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Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers
Commissie voor Buitenlandse Betrekkingen

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Geachte leden van de kamer, Commissie leden, Burgers van België,

Ik dank u voor de uitnodiging om vandaag gehoord te worden voor de Resolutie 1766/01 over de erkenning en de vervolging van de tegen de Jezidi's gepleegde genocidemisdaden en over hulp aan de Jezidische bevolking. Als Nederlandse Jezidi hoop ik dat ook andere landen een voorbeeld nemen aan België en de genocide tegen de Jezidi's erkennen en hulp bieden aan hen in erbarmelijke omstandigheden. Ik zal nu verder gaan in het Engels.

I will focus on four themes today: why the crimes against Yezidis amount to genocide, why genocide recognition is critical, the value of prosecuting the perpetrators, and the necessity of humanitarian aid to help Yezidis recover and rebuild.

Yezidis have been persecuted for centuries because of our identity and religion. The international community never heard about the suffering of our people. For example, many do not know that 500,000 Yezidis were killed during the 1915 Armenian Genocide. The Daesh genocidal campaign of August 2014 against the Yezidis is the 74th such attack against our people. I was personally in Brussels in August 2014, leading a protest for help from the powers of Europe. In response to our efforts, one leading Dutch politician said that it would not be possible to determine if a genocide was occurring or not until after it was over. In such a case, our people would have all been killed. Now, seven years later, I am very pleased to support this resolution of the Belgian Parliament, and I thank the Members who have brought this resolution forward.

1. Do the Crimes against Yezidis Constitute Genocide?

Genocide, the crime of crimes, must be demonstrated not only via the actions of the perpetrators, but also the *intent*. The mass execution, abduction, sexual violence, and system of slavery and degradation must be intentional. In the case of the Daesh crimes committed against Yezidis, this is not difficult to prove. Daesh publicly announced its expectation to destroy Yezidis, not as part of a military campaign, but for the express purpose of eradication. As Daesh captured the city of Sinjar, there were buses already present to transport women and children deeper into its territory, where women were to be sold as slaves and children forced to become child soldiers, joining the so-called 'Cubs of the Caliphate'. This was planned across different groups of Daesh fighters and in different locations. Yezidi men were to be executed, but Daesh needed a system to determine who is a man and who is a boy. For that reason, Daesh members checked under the arms of older boys. Those who had hair were considered men and executed, while those who did not were abducted. This was a planned and systematic eradication. Intent was clear, from planning to implementation.

Later, those women held in Daesh captivity were registered as property to Daesh slaveholders through Daesh 'courts'. Those documents were stamped and were legally binding within Daesh's



twisted governance structure. The Daesh rationale was to execute Yezidi men, convert Yezidi children to Islam, and permanently enslave Yezidi women in service to the Caliphate generally, and to individual slaveowners, personally. It has now been well established that Daesh sought to destroy the Yezidi people through: killing its members, causing serious bodily and mental harm to the group, inflicting conditions calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction, imposing measures to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. Sadly, Daesh fulfilled literally *every single one* of the constitutive elements listed in the Genocide Convention.

The Free Yezidi Foundation has submitted to this Parliament a number of documents and other types of evidence further detailing why and how this was genocide. This has been affirmed first by the US Holocaust Museum and the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, later by a number of countries around the world, and most recently, by UNITAD.

Daesh leadership and members – both male and female – left no doubt by their words and actions: this was genocide. One anecdote: a European female Daesh member surrendered after the collapse of Daesh Caliphate in Beghouz, Syria. She explained to a member of the media at that time why slavery of Yezidis is acceptable. She said:

“They are property, so we are allowed to use them. It is not rape in Islam. You are allowed to, because they are your property, they are your slaves...They were prisoners of war, and they become slaves...”

Even today many Daesh members, male and female, still adhere to the sickening belief that the Yezidi Genocide and the associated human slave trade was and is justified.

2. Why Does Genocide Recognition Matter?

The Yezidi Genocide has devastated our already vulnerable ethno-religious minority community. Aside from the thousands murdered and thousands enslaved, the entire population from Sinjar was displaced and made homeless. If the world has learned any lessons from the Holocaust, Rwanda, and former Yugoslavia, it is that recognition of genocide is a necessary first step. If the international community cannot acknowledge what has happened, there is no realistic prospect of addressing root causes or dealing with the aftermath of such atrocities.

