

ACTIVITY REPORT

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

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Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Yazidi IDPs in Sinjar

KAS AND WEO HOLD SECOND CONFERENCE ON OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE RETURN OF YAZIDIS TO SINJAR

The plight of the Yazidis first hit international headlines three years ago, and many consider the atrocities and massacres committed by the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) as an act of genocide. A religious minority in Iraq, the Yazidis were and continue to be subject to unimaginable violence at the hands of ISIS, resulting in the massacres of thousands, and the abductions of women and children. However, despite the liberation of Sinjar from ISIS in November 2015, thousands of Yazidi IDPs have yet to return to their home of Sinjar, as they are inhibited by a variety of causes, including an unstable security situation, limited reconstruction funding that has resulted in a lack of basic services, and political deadlock. In order to discuss potential measures and mechanisms for the return of the Yazidis to Sinjar and recommendations to facilitate the rehabilitation of IDPs, the KAS Syria/Iraq office and the Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) held a conference entitled "Rule of Law Progress in Sinjar After the Liberation of the City" on 22 May 2017 in Erbil. This conference was a follow-up to a previous KAS and WEO conference on the situation in Sinjar, held in August 2016, and reviewed and addressed the recommendations presented then.

The opening session featured remarks by Suzan Aref, the director of WEO, Kareem Sinjari, Minister of Interior and acting Minister of Peshmerga in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Bashar Kiki, the

head of the Nineveh Provincial Council. Suzan Aref opened the conference by introducing the KAS and WEO projects, including the previous conference, and emphasized the need to analyse the recommendations put forward then and their effectiveness, as well as to determine further challenges facing the Yazidi IDPs.

Minister Sinjari spoke about the KRG's efforts towards the rehabilitation of the Yazidi IDPs, in particular, the thousands of women who were abducted by ISIS. He stated that the KRG has developed a strategic plan to support the Yazidi women, which focuses on empowerment, the provision of services within IDP camps, and improving their standards of living. He also highlighted the KRG's efforts of psychological and social rehabilitation for the women in order to reintegrate them into society, which is being done in cooperation with local and international NGOs. He stated that the KRG is focusing on collecting evidence of the crimes against the Yazidis, as documentation plays a key role in the transitional justice and rehabilitation process.

Bashar Kiki emphasized the need for a clear strategy in order to encourage Yazidis to return to Sinjar, as currently, the Iraqi central government has made few efforts and provided limited funding for Sinjar. According to him, such a strategy should include the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms and a focus on reconstruction and the provision of services in Sinjar. Kiki also saluted the Yazidi women victims of

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ISIS, and acknowledged the role that Germany has played in their rehabilitation.

The opening session was followed by a presentation of the outcomes and recommendations of WEO's meetings with partners and relevant actors to the Sinjar crisis. In addition to the August 2016 conference held in cooperation with KAS, WEO held a series of meetings with the KRG Ministry of Interior, human rights and women's committees, the Nineveh Provincial Council and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments. From these meetings, WEO came up with a series of recommendations, targeted at the Iraqi central government, the KRG, and local and international civil society organisations. Recommendations to the federal government included declaring Sinjar a disaster zone, allocating a specific budget for the reconstruction of Sinjar, re-considering the Iraqi penal code, and compensating victims of violence, among others. The recommendations for the KRG included supporting and establishing special programs for victims, especially women and children, documenting and collecting evidence of crimes and acts of genocide, and facilitating the IDP ID paperwork process. For civil society organisations and the media, the suggestions included forming capacity building programs for women, establishing rehabilitation centres and advocacy campaigns.

A discussion and analysis of these recommendations and further challenges to the return and rehabilitation of Yazidi IDPs in Sinjar was the focus of the following session, which was moderated by Khidr Domly, a civil society organisation activist and academic. Mahma Khalil, the District Manager of Sinjar, spoke about the atrocities committed against the Yazidis by ISIS after the capture of Sinjar and the difficulties faced by those who fled the city, which, according to him, constitute acts of genocide and crimes against humanity. He stated that the implementation of the current Iraqi constitution has weakened the rights of minorities and as a result, these communities no longer feel protected by the state. Poverty continues to be a major issue inhibiting the return of IDPs, as he reported that more than

85 percent of Sinjar has been destroyed. Although Sinjar was declared a disaster area in 2016 by the Iraqi central government, Khalil pointed out that the promised funds and support have not arrived from Baghdad and thus, he questions the government's commitment to the stabilisation of Sinjar. In addition to stressing the importance of reconstructing Sinjar, he urged PKK and YPG forces to withdraw. He further recommended that transitional justice and rule of law mechanisms be implemented, and the establishment of a criminal court to prosecute crimes. He also mentioned that the GIZ has contributed 12 generators to camps hosting Yazidi IDPs, which has helped to improve the standard of living within the camps.

