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'Justice is sleeping':

Yezidis struggle to punish Kurds who greenlit genocide

On the 10th anniversary of the Yezidi genocide by ISIS, survivors are still struggling to get the international community to identify and punish the Kurdish collaborators who helped pave the path for slaughter.



(Photo Credit: The Cradle)

In August 2014, the terror group ISIS slaughtered thousands of men and enslaved thousands of women and children from the Yezidi religious minority in the Sinjar region of Iraq.

Ten years later, Yezidis, who survived their genocide by ISIS and fled to Europe as refugees, established a protest camp in front of the German parliament in Berlin to tell the truth about what happened.

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Yezidi activists speaking with *The Cradle* say they want the world to know that politicians and military leaders of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), led by [Masoud Barzani](#) and his family, partnered with ISIS in planning and executing the genocide.

“Barzani and the Kurds are the most responsible for what happened to us,” Farhad Shamo Roto, a survivor of the genocide, tells *The Cradle*. Farhad is among several Yezidi activists who helped establish the Voice of Yezidis for the Truth of Genocide ([VETO-G](#)) protest camp in Berlin.

Betrayal

In the weeks leading up to the ISIS massacre in 2014, the Peshmerga – Kurdish security forces under Barzani’s control – publicly claimed they would protect Sinjar until their “last drop of blood.” But Yezidis did not then know Barzani had agreed with ISIS to allow the terror group to [carry out](#) the genocide.

Under orders from Barzani, the Peshmerga disarmed Yezidis and prevented them from fleeing Sinjar, leaving them defenseless, open targets for the terror to follow. As Farhad and others in the encampment and inside Iraq have repeatedly confirmed to *The Cradle*:

Barzani’s Peshmerga left Sinjar without notice, allowing ISIS to attack, after they had used all means to convince us that they would protect Sinjar through their official media and their leaders.

Farhad escaped the ISIS massacre with his family at the age of 17. After three years of living in a tent in an internally displaced person (IDP) camp in the IKR, he became a refugee in France. He is now completing a PhD on the Yezidi genocide at the prestigious Centre d’Etudes Diplomatiques et Strategiques in Paris.

Silencing the truth

Like most Yezidis, Farhad initially remained silent about the Kurdish responsibility for the genocide. While living in the IDP camp, he feared retaliation from Barzani’s secret police, the Asayish.

Even in Europe, he and other Yezidis fear that speaking publicly about Barzani’s role in planning the genocide could get them, or their relatives still living in the camps, murdered.

But over time, Farhad mustered the courage to speak out. He established an NGO to highlight the Kurdish role in the Yezidi genocide at academic conferences and in media interviews. Barzani’s political party tried to buy Farhad’s silence by offering to pay for his PhD studies in Paris, but he refused, and continued to speak out.

After being [chosen](#) for the Obama Foundation's Young Leader program in 2020, Farhad was invited to a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. Farhad told him of the Kurdish role in the genocide and asked him to visit Shingal (Sinjar) to hear the truth firsthand from other genocide survivors.

"I would love to come," Macron told Farhad, "But the Kurds do not accept this."

Soon after, Farhad began receiving threats. In March 2022, two cars full of men screaming racist slogans blocked Farhad's car on the road. When he got out to confront the men, they tried to kill him by ramming him with their vehicle. He escaped, but his wrist was crushed, needing multiple surgeries to recover. Farhad spent the next three months in hiding and under the protection of French authorities.

The long arm of the Kurds

While the German government has recognized the Yezidi genocide, it has not acknowledged the role of its Kurdish counterparts in Iraq in perpetrating it.

Immediately after the genocide in 2014, the German government began providing weapons and funding to Barzani's Peshmerga, who falsely claimed ISIS was its enemy rather than its intimate partner.

Yezidi-German immigration lawyer Kareba Hagemann has tried to inform members of the German parliament of the Kurdish role in the Yezidi genocide but says the influence of Kurds in the German political system makes this difficult.

"A Kurdish person here in Germany warned me that I shouldn't criticize them, especially Barzani, because 'the arm of Barzani is long.' It was a threat to me to stop my work," Hagemann told *The Cradle*.

"They even have influence in the German parliament," Hagemann added. An employee of a German MP threatened her as well, telling Hagemann "[not to] dare say anything negative about the Kurds."

Canadian-Yezidi human rights activist Mirza Ismail has also received threats for his work exposing the Barzani family's role in the 2014 Genocide.

"I can't go to the Kurdistan region of Iraq because I have received death threats," Ismail told *The Cradle*. "Even Lalish, our holy place, I cannot visit because the area is under Barzani's control."

Ismail has [testified](#) about crimes committed by ISIS during the genocide to the US Congress and Canadian parliament. But when he tried to present evidence of the Kurdish role to officials from the Obama administration – who could have taken action to prevent the genocide – they refused to speak with him.

The Obama officials said we don't want to see it. Why didn't they want to see it? Because that means you are not guilty of allowing this to happen. That way, they can claim that they don't know. But you cannot hide the evidence. It's everywhere.

Another Yezidi activist told *The Cradle* that Barzani's secret police killed one of his relatives after he spoke out against the Peshmerga occupation of Sinjar even before the 2014 genocide. He now lives in a western country as a refugee, having fled there after the ISIS massacre. But he has received threats from Kurds in his new country of residence as well.

"Justice is sleeping," he said. "We hope one day it will wake up. We do not think God will tolerate this injustice forever."