Ideally, Yezidis would like to see the international community adhere to the letter and spirit of the Genocide Convention that most countries have signed. In this way, recognition of the Yezidi Genocide would trigger concrete action. But aside from humanitarian aid and engagement and support from the international community, international recognition of the Yezidi Genocide has its own value.

Over the centuries, our people have suffered atrocity after atrocity. I think all Yezidis will agree that our best hope for prevention of future violations lies with recognition, acknowledgement, and a public record of the violence, the hatred, and the horrible crimes committed against our people. If we seek to stop the endless cycle of atrocities against Yezidis, we must demand the outside world call this what it is. This was genocide, and recognition is one critical step to understanding in Iraq that crimes against Yezidis are unacceptable.

3. What is the Value of Prosecution?

To allow a group of individuals to commit genocide with impunity is a failure and stain on us all. It should be noted that genocide and crimes against humanity are to be considered not only crimes against the targeted group, but against all of mankind. In this way, the international community should view the Daesh atrocities as an affront to everyone. It is inconceivable that Daesh should commit crimes against Yezidis and against common human values and avoid responsibility. I call upon Belgium's law enforcement and judicial authorities to take seriously the crimes that were committed by its own citizens, men and women, in Iraq and Syria. That includes those who facilitated the recruitment and travel of Daesh members. In my view, these individuals are not only complicit in terrorism, but also complicit in the atrocities that they helped to finance and support, including genocide and systematic slavery and sexual violence.

Thousands of individuals came to the Daesh Caliphate from abroad. The knowledge, funding, resources, and manpower that they brought were of strategic and operational importance for Daesh. Daesh committed terrorism and violations of international criminal law. Unfortunately, a worrying trend has been the prosecution of Daesh perpetrators under terrorism laws. This is because providing proof for participation in and material support for a designated terror organization is easier to prove in court. However, we must not always take the easier route toward criminal convictions. The crimes Daesh committed against Yezidis were not only terror-related crimes – they were far more sinister. If prosecutors in Iraq, Europe, and around the world are only able to legally demonstrate Daesh members as participating in terrorism, then I fear we have missed the fundamental purpose of justice and accountability for mass atrocity crimes. I therefore call upon all those with prosecuting authority, beginning in Belgium, to carefully examine the evidence and the crimes of Daesh members.

In the 20th century, Nazis committed all manner of crimes throughout the European continent. As World War II ended, the allies correctly and wisely understood the importance of accountability and demonstrating in court the gravity, the reality, and the sheer horror of the crimes that had been committed. Today, thousands of Daesh members in Iraq, Syria, and Europe remain. It is imperative that we do not allow those atrocities to be forgotten and those crimes to go unchecked. It sends a message of impunity to those who would commit similar crimes in the future and shows survivors that these unspeakable violations were never confronted by the force of law. In this sense, the hefty investment of time, energy, and resources that are required for meaningful trials are well-spent.

4. The Necessity of Humanitarian Aid for Yezidis

The need for humanitarian assistance to the Yezidi population should not be underestimated. Although Daesh has been militarily defeated, thousands of its ideological adherents remain. The damage to the Yezidi community has been massive, including physical destruction and intense trauma. Yezidis have suffered generations of discrimination, unfair treatment, and abuse. The root causes that led to 2014 have not been tackled. Without reasonable opportunity for employment, education, security, or protection, Yezidis simply will not survive in Iraq. For this reason, smart, targeted international aid to our people is absolutely necessary. Yezidis must have the chance to participate in the modern economy without being marginalized or cast aside. We therefore urge the Belgian Parliament and other parliaments to design well-crafted humanitarian aid packages to



stabilize a severely endangered Yezidi population and help provide a reasonable prospect for our surviving community to exist safely in our homeland in Iraq.

Geachte leden van de kamer, Commissie leden,

Ik heb zelf 21 mannen van mijn familie verloren, 19 meisjes en vrouwen waren ontvoerd. 17 zijn tot de dag van vandaag nog vermist. Als Jezidi verzoek ik u het volgende: erken en veroordeel de misdaad van genocide die door de Islamitische Staat in Irak en Syrië sinds 2014 tegen de Jezidi's wordt gepleegd. Eindig de straffeloosheid van misdaden gepleegd door ISIS leden, medeplichtigen en aanhangers, waaronder Belgische burgers. Biedt humanitaire hulp aan de Jezidi's. Ondersteun de Jezidi's bij herstel, rehabilitatie en de verzekering van een betere toekomst.

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