



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

Genocide by ISIS: The Plight of Yazidis in Iraq and Syria and the Role of the International Community

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Opening Remarks

Thank you all for your participation in today's briefing on the plight of Yazidi's in Iraq and Syria and the role the international community should play in addressing the genocide against these communities.

I would like to especially recognize the distinguished individuals who will be addressing you today. They bring with them not only unparalleled expertise in the areas of human rights and national security, but are also extraordinary leaders who have championed the cause of the helpless and guided the efforts of the United States to confront the sinister menace of the so-called Islamic State.

On March 14th, my colleagues and I in the House voted unanimously to condemn the atrocities of ISIS against Yazidi's, Christians, and other religious minorities as an act of genocide. Three days later, the Secretary of State concurred, and for the first time in twelve years, the United States recognized what Churchill famously called the "crime of all crimes."

For the Yazidi people, the genocide designation only confirmed what they already knew to be taking place. Seventeen months earlier, Vian Dakhil, one of only two Yazidi members in the Iraqi Parliament, stood before her colleagues and delivered

an impassioned speech describing the slaughter of her people by ISIS forces and pleading for assistance. That same day, President Obama authorized U.S. airstrikes against ISIS targets, including those who had surrounded the Yazidi's on Sinjar Mountain.

Today, ISIS has been pushed back from Sinjar Mountain, but the situation for Yazidi's and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria remains desperate. In April, I chaired a hearing by the Lantos Commission to examine the situation for religious minorities and look at options for moving forward. While many possibilities were discussed, one thing became clear: the role of the international community in confronting this genocide is not over. Hundreds of thousands of Yazidi's remain displaced, living in camps or unfinished buildings. Thousands of Yazidi women and girls kidnapped by ISIS continue to live in captivity, forced to endure rape and violence on a daily basis.

We cannot simply look the other way. Future generations will look back on this time and ask, did we do all that we could to stop this genocide? Did we help the victims when they needed it most?

Among the distinguished participants here today, special recognition must be given to Ms. Vian Dakhil. She has become a hero, and not just for her own people, but for all who spurn the Islamic State's ideology of hatred and subjugation, both towards religious minorities and towards women. For her heroic efforts, she has been nearly killed in a helicopter crash and added to the Islamic State's most wanted list. Yet she has also become an inspiration to many, and we are in great need of many more like her if we hope to one day live in a world free from the scourge of religious persecution and the Islamic State.

Thank you all for coming today, and with that I conclude my remarks.