POLICY BRIEF

Survivors' Priorities
for Iraq's International Crimes Law

Five Changes We Ask the Council of Representatives to Support

October 2026

About the Survivors Rise Network

The Survivors Rise Network (SRN) is an inclusive, survivor-led platform that brings together trained survivor advocates from different communities to strengthen collective advocacy, promote collaboration and meaningful survivor participation, and engage with institutions and partners to advance the rights of survivors of ISIL atrocities.

By working collectively, the Network seeks to strengthen survivor leadership and contribute to more inclusive and survivor-centred policies and decision-making processes. Guided by the principles of survivor leadership, inclusion, dignity, respect, a survivor-centred approach, and Do No Harm, the Network advocates for truth, justice, reparations, accountability, and guarantees of non-repetition.

About Yazda

Yazda is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that was established in 2014 in response to the genocide committed by the self-declared Islamic State (ISIS) against the Yazidis and other minorities in Iraq. Yazda manages a portfolio of humanitarian, justice, advocacy, and development-related projects, all of which are community and survivor-centered in terms of design and implementation.

Since its inception, Yazda has been working with local and international partners to provide humanitarian, accountability, and advocacy services to vulnerable minority groups in Iraq in their post-genocide recovery. The organization has been operating in Iraq since October 2014 and has main offices in Duhok in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and a branch office in Sinjar in Nineveh Province. Yazda is registered as a non-profit organization in the United States, the United Kingdom, Iraq, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Since its creation, Yazda has received support from numerous donors, both institutional and individual, and has reached tens of thousands of direct and indirect beneficiaries through its programs and initiatives.

> *“As the Survivors’ Rise Network, we believe that accountability must reflect the full truth and gravity of the crimes committed against our communities. ISIS members should not be prosecuted only for individual offences when their actions formed part of genocide and other international crimes.*
>
> *The law must ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for the crimes they actually committed, wherever they are found. It must also recognise these crimes and provide meaningful guarantees of non-recurrence, so that no community is forced to endure them again.”*
>
> **Members of the Survivors Rise Network**

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Why are we asking you to strengthen the Draft International Crimes Law?

We are survivors of crimes committed by ISIL and survivor advocates from communities affected by those crimes. For more than twelve years, we have waited for the crimes committed against us, our families and our communities to be recognised for what they were: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Until now, survivors seeking this form of justice have had to look largely outside Iraq. Cases in other countries have shown that ISIL members can be prosecuted for international crimes, and survivors have travelled abroad, given testimony and participated in proceedings far from their homes to help make this possible.

These cases have been important, but justice for crimes committed in Iraq should also be possible in Iraq. Survivors should not have to depend on the courts of other countries for the crimes committed against us to be prosecuted.

The Draft International Crimes Law gives Iraq an important opportunity to change this. Following its approval by the Council of Ministers on 24 August 2026, the draft is now before the Council of Representatives. If adopted, it could provide Iraqi courts with a long-awaited legal basis to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. This opportunity is particularly urgent given the recent transfer of alleged ISIL members from north-eastern Syria to Iraq, which has widened the accountability gap the law needs to close.

We welcome the Draft International Crimes Law and want it to succeed. But recognising these crimes in law is only part of justice.

For us, the measure of this law will also be what happens when survivors seek justice through it. Will we know what is happening in a case? Will we be able to participate and have our voices heard, rather than being treated only as witnesses or sources of evidence? Will our identities and personal information be protected? Will we have access to legal and psychosocial support? Will we be protected from having to repeat traumatic experiences unnecessarily? And if someone is convicted, will we have access to meaningful reparation?

A justice process should recognise the harm we suffered without exposing us to further harm.

With the support of Yazda, we have prepared this brief for members of the Council of Representatives and its relevant committees, as well as judicial and government authorities, civil society organisations, international partners and other allies who can help strengthen the draft during this legislative moment.

We are not asking you to change the purpose of the law. We are asking you to help make it stronger.

Who are we, and how did we prepare this brief?

We are members of the Survivors Rise Network (SRN), a survivor-led advocacy platform bringing together survivor advocates from diverse communities affected by ISIL atrocities. The Network builds on years of work by survivors to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to advocate for our rights and influence decisions that affect us.

