



Free Yezidi Foundation Statement

Kocho Mass Burial

4 February 2021

Kocho, Ninewa Governorate, Iraq – The Free Yezidi Foundation (FYF) will join together with Yezidi community members and organizations to lay to rest 104 Yezidis murdered in Kocho, Sinjar, on 15 and 16 August 2014 by the armed group, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).

On 3 August 2014, ISIS seized control of Sinjar in northern Iraq. In the days that followed, reports emerged of ISIS fighters killing Yezidi men, adolescent boys, and older women; and of their forcing younger Yezidi women and girls into holding sites to be registered and sold. Later, news would circulate of young Yezidi boys being taken to ISIS “cub camps”, where they were indoctrinated and trained. It was quickly apparent that the Yezidis were targets of ISIS attacks. ISIS publicly declared its intention to eradicate the Yezidis from its “caliphate”.

Kocho village was encircled for twelve days, with no attempt made to rescue the residents trapped inside. On 15 August 2014, ISIS fighters ordered the Yezidis of Kocho to assemble in the village school. The women and younger children were forced upstairs, while the men and older boys were made to stay on the ground floor. Shortly after, ISIS fighters forced the men and boys out of the school at gunpoint. They were taken to various locations around the village, where ISIS opened fire. Almost all of Kocho’s men and adolescent boys were murdered on the afternoon of 15 August 2014. ISIS is said to have used a bulldozer to pile earth on top of the remains. Later that day, ISIS moved the Yezidi women and children to Solagh, where, in the early hours of 16 August, they separated women who were past child-bearing age and executed them. That grave too has been recently exhumed. ISIS transferred the surviving Yezidi women and children deeper inside the “caliphate” where the women and girls were forced into a system of brutal sexual enslavement, and the myriad of violations that entailed, while the young boys were separated from their mothers to be indoctrinated, trained, and forced to fight. This was a pre-determined, organized, methodological campaign of religious-based extermination based on ISIS’ perverse ideology. It was not a war or a battle. This was genocide.

Now, after some bodies have been exhumed and some have been identified, 104 Yezidis will finally receive proper Yezidi burial rites. Many survivors will be present to bury their family members and bid them a dignified farewell.

FYF has worked with a large number of survivors from Kocho, some of whom have bravely provided their accounts about the systematic nature of the ISIS attacks, executions, subsequent enslavement, and other atrocities they have suffered. FYF and others are working to ensure that those who perpetrated these crimes are held accountable, wherever they are located. In so doing we help carve a path to justice for the Yezidis: those who were killed and the survivors as well.

FYF is among those providing psychosocial support services to Yezidi survivors and family members during the emotional burial ceremony on 6 February 2021 in Kocho. Aside from this burial service, Yezidi survivors generally require specialized, sustained trauma treatment. We



again call upon the international community to focus on *recovery and psycho-social treatment*, not only reconstruction, in efforts to protect and support the Yezidi community in building a brighter future for the next generation. We stand in solidarity with the hundreds of survivors of Kocho and we mourn for those we have lost.

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For more information, visit www.freeyezidi.org.

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