Deportation

Ten years after the genocide, hundreds of thousands of Yezidis who fled the ISIS onslaught in Shingal (Sinjar) still live in overcrowded IDP camps in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

International NGOs provide billions to the Kurdish authorities to operate the camps, but the majority of this aid does not reach displaced Yezidis, protesters in Germany say.

One Yezidi who lived for years at the Shariya Camp near Dohuk told *The Cradle* that Yezidis continue to live in tents, receive only two hours of electricity a day, and suffer from food and water shortages.

However, he said, when representatives of the international NGOs visited the camp, electricity and water were provided 24 hours a day, and rations were distributed generously.

The NGO workers write glowing reports about the generosity of Kurdish authorities in hosting Yezidis. But, when they leave, camp conditions regress once again.

The Kurdish secret police, Asayish, have informers in the camps and watch them closely. Yezidis, angered by the conditions in the camps, where a generation of Yezidi children have now spent their entire childhoods, are scared to speak out for fear of being arrested and disappeared by the Asayish.

No one dares publicly ask, "Where do the billions in funding from the international community and NGOs really go?"

Another genocide?

Yezidis protesting at the VETO-G Camp in Berlin also expressed their fears that [another genocide looms](#). They have demanded that Germany end its policy of deporting Yezidis to Iraq, who have recently made the dangerous journey to safety.

Kareba Hagemann tells *The Cradle* she is shocked that the government in Berlin is sending genocide survivors back to Iraq, where the Kurdish perpetrators of the 2014 genocide remain in power.

But the Yezidis living under Kurdish rule in the IDP camps in the IKR are completely defenseless and at the mercy of the Barzani government. They could easily be massacred in huge numbers, as in 2014, should the Kurdish leaders decide to carry out or incite a new genocide.

Hate speech

Fears of another genocide exploded on 9 August, just one week after the tenth-anniversary Genocide protest in Berlin.

Thousands of Yezidis fled in fear from IDP camps in the Kurdish region of Iraq following a [barrage](#) of threats from Kurds on social media and in mosques threatening to repeat the genocide carried out by ISIS 10 years before.

Yezidi sources speaking with *The Cradle* stated that the Asayish quickly sealed the camp exits once evidence of the exodus became clear and did not allow any more families to leave.

One source said, “What I am seeing now is like the genocide in 2014. I see hundreds of cars and trucks, each packed full of as many people as possible, trying to escape to Sinjar.” Meanwhile, Kurdish social media users can be seen inciting violence against the persecuted religious minority, making [comments](#) like, “All Yezidis are infidels and share the same ideology. ISIS made a mistake by leaving any of them alive. They should have eradicated them, along with Lalish [a Yezidi holy site], from the face of the earth.”

Remembering Tel Ezer and Siba Sheikh Khidr

Yezidis also gathered in front of the parliament in Berlin on 14 August to hold a vigil for the 17th anniversary of a massive terror attack targeting Yezidis in Sinjar.

On 14 August 2007, four coordinated suicide car bombs detonated in the Yezidi towns of Tel Ezer (Qahtaniyah) and Siba Sheikh Khidir (Jazirah), killing 796 people and injuring 1,500 more.

In the wake of the terror attack, the second largest in Iraq’s bloody history, Iraqi Brigadier General Abdul Karim Khalaf said the carnage [looked](#) like the aftermath of a “mini-nuclear explosion.”

One Yezidi who spoke with *The Cradle* described running to the site of the incident in the center of Tel Ezer after hearing the explosion. Only five years old at the time, he discovered the body of his brother, which was torn in half by the blast.

Another survivor speaking to *The Cradle* said he was playing football in the street in Tel Ezer when the bomb detonated. Also, just five years old at the time, he broke down in tears as he described how his sister was blown to pieces standing just feet from him.

The US military immediately announced the bombing had all the “hallmarks of Al-Qaeda,” but multiple Yezidis from Tel Ezer speaking with *The Cradle* stated that the bombing was done in coordination with the Peshmerga, who were in tight control of both towns.

“No one believes Al-Qaeda was responsible for the truck bombs,” a survivor of the massacre from Tel Ezer told *The Cradle*. “How could these massive truck bombs enter Tel Ezer and Siba Sheikh Khadr without being checked?”

Support from powerful states

However, those in the international community refuse to tell the truth about the Kurdish role in the Yezidi genocide, which is ongoing.

In 2015, prominent human rights lawyer Amal Clooney [testified](#) to the UN Security Council, claiming to advocate for the Yezidi genocide victims.

Clooney stated, “We know that what we have before us is genocide, and we know that it is still ongoing. We know exactly who the perpetrators are. ISIS brags about its crimes online.”

However, she then claimed, “We know that these perpetrators *have no political support* from any of the powerful states.”

But, ISIS had immense [support](#) from powerful states. Rather than tell the truth that Masoud Barzani and the Peshmerga conspired with ISIS to perpetrate the genocide, with help from the US, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, and Israel, Clooney pointed the finger solely at the lowly ISIS foot soldiers who carried out the crime on behalf of their powerful political sponsors.

Because Amal Clooney and others in the international community refuse to expose the truth of the Yezidi genocide, the task is left to courageous activists like Farhad Shamo Roto, Kareba Hagemann, Mirza Ismail, , and the many other Yezidis whose names will never be known, but who are risking their lives to awaken justice from its sleep.

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