Since 2014, Yazda has worked alongside survivors of ISIL atrocities to advance justice, accountability and survivors' rights, including supporting individual survivor advocates, establishing the Yazidi Survivors Network in 2019, and launching the Know Your Rights Programme in 2024. The Survivors Rise Network grew from this foundation, shaped through consultation and co-creation with graduates of that programme and other survivor advocates. Yazda and its partners facilitated this process and provided technical support; the priorities in this brief are ours.

Our aim is not simply to be consulted. We want survivors to participate meaningfully in the decisions that shape our rights and our future. Through the Network, we identify our own advocacy priorities and engage collectively with government institutions, civil society, diplomatic missions, and international partners to advance them.

The Council of Ministers' approval of the draft on 24 August 2026 created both momentum and a concrete opportunity for us to act, made more urgent by the recent transfer of alleged ISIL members from Syria. We made the draft law our first collective advocacy priority. On 31 August 2026, SRN members met to discuss the draft and identify our initial concerns and open questions. On 8 September 2026, Yazda, with support from a legal expert deployed by Justice Rapid Response (JRR), facilitated an accessible presentation and discussion of the draft, giving us the chance to understand its provisions and ask questions. Based on those discussions, we identified the gaps that mattered most to us and agreed the priorities set out in this brief.

We know that no single group can represent every survivor. ISIL's crimes affected different communities, and affected women, men, girls and boys differently; survivors also face different barriers because of displacement, disability, economic circumstances, stigma and security. This brief should be part of a continuing conversation, not the end of one. We ask Parliament and other authorities to keep engaging meaningfully with survivors from all affected communities as the law is considered, amended, and implemented.

What changes are we asking you to support?

For the International Crimes Law to work in practice, it must do more than give Iraqi courts jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes: It must create a justice process that survivors can access safely, participate in meaningfully, and trust.

Based on our discussions of the draft law and our experiences seeking justice, we identified five priority changes that we ask members of Parliament and other allies to support as the draft moves through the legislative process. References to specific articles throughout these priorities are to the August 2026 version of the draft law that we reviewed and discussed as SRN members.

1 PRIORITY 1

Guarantee our meaningful participation in proceedings

We do not want survivors to be treated only as witnesses or sources of evidence. We want the law to recognise survivors as rights-holders who can participate meaningfully in proceedings, including as complainants and civil parties: understanding what is happening in a case, receiving information about important developments and decisions, having legal representation, expressing our views at appropriate stages, and asking for protection when we need it.

The procedural rules should make these rights possible to exercise in practice, including through individual or collective representation, accessible information in languages survivors understand, and appropriate arrangements for survivors who are displaced, have disabilities, face security risks, or cannot safely travel to court.

Participation must also be a choice. No survivor should be pressured to participate or made more vulnerable because they decide to do so. A survivor's decision to participate or not to participate in criminal proceedings under the International Crimes Law must not affect any of their other rights or entitlements, including their eligibility for or receipt of benefits under the Yazidi Female Survivors Law or any other applicable reparations law or programme.

What we ask you to support

Strengthen the relevant provisions and procedural rules to ensure that survivors' meaningful participation is recognised and can be effectively exercised in practice.

2 PRIORITY 2

Protect and support us without causing further harm

For many of us, participating in a criminal case carries real risk such as retaliation, exposure of our identity, stigma within our families or communities, or psychological harm from revisiting traumatic experiences. Many of us have already told our stories multiple times; we should not have to repeatedly describe painful experiences when reliable statements have already been properly collected and preserved.

We ask for a specialised victims and witnesses unit, with trained staff, clear responsibilities and sufficient resources, able to assess risks, protect confidential information, put protective measures in place, and connect survivors with legal, medical and psychosocial support before, during and after proceedings.

Investigations and court proceedings should be trauma-informed: unnecessary repeated questioning avoided, an appropriate accompanying person allowed where needed, and confidential and sensitive information protected. Survivors should be treated with dignity and without harmful assumptions. Questioning should not rely on gender stereotypes or use a survivor's prior or subsequent sexual conduct to undermine their credibility or the harm they experienced.

