho village and is about ten square meters. Bones (a jaw bone and a pelvic bone), scattered clothes, and shell casings are visible.

A Yazidi man who survived the shooting at this mass grave informed Yazda that he was in the third group consisting of 14 Yazidi men that were taken to this site after the residents of Kocho village were gathered in the school building on August 15, 2014. IS fighters shot at the group from two directions. The man survived the shooting, after which he hid behind a hill and later a farmhouse, where he witnessed IS fighters burying the bodies using two bulldozers.



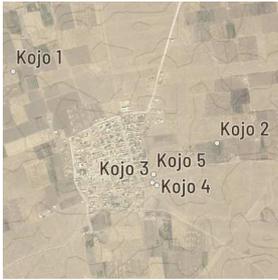
#### VICTIMS

*13 men*



## 18. KOCHO 4





This site is located in Kocho village and is surrounded by berms. A white t-shirt and some shell casings are visible on the surface.

A Yazidi man who survived the shooting at this mass grave informed Yazda that he was in the second group consisting of approximately 25 Yazidi men, ages 13-70, that were taken to this site after the residents of Kocho village were gathered in the school building on August 15, 2014. IS fighters told them to turn around and shot them while videotaping the incident. The man survived the shooting, after which he hid in a hole for seven days before escaping to safety. He was one of the two people that survived this shooting.

**VICTIMS**

*Approximately 25 men*



**19. KOCHO 5**



This site is located in Kocho village and contains bones, clothes and shell casings.

While the Yazidi man who survived the shooting of Kocho 3 saw some executions being undertaken at this site, the number or identity of victims or the conditions under which they were executed are unknown.



**VICTIMS**  
*Unknown*





This site is located on a hill in the west of the Qasr al-Mihrab village, near Tel Afar.<sup>21</sup>

A survivor informed Yazda that he was the only young adult male among approximately 60 Yazidi elderly men, women, and children that were held in a house in Qasr al-Mihrab village.<sup>22</sup> They had escaped from Kocho village on August 3, 2014, captured, held in different locations, and were finally taken to Qasr al-Mihrab on August 18, 2014. There was a picture of Ali ibn Abi Talib<sup>23</sup> in the house, indicating that the house had most likely belonged to Shi'is and was taken over by IS fighters. IS fighters asked the Yazidis to remove the picture, but the Yazidis instead covered the picture with a piece of cloth. The IS fighters frequently denied the Yazidis food and water for months; many people died from starvation and/or poor sanitation while others were executed. Those who died, including the mother of the survivor with whom Yazda spoke to, were buried on this spot, a hill next to the house where the Yazidis were held for at least five months.

### VICTIMS

*17 men, women, and children*

<sup>21</sup> Tel Afar is a mostly Shi'i town, approximately 50 kilometers from Sinjar.

<sup>22</sup> This account pertains to only one of the houses in Qasr al-Mihrab where hundreds of Yazidis were held in several houses. Other mass graves are expected to be discovered in the area.

<sup>23</sup> Believed by Shi'i Muslims to be the first Imam of Muslims.



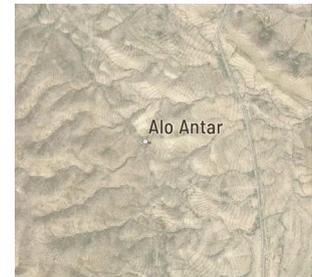


This site, in close proximity to Tel Afar<sup>24</sup>, is believed to be the mass grave containing the highest number of victims. The bodies were disposed into a natural well, with a diameter of approximately 45 meters, which used to have a depth of 85 meters; after the disposal of the bodies, the depth decreased to approximately 25 meters. Photographs of this site were examined by Prof. Tal Simmons, Professor of Forensic Science at Virginia Commonwealth University, who identified a total of 56 individual bodies, seven of them represented by severed heads, from the surface of the site.<sup>25</sup> Four of the bodies show signs of being bound from their wrists or forearms, and one individual has a blindfold covering his upper face and head.<sup>26</sup> Several shell casings and unused bullets, blood stains, clothes and shoes are visible on the surface.

