

Testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women's Issues

December 9th, 2014

Dear members of the Senate, ladies and gentleman Good Morning.

Chairwoman Boxer, ranking member Senator Rand Paul, and members of the subcommittee:

I would like to begin by thanking you and thanking your staff for convening this hearing and giving me an opportunity to speak today about the horrors experienced by my people... the Yezidis of the Kurdish Region. I thank you for your leadership and for your compassion, and ask that you hear our plea for help to meet the most critical crisis facing our people in our long and painful history.

My name is Vian Dakhil. I am the only Yezidi Minister of Parliament in the Iraqi central government and a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. I was born in Mosul in 1973. My father's work as a doctor moved our family to various towns and villages before finally settling in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish Region in 1984.

Since the invasion of the "so called Islamic State" (IS) in June 2014, I have been working tirelessly to bring attention to the plight of the Yezidi people and the acts of genocide committed against them by the IS.

Let me begin by saying the Yezidi people have suffered many acts of genocide over the course of our history. Many thousands have been persecuted and killed because of our beliefs. The number of surviving Yezidis in northern Iraq, southern Turkey, and eastern Syria now does not exceed 600,000, and many are living in refugee camps with minimal support.

I traveled myself to Mt. Sinjar to deliver emergency aid to the Yezidis fleeing IS. Our helicopter crashed resulting in the death of several on board. I suffered injuries, but was fortunate to continue the struggle to help those in need.

The stories told by refugees are heartbreaking. A woman recently called me at 2 am in the morning to recount that she had fled her village with her five children after IS slaughtered her husband. Two of the children died of thirst; one was left disabled on the mountain because she had to keep running to save the lives of her remaining two children. Imagine yourself having to choose which one of your children will live? This is only one example of thousands ... Yezidis who have witnessed family members massacred, who fled chaotically not knowing whether they will live to see tomorrow. They fled with no family, no shelter, no food and no water.

Our women and girls have been targeted by IS and kidnapped and raped. No doubt you have heard the many stories of indescribable suffering by these poor women, treated as sexual slaves and sold and

traded as property. This continues with many Yezidi women still being held and suffering at the hands of IS. It is believed that at least 3,000 Yezidis are still in captivity in IS hands in Iraq and Syria.

There are 700 hundred families still trying to survive on Mt. Sinjar. They do not have enough shelter, food or medical to survive the winter.

Many Yezidis have fled the IS controlled areas and are living in refugee camps in the region. The cities of Zakho and Dohuk in Iraqi Kurdistan have tried to accommodate some of these refugees. Two thirds of all schools in those two cities have been converted to temporary housing for Yezidis and other refugees fleeing IS. Others are living in makeshift tent cities that are exposed to the harsh winter weather. Supplies, humanitarian aid, and medical assistance are far from adequate for these people.

We come here today to ask for your help. The Christians in Iraq and elsewhere have a powerful lobby. They have the strong support of the European nations and the Vatican. Many are being offered political asylum. We, the Yezidis, are a small minority. We do not have advocates. I ask for your compassion and support.

We ask you for immediate support to get the Yezidis through this difficult winter. We ask for your help for a long term solution that protects the Yezidi people from further persecution.

We have lived in the region for thousands of years preserving our heritage, our religion and our land. We feel that IS is determined to exterminate the Yezidi people. After the recent massacres, and the inhumane torture of our women, we are desperate to protect what is left of our people and our religion. If it means leaving the land to protect our people, we are willing to do so to protect our identity and future generations.

We are here to plead for your help ... to support the refugees survive the dire short term challenges of this winter. And we ask you to support the Yezidi people in finding a long term solution that protects Yezidis from annihilation. The world cannot allow another genocide to occur.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to appear before this subcommittee.