Previously collected and properly preserved survivor statements should be usable where permitted by applicable evidentiary and fair-trial requirements.

What we ask you to support

Strengthen the relevant provisions so that specialised protection, support and trauma-informed practices are integrated into the justice process from the outset.

3 PRIORITY 3

Make reparations real and enforceable

For us, accountability should not end with a conviction. We want the specialised criminal court to be able to order appropriate reparation on conviction, recognising both material and non-material harm, through restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and other appropriate measures.

A right to reparation means little if survivors cannot obtain it. We should not have to begin another difficult, costly legal process after a criminal trial simply to seek redress.

Reparations ordered through criminal proceedings should complement, and not reduce or replace, survivors' rights and entitlements under the Yazidi Female Survivors Law or other applicable reparations laws and programmes. The law should also allow assets to be traced, frozen or seized at an early stage by judicial order, subject to appropriate safeguards, so assets cannot be hidden or transferred before a final judgment can be enforced.

What we ask you to support

Strengthen the relevant provisions and procedural rules so courts can order and enforce appropriate reparations and preserve assets to ensure those orders can be satisfied.

4 PRIORITY 4

Build specialised and representative institutions

International crimes cases are complex: large numbers of victims and witnesses, crimes committed years ago, digital and documentary evidence, evidence located outside Iraq, sexual and gender-based violence, crimes against children, and survivors living in different places or facing serious security concerns. Judges, investigators, prosecutors and other staff need specialised knowledge and training. This should include international criminal law, complex and digital evidence, sexual and gender-based violence, working appropriately with children, trauma-informed practice, and the cultural and social context of affected communities.

We also want affected communities to be able to trust these institutions. Women should be represented among judges and other personnel, and appointments should reflect representation from affected communities as well as relevant language and cultural knowledge.

What we ask you to support

Strengthen the relevant provisions so that appropriate expertise, specialised training and representation are built into the institutions responsible for investigating and prosecuting these crimes.

PRIORITY 5

5 Make coordination between institutions mandatory

Survivors and families of the missing should not have to navigate institutions that do not communicate with one another. Nor should information and evidence that Iraqi institutions have collected over many years remain disconnected from future investigations and prosecutions under the International Crimes Law.

The General Directorate for Survivors' Affairs already has an important role under the Yazidi Female Survivors Law in coordinating with investigative and judicial authorities and providing statistics, data and evidence on ISIL crimes.

Other Iraqi institutions also hold information, documentation and forensic evidence that may be important for both accountability and the continuing search for missing persons. The Directorate for Protection and Mass Graves Affairs of the Martyrs' Foundation has responsibility for investigating mass graves, while the Medico-Legal Directorate of the Ministry of Health and its relevant departments are responsible for the forensic examination and identification of mortal remains, including through DNA testing. Over the years, these institutions have recovered remains, collected and preserved forensic evidence and worked to identify victims of ISIL crimes.

We believe that the International Crimes Law should ensure that this existing work is connected to the new accountability process. Evidence and information already lawfully collected and preserved should, where relevant and subject to applicable evidentiary safeguards, be available to investigators and specialised courts rather than unnecessarily collected again. At the same time, information generated through investigations and proceedings under the International Crimes Law should, where appropriate and lawful, contribute to ongoing efforts to identify missing persons and provide answers to their families.

Coordination should therefore be a duty, not something institutions merely "seek" to do. This should include the General Directorate for Survivors' Affairs, the Directorate for Protection and Mass Graves Affairs, the Medico-Legal Directorate and other relevant Iraqi authorities, each acting within its legal mandate.

Such coordination must never come at the expense of survivors' and families' rights, privacy or choices. Information-sharing arrangements must establish clear rules on access and use, protect confidentiality and personal data, respect applicable consent requirements and preserve judicial independence.

What we ask you to support

Strengthen the relevant provisions to require effective coordination between the specialised courts, investigative authorities, the General Directorate for Survivors' Affairs, the Directorate for Protection and Mass Graves Affairs, the Medico-Legal Directorate and other relevant authorities, each within its mandate. This should be supported by clear protocols governing referrals, access to and sharing of information, survivor support, forensic documentation and evidence, and the use of relevant data to support both criminal accountability and efforts to identify missing persons.