One eyewitness who lived close to the site reported seeing IS fighters in the spring of 2015 take at least 1,000 Yazidi men, women and children in addition to some smugglers to the site in trucks and cars, killing them by beheading, shooting, and dismembering. The site was visible to those who pass by, and the witness' children visited the grave and informed their father of several bodies there. When that witness went near the grave, he

### ABOVE

*The bodies in the photo have been censored due to their graphic nature.*



### VICTIMS

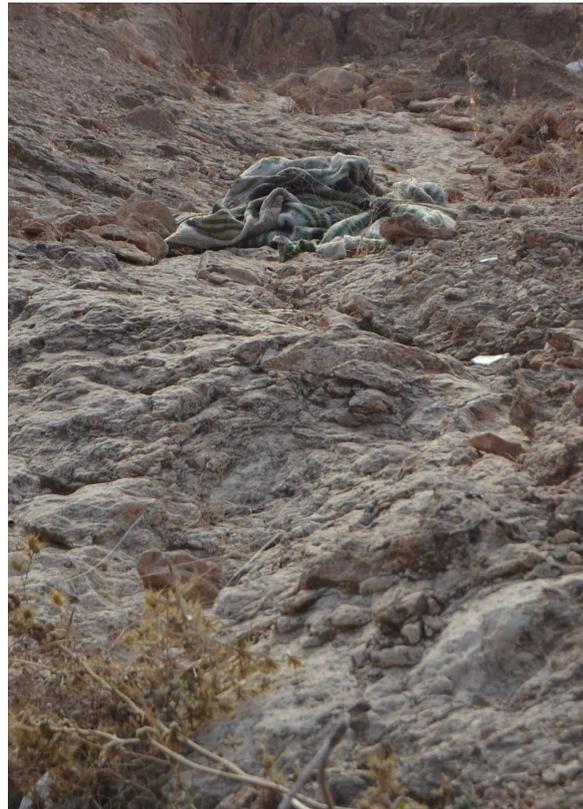
*Approximately 1,000 men, women and children*

<sup>24</sup> This item replaces numbers 34 and 45 in the 2016 Report, which were reported when there was no access to the site. See 2016 Report, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Tal Simmons, *Yazda: Bir-Alow Grave* (29 January 2018).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

was told by an IS fighter that if he saw him there again, he would kill him and his children and throw them in the grave. The same witness was told by another IS fighter, who according to his own account also participated in the Kocho massacre and was responsible for killing 400 Yazidis, that Yazidis living in Tel Afar were gathered near this site, women and children were separated, and men and the elderly were executed and thrown into the grave, with women being sold into slavery. This site is believed to be used by IS as a mass grave for several killings.



## B. POTENTIAL MASS GRAVE

Below is a potential mass grave newly discovered by Yazda after the publishing of the 2016 Report. Evidence visible on the surface support the finding that this site is most likely a mass grave, although no eyewitnesses were found to confirm the events that unfolded at this site and no bones are visible on the surface. Hence, it has been categorized as a *potential* mass grave.

### SIBA SHEIKH KHIDR 5



This site is located at Siba Sheikh Khidr village, approximately six meters from the street. There is an unfinished building with a blood-stained rope hanging from the ceiling, a blood-stained blanket and a mound of earth. The ground has been dug presumably using a bulldozer.

#### VICTIMS

*Unknown*

While there were no eyewitnesses found for the events that unfolded at this site, it is highly likely that the mound of earth contains bodies of victims killed by hanging.



## C. KILL SITES

Below are some of the kill sites newly discovered by Yazda after the publishing of the 2016 Report. Throughout this sub-section, the term “site” refers to kill sites specifically.

### 1. SIBA SHEIKH KHIDR



**VICTIMS** This site is located in a berm in Siba Sheikh Khidir village. Some shoes are  
*Unknown* visible on the surface.

A local man informed Yazda that he was among those Yazidis who fought IS when they took over the village. As confirmed by other accounts, the security forces in Siba Sheikh Khidr village had left behind heavy weapons, one of them on the roof of the police station. A number of local Yazidi men remained to resist IS instead of fleeing and held out until their ammunition supplies were depleted. IS fighters, some of them Sunnis from neighboring villages whom the witness knew personally, attacked the Yazidi fighters using the heavy weapons. The Yazidi fighters responded, but were both fewer in numbers and had fewer and less powerful weapons. The fight proceeded for approximately five hours. The IS fighters killed several Yazidi fighters who were stationed in the berm and captured several others.



## 2. GERZERIK



**VICTIMS** This site is located behind a berm in Gerzerik village next to a military checkpoint and contains scattered clothes and pieces of bones. The site has been burned.  
*Unknown*

A Yazidi man from Gerzerik village informed Yazda that IS fighters as well as local Sunnis who later joined IS arrived at the village on August 3, 2014. Yazidi villagers stationed behind the berm and started fighting, although they were surrounded by IS fighters. An unknown number of Yazidis were killed during the fight on this spot.



