

Time is of the essence to ensure trusted security in Sinjar

Joint press release

Washington D.C., September 29, 2022: The chronic absence of security is debilitating the Yazidi community and other minority groups in Sinjar. With a long-term power vacuum that has not been resolved by the Sinjar Agreement, the security breakdown is enforcing armed groups and putting humanitarian and socio-economic development prospects at serious risk.

The security situation was debated in an expert panel hosted by the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center. A new policy paper titled, "Collapsed security threatens the future of Yazidis and minorities in Sinjar," was launched sharing detailed examples of community lived experiences and specific urgent recommendations for national and international stakeholders. The paper is co-authored by Yazda, a community-led institution, and The Zovighian Partnership, a long-time social investor in the Yazidi Cause, and highlights the direct concerns and recommendations of community members.

Key speakers included: Ambassador Mark Green, President, Director, and CEO of The Wilson Center; Jennifer Gavito, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Press and Public Diplomacy and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iran and Iraq at the United States Department of State; Haider Elias, Co-founder and President of Yazda; Nadine Maenza, President of the International Religious Freedom Secretariat; and Lynn Zovighian, Co-founder and Managing Director of The Zovighian Partnership.

Absence of safety and security threatens the future of Yazidis

Safety and stability remain dangerously compromised due to the chronic and growing presence of armed groups and militias. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jennifer Gavito stressed that the presence of multiple armed groups is creating an insecure, unstable environment that inhibits any means for rebuilding and recovery. She emphasized, "The USA continues to prioritize the recovery of all communities that were subjected to genocide and other atrocities by ISIS." She urged Iraqi leaders to engage in a sincere and inclusive dialogue that leads to a political compromise and avoids further violence.

Wilson Center President Ambassador Mark Green highlighted: "The absence of security is hampering humanitarian decisions, justice mechanisms, infrastructure and strategic development, as well as shaping the geopolitical positioning of Sinjar."

The Zovighian Public Office (ZPO) was established in 2015 to serve and safeguard communities facing crises and crimes of atrocity through research, cultural, advocacy, and diplomacy.

   

publicoffice@zovighian.org
www.zovighian.org

Lynn Zovighian, Co-founder and Managing Director of The Zovighian Partnership, explained that security, as defined by Yazidi community members, is “a trusted inclusive public asset that all Sinjaris can count on, that is implemented with full accountability by national stakeholders with a strong hand from the international community to make sure that no one falls through the cracks.”

Haider Elias, Co-founder and President of Yazda stressed the need to amplify the voices of Yazidi survivors who are unable to return to their homeland with fears that they may become vulnerable again in case of another attack on Sinjar. “The conflict between multiple militia groups in Sinjar is killing a lot of innocent Yazidis. There are many other reasons that make Yazidis cautious when thinking about living in Sinjar again,” stated Elias.

The deprived state of security and consequential fragile rule of law critically endangers the lives of families. Nadine Maenza, President of the International Religious Freedom Secretariat, further emphasized, “It is so important that we include Yazidis and Sinjari residents in their own security.” She added, “The international community can help a different way forward and push away from this ‘rocket diplomacy’ so we can move forward with a secure place for the Yazidi community to go back to their homeland.”

Recommendations to strengthening security in Sinjar

Given the significant delays in addressing and resolving security in Sinjar, the paper provides time-critical actionable policy recommendations that have been co-defined with Yazidi community members.

Panelists expressed disappointment in the chronic policy of inaction amongst key stakeholders and highlighted these recommendations and called for the inclusion of all communities to assure self-determination and community-led decisions, mandates, and actions. Six recommendations are prioritized in the paper:

1. Update the Sinjar Agreement with meaningful community inclusion;
2. Activate long-term budgets for local law enforcement and capacity building that includes community recruits;
3. Close all non-state checkpoints and ensure the safe and trusted movement of aid, goods, services, and people;
4. Establish and fund a multi-stakeholder taskforce to define and oversee a security plan with community co-decision-making seats;
5. Establish and fund a community-led independent oversight body to monitor progress and ensure accountability; and
6. Introduce legislation that ensures safety as a human right for all citizens.

“The biggest mistake that was done with the Sinjar Agreement is the exclusion of the Yazidi community and the Sinjar community in general in drafting this agreement. Having said that, there is a way forward with this agreement only if it includes the Yazidi community and Sinjar community,” stated Maenza.

“What is so important is to appreciate that everything is time-critical. The challenge that we are facing today is that the breakdown is speeding up,” stated Zovighian. “There is nothing else that we can ask for if we don’t get security right and this is why this is not only a pertinent topic, it is not only overdue, it is indispensable, it is a prerequisite for all,” she concluded.

In closing remarks, Elias emphasized: “The genocide is ongoing; it is a human rights issue.” He added: “They [armed and political actors] have all the time onwards. That is why the longer it takes the better it is for them. But it is a disaster for Yazidis suffering inside refugee camps.”

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About Yazda

Yazda is a global community-led organization providing critical humanitarian assistance and promoting accountability and justice for the atrocities committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as ISIS, IS or by its Arabic acronym Da’esh, against the Yazidi community and other groups in Iraq. Yazda was established in 2014, three weeks after the genocidal campaign commenced in Sinjar, northern Iraq, and was among the first organizations on the ground providing lifesaving assistance to survivors. Yazda was the first actor to document Yazidi survivor accounts of crimes committed by ISIL.

www.yazda.org

About the Wilson Center

Chartered by Congress, the Wilson Center provides nonpartisan counsel and insights on global affairs to policymakers through deep research, impartial analysis, and independent scholarship. The Wilson Center is based in Washington D.C. and was named the #1 regional studies think tank in the world in 2019.

www.wilsoncenter.org

About the Zovighian Public Office

The Zovighian Public Office (ZPO) was established in 2015 to serve communities facing crises and crimes of atrocity. We are dedicated to amplifying their voices through research, culture, advocacy, and diplomacy. We are deeply committed to justice and accountability for the Yazidis of Sinjar in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq.

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