The Nineveh Deputy Governor for Returnee Affairs, Ali Omer Gabo, detailed the five-year strategy established by the central government for the reconstruction of governance in Sinjar; (1) the liberation of Nineveh province, scheduled to take six months, which is currently underway, (2) the re-establishment of stability and the provision of services, estimated for two years, and (3) the reconstruction of Nineveh province, which will take an additional two and a half years. This will be funded by the Iraqi Reconstruction Fund, however, it is estimated that over 75 percent of the required funds will need to come from the international community. Gabo added that international civil society organisations are currently pulling out of Sinjar due to the unstable security situation. Stability is required for peaceful coexistence, and he urged that a sense of citizenship is needed as well as transitional justice to persecute terrorist groups and war criminals. To further promote peaceful coexistence, according to him, there should be humanitarian education as well as the monitoring of religious speeches and the media to prevent sectarian conflict.

Amina Saeed Hassan, a Yazidi women activist and former member of the Iraqi parliament, described the living conditions of Yazidi IDPs, saying that even though Sinjar was liberated two years ago, most IDPs are still living in camps and there is still no concrete plan for their return to Sinjar. On top of this, over 4000 Yazidi women are still

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under ISIS captivity, and that the Sinjar tragedy has caused psychological shock for the Yazidi community. She therefore suggested the implementation of psychological support for the entire community to combat this psychological trauma. However, instead of rehabilitation centres, she recommended that this be achieved through community confidence building measures, which include the regaining of livelihoods and promoting a sense of Iraqi citizenship. As poverty is a critical issue in Sinjar, the reconstruction of infrastructure is key to allow for the return of IDPs. She also urged that a rapprochement between the Yazidis and the surrounding Arab communities is essential in order to promote religious tolerance and reintegration of Yazidis into Sinjar.

According to Mariwan Hassan, a representative of the KRG Ministry of Interior and the Joint Crisis Coordination Committee (JCC), Sinjar is part of the disputed area between Iraq and the KRI, and thus, reconstruction has been difficult due to political conflicts of interest. The KRG has provided Yazidis a safe haven, however, he added that due to the economic crisis in the KRI, the KRG has faced difficulties in meeting needs of its own people but has still done their best to provide services to Yazidi and other IDPs. He further stated that the KRG feels responsible for the IDPs, as the Iraqi federal government has been ineffective in its response to the crisis. According to him, despite the existence of a reconstruction fund, funding is unfairly distributed, and Sinjar has received little to no money to rebuild. He concluded that the Kurdistan region is left out on purpose and that the KRG itself is lacking the funds to rebuild Sinjar on its own.

The concluding panel of the conference, led by Suzan Aref and Khidr Domly, featured the recommendations proposed by the participants of the conference. These recommendations stressed the need to categorize the goals according to priority, and to identify measures needed for short-term implementation. The proposed recommendations, which will be included in the next WEO report, include; establishing a court of justice for Sinjar, supporting the rehabilitation of women and children victims, promoting ef-

forts aimed at converting Sinjar into a province and conducting a survey in Sinjar to determine opinions regarding this, compensating victims, promoting legislation concerning justice, training civil society and governmental actors in rehabilitation and reconciliation measures, as well as increasing the monitoring and support of victims.

The concluding session also featured remarks by Idah Muema, the Senior Women Protection Adviser at the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General at UNAMI. She highlighted the six areas that should be prioritized concerning Sinjar; (1) supporting legislation and documenting sexual crimes, (2) prosecuting sexual crimes in Sinjar, (3) providing reparations for survivors and protecting children born of rape, (4) promoting religious tolerance among the Sinjar community, (5) involving women in counter-terror efforts, and (6) raising awareness through social media campaigns and conferences.