### 3. KOCHO 1



**VICTIMS** This kill site is located in Kocho village, in the northwest corner of the schoolyard. The mukhtar of Kocho village, Ahmed Jaso, is believed to have been killed here.  
*One man*

Witness testimonies from the events in Kocho on August 15, 2014 indicate that Jaso was the last male remaining in the school building after all men were taken in groups to be executed. While there are no eyewitnesses to the killing itself, different testimonies have led to the conclusion that Jaso was executed in this location after the men were taken for execution and before the women were taken to be sold into slavery. A Yazidi man also informed Yazda that he called Jaso's phone on August 15, 2014, and an IS fighter answered the phone. The IS fighter proceeded to tell the Yazidi man that Jaso was dead and that he had "slaughtered Jaso like a goat".

#### 4. KOCHO 2



The site is located in Kocho village and contains bones believed to belong to one man, some scattered clothes, and shell casings.

**VICTIMS**

*One man*

The circumstances under which this person was killed are unknown.



## 5. KOCHO 3

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**VICTIMS** This site is located in the southwest of Kocho school building. One bone is visible on the surface.  
*One person*

The circumstances under which this person was killed are unknown.

## 6. TEL BANAT

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**VICTIMS** The decomposed body of a man was found in a bathtub in a house in Tel Banat village. The victim was handcuffed from behind and wearing a winter coat.  
*One man*

The circumstances under which this person was killed are unknown.



## V. NEXT STEPS

### A. CHALLENGES

The majority of the Yazidi population (approximately 300,000) remain internally displaced, living mostly in camps in Duhok Governorate, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Some (approximately 65,000) have returned to Sinjar and others (approximately 100,000) have been displaced outside of Iraq and have settled abroad. The political, humanitarian, and security-related challenges that have prevented Yazidis from returning to Sinjar, as detailed in Yazda's 2016 Report, are now further complicated. Following the Kurdish independence referendum on September 25, 2017, Iraqi forces launched a military campaign to retake control of a number of disputed territories, including Sinjar. The withdrawal of the Kurdistan Regional Government ("KRG") Peshmerga from Sinjar, and the subsequent entry by Hashd al-Shaabi on October 16, 2017, left the Yazidis divided under the control of the KRG in camps, and the Iraqi Central Government in Sinjar. The issue of Sinjar's dual local administration by the KRG-appointed mayor and Hashd al-Shaabi-appointed mayor since October 2017 remains unsolved. Difficulty of access to Sinjar, which presents itself as blocked roads, additional permit requirements, and increased checkpoints, further

discourage the Yazidi population from returning to their homeland. Safety threats, such as mines and Turkey's threats to attack Sinjar (which led to the Kurdistan Workers' Party ("PKK") to withdraw from Sinjar on March 23, 2018), add to the unwillingness to return.

While reconstruction efforts in Sinjar have begun, there remains a serious lack of basic services, including electricity, water, education, and healthcare. Combined with the absence of livelihood opportunities, prospects of return to Sinjar remain low for many Yazidis at present, even if many desire the opportunity to return and rebuild.<sup>27</sup>



Importantly, the lack of accountability mechanisms for the perpetrators of the genocide<sup>28</sup> has caused great disappointment within the Yazidi community. Despite several trainings provided by the International Commission on Missing Persons ("ICMP") to Kurdish and Iraqi officials on techniques to preserve and exhume mass graves,<sup>29</sup> a large number of the sites remain unprotected and

27 For detailed information on the situation of Sinjar post-genocide, see Nadia's Initiative, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Report on the Status of Sinjar* (2018), [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5771830a5016e1a544ba4318/t/5ac63dda88251b8bef460c7b/1522941415946/Status\\_of\\_Sinjar\\_Report.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5771830a5016e1a544ba4318/t/5ac63dda88251b8bef460c7b/1522941415946/Status_of_Sinjar_Report.pdf)

28 For a comprehensive overview of possible legal recourses for the Yazidi Genocide and their complications, see Beth Van Schaack, "The Iraq Investigative Team and Prospects for Justice for the Yazidi Genocide", *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 16(1) (2018), pp. 113-139.

