

## Free Yezidi Foundation<sup>1</sup> Statement

### *Statement on Turkish airstrikes in Sinjar, Iraq*

The Free Yezidi Foundation condemns in strongest terms the Turkish airstrikes conducted in Sinjar, Iraq. In 2014, Daesh (ISIS) terrorists swept through vast areas in Syria and Iraq, committing genocide against the ethno-religious minority Yezidi community in Sinjar. Yezidis have been displaced since that time and are slowly beginning to return back to their areas of origin. These airstrikes, in violation of Iraqi sovereignty, heighten the risk to Yezidi civilians and jeopardize the safe, voluntary return of a fragile and severely traumatized minority population.

The world has witnessed human rights violations against minorities carried out by Turkish-backed militias in Syria, including in Afrin and Northeast Syria. The international community must ensure gross violations of human rights are not committed with impunity. Now, the recent airstrikes conducted by Turkey have not only endangered the lives of Yezidis in Sinjar but have also dimmed the prospect of the return of civilians to their areas of origin. This places further hardship upon the more than 300,000 displaced Yezidis living in grim conditions in IDP camps.

After years of displacement some Yezidis have returned to their homeland, despite the lack of infrastructure, governance, and basic services, and despite the serious security threat that ISIS adherents still pose. Stark trauma levels and suicide rates in the IDP camps reflect civilians losing hope, and the desire to return home is understandable. However, those who have advocated for IDPs to return to Sinjar have a solemn responsibility to ensure that such civilian returnees do not become casualties of Turkish airstrikes.

FYF Executive Director Pari Ibrahim said, “These airstrikes have had a chilling effect on the Yezidi population already in Sinjar, as well as those in the IDP camps considering a return to their homes. We call upon the international community to stand forcefully against these airstrikes and abide by its responsibility to protect a vulnerable community as it seeks to recover and rebuild.”

#### *Recommendations*

UN Security Council: Raise the issue of Turkey’s airstrikes on Sinjar and other areas in Iraq as an agenda item relating to international peace and security.

Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS: Request information from Turkey on this dangerous escalation, seek clarification on why such destabilizing steps are being taken, and ensure that these strikes do not harm genocide survivors and do not prompt increased ISIS activity in or around Sinjar.

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<sup>1</sup> The Free Yezidi Foundation is an apolitical Yezidi civil society organization based in the Netherlands and United States, dedicated to providing humanitarian and human rights assistance to Yezidis in need. FYF is led by Yezidi women.



NATO Member States: Summon Turkish counterparts for clarification on this attack on the Yezidi homeland and pressure Turkey to cease escalating the danger posed to Yezidis and other civilians in such areas by demanding an end to Turkish airstrikes on Iraqi territory.

Government of Iraq and KRG: Assert sovereignty over territory and demand a permanent end to Turkish airstrikes against Iraqi territory, including Sinjar. If necessary, raise this matter at the United Nations Security Council.

International Aid Community: Ensure that programs, incentives, and funding to prompt the return of Yezidis to Sinjar includes an assessment of the security risk that returnees might face. Foreign aid agencies should ensure that humanitarian programs do not unintentionally place civilians at greater risk, as determined through a sober and realistic analysis of the security threat facing civilians from actors such as ISIS and the Turkish military.

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