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### **Written statement<sup>\*</sup> submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 August 2017]

## **REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNISE THE ISIS ATROCITIES AGAINST CHRISTIANS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES AS GENOCIDE AND TAKE IMMEDIATE APPROPRIATE ACTION**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In May of 2017, the ECLJ submitted its third written and oral testimony to this Council requesting that the United Nations (U.N.) join other international bodies and publically proclaim that Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria are victims of genocide and deserving of international assistance and protection. Despite our persistent efforts in drawing this Council's attention to the issue, and the increasing evidence, this body has yet again remained silent while the Islamic State ("ISIS") has continued and even spread its systematic and targeted acts of genocide against Christians and other religious minorities.

As the ECLJ has submitted before, the actions of ISIS against Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria clearly embody the definition of genocide as enshrined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide<sup>2</sup>. The ISIS campaign to destroy these religious minorities and decimate their homelands and cultures undoubtedly meets the definition of genocide, yet the world's premier international body has thus far failed to recognise it as such. In failing to do so, these vulnerable groups remain unprotected and in peril.

Moreover, ISIS and its affiliates are spreading their attacks to regions of the world beyond Iraq and Syria. There have been recent attacks in the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium. ISIS has carried out attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt. Even Southeast Asia is affected, as ISIS attempts to gain a foothold in the Philippines. It is imperative that the international community join together to stop this growing threat.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

While most of the Islamic State's genocidal atrocities have occurred in Iraq and Syria, the rest of the world is vulnerable to attack.

For instance, in February 2015, ISIS "released a video of 21 Coptic Christians from Egypt being executed on a Libyan beach"<sup>3</sup>. Also in 2015, the Islamic State executed at least 30 Ethiopian Christians in Libya<sup>4</sup>.

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2 Genocide is "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, art. II, Dec. 9, 1948.

3 Elliott C. McLaughlin, *ISIS Executes More Christians in Libya, Video Shows*, CNN (20 Apr. 2015), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/19/africa/libya-isis-executions-ethiopian-christians/>.

4 *Id.*

In June 2016, “[e]ight suicide bombers launched two waves of attacks on the Christian town of Al Qaa in northeastern Lebanon”<sup>5</sup>. The New York Times reported that “[f]our attackers blew themselves up in the town before dawn, killing five people and wounding a dozen others, according to local officials. Four more attacks took place at night as residents prepared for funerals to be held on Tuesday morning, wounding 11 more people”. According to reports, “nearly all experts believe it was carried out by ISIS fighters who infiltrated al-Qaa from nearby Syria”<sup>6</sup>. As one expert explained, “*Make no mistake, the[y] targeted [the] village for one reason: it is Christian*”<sup>7</sup>.

In July 2016, ISIS “soldiers” slit the throat of an 85 year old Catholic priest in a church near Normandy, France, during Mass<sup>8</sup>. According to French officials, “[o]ne of the two suspects in the attack was known to anti-terror authorities after attempting a trip to Syria”<sup>9</sup>. The spread of ISIS genocide against Christians should come as no surprise: “For two years, the black-clad jihadist army has called for attacks on Christians in Rome, throughout Europe and across the world. It has even called for the assassination of Pope Francis”<sup>10</sup>.

In February 2017, ISIS released a video making reference to its December 2016 bombing of a Christian church in Egypt, and described Christians as its “favorite prey”<sup>11</sup>. Just weeks later, ISIS claimed responsibility for the bombing of two churches on Palm Sunday in Egypt that killed 49 and injured more than one hundred people<sup>12</sup>. More recently, ISIS claimed responsibility for the failed attack on Saint Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai. While the attack failed, ISIS “has vowed more attacks against Christians in Egypt”<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>Ben Hubbard & Hwaida Saad, *Elaborate Suicide Attack Hits Christian Village in Lebanon*, N.Y. TIMES (27 June 2016),

[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/28/world/middleeast/al-qaa-lebanon-suicide-bombers.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/28/world/middleeast/al-qaa-lebanon-suicide-bombers.html?_r=0).

<sup>6</sup>Johnnie Moore, *After Fallujah, ISIS Moves to Lebanon and Targets Christians*, FOXNEWS.COM (2 July 2016), <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2016/07/02/after-fallujah-isis-moves-to-lebanon-and-targets-christians.html>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* (emphasis added).

<sup>8</sup>Noemie Olive, *Islamists Attack French Church, Slit Priest’s Throat*, REUTERS (27 July 2016), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-hostages-idUSKCN1060VA>.