29 In 2016, the ICMP provided a month long basic training in field, mortuary, and crime scene documentation techniques to KRG and Iraqi Central Government participants mandated to deal with search, location, recovery, examination, and DNA-led identification. The principle aims of the training were to provide a foundation in forensic best practice methodologies to field and mortuary work, ultimately imprinting the need for best practice methodologies to ensure admissibility of the forensic evidence in future judicial proceedings and secure DNA-led identifications.

unexhumed four years after the genocide.<sup>30</sup> In the meantime, mass graves and kill sites have been severely disturbed by people and weather conditions, jeopardizing evidence collection. The political tensions between Erbil and Baghdad have further complicated the investigation process, as access to survivors, witnesses, suspects, and crime scenes have become increasingly difficult.



Yazda welcomes the efforts by the KRG's Commission of Investigation and Gathering Evidence ("CIGE"), that has collected over 2,000 interviews from survivors and witnesses of the genocide, in addition to more than 1,200 blood reference samples and related ante-mortem data from family members of missing persons with the support of the ICMP.

Yazda further appreciates the establishment of a Judicial Investigation Board for Crimes Against Yazidis by the Iraqi Central Government in June 2017, which is to try members of IS accused of committing crimes against Yazidis.

Nevertheless, since war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide are not defined in the penal codes of the KRG or Iraq, the legal framework to try these crimes as such at the local level is non-existent. The Anti-Terrorism Law of 2005 is severely insuf-

<sup>30</sup> In 2016, ICMP with the KRG's Commission of Investigation and Gathering Evidence ("CIGE") provided basic protection and safeguarding through the provision of fencing at 15 locations relating to the genocide. While an accurate figure of the current number of sites protected and safeguarded in and around Sinjar is not available to Yazda or the ICMP, it is believed some have been fenced by the community and family members, and additional sites were fenced by the CIGE up to 2017. The basic measures to protect and safeguard sites have merit in the short to medium term, to prevent grave tampering and loss of evidence, however, it is not a long-term solution and timely excavation is needed.

ficient vis-à-vis the atrocities committed against Yazidis, lacking -very importantly- the legal basis to try rape as an act of genocide.

A positive development was the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2379, which provides for the establishment of an Investigative Team to collect, store and preserve evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide committed by IS in Iraq to support domestic accountability efforts.<sup>31</sup> Following the signing of the Terms of Reference on February 9, 2018,<sup>32</sup> Karim Asad Ahmad Khan QC was appointed as the Special Adviser of the Investigative Team,<sup>33</sup> and the Team is expected to start their mission in Iraq soon.

Yazda is hopeful that the Investigative Team will coordinate and facilitate the evidence collection process between the KRG and Iraq, accelerate efforts to exhume mass graves by cooperating with domestic and international bodies that have existing efforts to this end, and assist the Iraqi judiciary with capacity building, as provided in Resolution 2379.



<sup>31</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 2379”, S/RES/2379 (21 September 2017), [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2379\(2017\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2379(2017))

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Letter dated 9 February 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council”, S/2018/118 (14 February 2018), <http://undocs.org/S/2018/118>

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, “Mr. Karim Asad Ahmad Khan of the United Kingdom - Special Adviser of the Investigative Team established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2379 (2017)” (31 May 2018), <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/personnel-appointments/2018-05-31/mr-karim-asad-ahmad-khan-united-kingdom-special-adviser>

## B. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CALLS FOR SUPPORT

Yazda calls upon the Iraqi Central Government, the KRG, and international actors to:

- Resolve without delay the issue of dual local administration in Sinjar in coordination with the Yazidi community;
- Restore and maintain security in Sinjar by increasing the size of local security forces;
- Ensure smooth access to Sinjar by non-governmental organizations, humanitarian organizations, and other actors seeking to provide aid, medicine, livelihood support, or reconstruction efforts in Sinjar, by also re-opening roads between Duhok and Sinjar;
- Accelerate reconstruction efforts in Sinjar, by including Yazidi representatives (and importantly, Yazidi women) in decision-making processes;
- Urgently ensure the provision of basic services to Sinjar, including electricity, water, healthcare, and education;
- Take necessary steps to hold accountable those responsible for the crimes committed against Yazidis, including locals who joined IS in committing these crimes, while pursuing a discourse that openly acknowledges the nature of the Yazidi Genocide;
- Enact legislation defining war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide;
- Protect, preserve and exhume mass graves in Sinjar to allow families of victims to bury their loved ones properly, and achieve closure;
- Cooperate on investigations of crimes against Yazidis;
- Once retributive justice is served, design reconciliation programs in consultation with the Yazidi community and thoroughly implement these in Sinjar to ensure peaceful cohabitation between different groups.

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