Completion of exhumations of mass graves in the intersection of Jidala near Tel-Azer and in the Siba Sheikh Kheder and Tel-Banat villages

10 November 2023

From 15 to 28 October 2023, the Iraqi national team in charge of exhumations, the Mass Graves Directorate (MGD) opened, with the support of UNITAD, ICMP and CIGE, a total of 12 mass graves in the intersection of Jidala-Tel-Azer as well as in Siba Sheikh Kheder, and Tel-Banat villages.

Mass graves in Tel Azer

From 15 October 2023, the national team started to exhume mass graves in the Jidala intersection near Tel-Azer. These mass graves are known as the "Mahmoud Khro" sites because they are in and close to the house and farm of the family of the same name. Yazda documented these sites in June 2017 and again in 2021. A direct witness to the events described how the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) executed male members of the family before enslaving the women and children. Other people from Tel Azer explained that while they were fleeing ISIL towards the mountains, they stopped at Mahmoud Khro's family house to rest and drink water. Some of them might have been captured and executed there as well.

Mass graves in Siba Sheikh-Khider

On 18 October 2023, the forensic team, with support of UNITAD and ICMP, moved to exhume mass graves in the village of Siba Sheikh-Khider. Along with Ger Zarek, Siba Sheikh-Khider was the first Yazidi village to be attacked by ISIL. Yazda documented the sites in June 2021 and spoke to witnesses who explained how many were killed because they either tried to flee or tried to fight back.

Yazda report on Ger Zarek, Siba Sheikh-Khider and Tel Azer

In August this year, Yazda published a report entitled *From Resistance to Rubble: The Stories of Ger Zarik, Siba Sheikh-Kheder and Tel Azer* to highlight the complexity of the Yazidi genocide and the systematic and widespread attacks ISIL has committed. Yazda had also identified and documented mass graves, execution sites and captivity sites in all these villages.

These locations were selected for the report as they were the first majority-Yazidi villages in Sinjar targeted by ISIL and Yazda welcomes the exhumations in two of these villages as an important step in securing justice for the Yazidi community. The process allows families of the victims to get some closure once identification of remains is successfully carried out. The mass graves in Ger Zarek were exhumed last year.

Yazda had deployed its documentation team as well as its Mobile Medical Unit and case management team to support the community in this difficult moment. Yazda remains available to answer questions and to make the link with the authorities.