<sup>9</sup>Hamdi Alkhshali & Schams Elwazer, *Suicide Bombing Kills Dozens in Syria*, CNN (27 July 2016), <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/27/middleeast/syria-isis-suicide-bombing/>.

<sup>10</sup>Malia Zimmerman, *Murder of French Priest Brings ISIS’ Long-threatened War on Christians to Europe*,

FOXNEWS.COM (26 July 2016),

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/07/26/murder-french-priest-brings-isis-long-threatened-war-on-christians-to-europe.html>.

<sup>11</sup>*ISIS Egypt Affiliate: Christians are Our ‘Favorite Prey’*, FOXNEWS.COM (20 Feb. 2017), <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/02/20/isis-egypt-affiliate-christians-are-our-favorite-prey.html>.

<sup>12</sup>Joe Sterling, Faith Karimi, Mohammed Tawfeeq, & Hamdi Alkhshali, *ISIS Claims Responsibility for Palm Sunday*

*Church Bombings in Egypt*, CNN.COM (10 Apr. 2017, 2:00 AM),

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/09/middleeast/egypt-church-explosion/index.html>.

<sup>13</sup>*ISIS Claims Attack on Police Checkpoint Near Renowned Egypt Monastery*, FOXNEWS.COM (18 Apr. 2017),

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/04/18/policeman-killed-when-gunmen-attack-renowned-egypt-monastery.html>.

In 2016, an online ISIS video shows the beheading of three Christian captives after viewers “who cannot travel to the Middle East [are urged] to go instead ‘to the Philippines’”<sup>14</sup>. In May 2017, members of the Maute, an Islamic militant organization that has pledged support to ISIS, carried out an attack in the city of Marawi on the island of Mindanao, Philippines. The attack resulted in the murders of 103 people<sup>15</sup>. More than 100 Christians were held hostage, tortured, and used as sex slaves<sup>16</sup>.

The United Nations must stand against the evils of the ongoing genocide and use all available options to stop the genocide and protect the victims – by implementing appropriate penal tribunals, coordinating a more effective use of coalition military force, administering a more efficient delivery of aid, and providing meaningful in-region protection for victims such as the establishment of safe-zones. The Charter of the United Nations demands no less, and through the organs of the United Nations, equipped and empowered by the Genocide Convention, the United Nations has the unique capability, and the responsibility, to end the genocide and protect the Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities victimized thereby.

As Nadia Murad, a religious minority survivor of ISIS genocide and the United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human trafficking, laments:

“We heard the sound of shots. At first, we believed people had come to help us, but when we looked out of the windows . . . we saw them killing the men . . . *we cried to the U.N., Europe, Kurdistan and Iraq but nobody came to help us. Today, the village is surrounded by mass graves*”<sup>17</sup>.

We must not allow the silent screams and tearless cries of Christians and other religious minorities to go unanswered.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

While the ECLJ calls for swift and decisive action by the international community to stop the genocide and protect the victims, it also understands that first the U.N. *must* recognize that the atrocities constitute genocide. A declaration by this Council that ISIS is engaged in genocide against Christians and other religious minorities and action by this Council calling for the U.N. Security Council (and other appropriate organs of the U.N.) to follow suit would carry significant weight.

Therefore, the ECLJ urges the U.N. to join other international bodies and formally recognize that the ongoing atrocities committed by ISIS against Christians, Yazidis, and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the world constitute genocide for purposes of implicating

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14James Griffiths, *ISIS in Southeast Asia: Philippines Battles Growing Threat*, CNN.COM (29 May 2017, 8:55 PM), <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/28/asia/isis-threat-southeast-asia/index.html>.

15 *Id.*

16Stoyan Zaimov, *ISIS Jihadists Torturing Christians in Philippines*, CHRISTIANPOST.COM (28 June 2017, 7:44 AM), <http://www.christianpost.com/news/isis-jihadists-torturing-christians-philippines-soldiers-find-decapitated-bodies-189911/>.

17Stoyan Zaimov, *Schoolgirl Raped Every Day for 6 Months by ISIS ‘Beast’*, CHRISTIANPOST.COM (25 July 2017, 8:22 AM), <http://www.christianpost.com/news/schoolgirl-raped-every-day-6-months-isis-beast-who-picked-her-out-of-150girls-193136/> (emphasis added).

the obligations of the international community pursuant to the Genocide Convention and the well-established responsibility to protect.

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