What are we asking you to do now?

Members of the Council of Representatives and relevant committees:

Consider these five priorities while there is still an opportunity to strengthen the draft.

Government and judicial authorities:

Begin preparing the institutions, procedures and resources needed to make these protections work in practice.

Civil society organisations, international partners and other allies:

Support these priorities and help ensure survivors' voices reach those responsible for shaping the law.

Above all: keep survivors involved.

Consult survivors as Parliament considers amendments. Involve survivors when procedural rules are drafted. Listen to survivors when protection systems, referral pathways and coordination protocols are designed. Ensure survivors from different affected communities — including women, persons with disabilities and displaced survivors — have meaningful opportunities to participate.

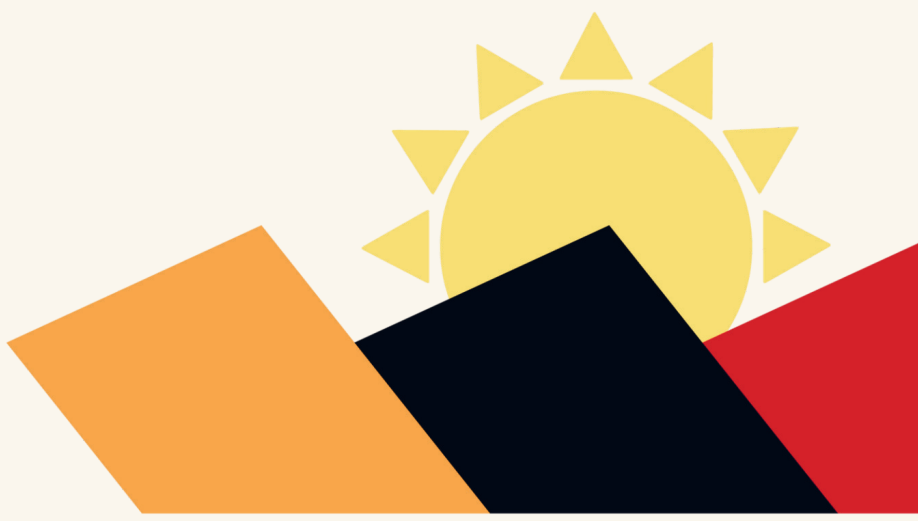
We have lived with the consequences of these crimes for more than twelve years. We know some of the barriers that can make seeking justice difficult, unsafe or inaccessible.

We want this law to succeed. We ask you to help make it a law that not only recognises the crimes committed against us, but makes meaningful justice possible for survivors here in Iraq.

At a glance: what we are asking Parliament to do

The Draft International Crimes Law gives Iraq a long-awaited legal basis to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. We support the law and want it adopted. We are asking the Council of Representatives to strengthen five areas before that happens:

Our priority	What we ask
1 Meaningful participation	Recognise survivors as rights-holders who can participate meaningfully as complainants and civil parties, not only as witnesses. Ensure that choosing whether to participate does not affect other rights or entitlements, including under reparations laws and programmes.
2 Protection without further harm	Establish a specialised and trained victims and witnesses unit; provide legal, medical and psychosocial support; make investigations and proceedings trauma-informed; and avoid unnecessary repetition of survivor testimony, including by enabling the appropriate use of previously collected and preserved statements.
3 Enforceable reparations	Empower the specialised court to order and enforce appropriate reparations, supported by early asset tracing, freezing and other measures to preserve assets for the enforcement of reparation orders.
4 Specialised and representative institutions	Require specialised expertise and training for judges, investigators, prosecutors and support staff, and meaningful representation of women and affected communities within the institutions responsible for these cases.
5 Mandatory institutional coordination	Require coordination between the specialised courts, investigative authorities, the General Directorate for Survivors' Affairs, the Directorate for Protection and Mass Graves Affairs, the Medico-Legal Directorate and other relevant authorities, including appropriate sharing and use of existing evidence and data to support accountability and efforts to identify missing persons.



Yazda

Any question, comment, or request for Yazda’s assistance can be sent directly to Yazda at info@yazda.org

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