

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM R O U N D T A B L E

Washington, D.C.

October 5, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write as an informal and diverse group of non-governmental organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious leaders, and human rights advocates to express our grave concern for religious minorities, among them Yezidis, Christians and Shia Muslims, at the hands of the Islamic State. We urge you to formally declare the systematic destruction of these ancient communities a genocide.

Mounting evidence indisputably shows the Islamic State's ongoing genocidal campaign in the Middle East through its attempts to create a global caliphate devoid of religious freedom and diversity. For more than a year, the news headlines have been replete with stories of almost unimaginable human suffering caused by the Islamic State. Religious minorities in these lands, among them the ancient Christian, Yezidi and Shia Muslim communities, have suffered grave injustices: displacement, forced conversion, kidnapping, rape and death.

As you know, Article II of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as:

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.

Since the beginning of its swift and destructive rise, the Islamic State has committed all of these against Yezidis, Christians, Shia Muslims and other religious minorities in whole and in part through a calculated system of atrocity.

Furthermore, the intent to commit genocide can be clearly seen in the Islamic State's ideology, as outlined in its propaganda, which calls for the eradication or subjugation of those who do not conform to the group's ideology. In Iraq, this has manifested most blatantly in the insurgency's treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, members of whom have been killed, tortured,

kidnapped, raped, enslaved, brainwashed, forcibly converted and/or driven from their ancient homelands.

A report released in March from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq states, “It is reasonable to conclude that some of these incidents, considering the overall information, may constitute genocide.” Furthermore, the report calls for the Security Council “to remain seized of and address, in the strongest terms, information that points to genocide.” It is imperative that the United States government and the global community universally acknowledge this issue as such.

As opposed to previous such instances in modern history, there has been no attempt by the Islamic State to conceal its actions. On the contrary, the group shamelessly broadcasts decapitations, crucifixions, forced drownings and other horrors with the sole purpose of spreading its message of destruction and recruiting more agents to the ranks of its diabolical insurgency.

Under the Islamic State, religious minorities now face an existential crisis and live on the edge of extinction in the lands that many have inhabited since antiquity. These communities will continue on a trajectory of tragic and precipitous decline into eventual non-existence without swift moral leadership on behalf of the administration and the international community.

It is our belief that officially declaring and subsequently halting this genocide and its spread is a matter of vital moral and strategic importance for the United States, the international community, and the overall state of religious freedom around the world. Perhaps equally as important, such a declaration will give a stronger voice to the long-suffering victims while furthering and sharpening ideological engagement against those currently at the forefront of this campaign.

We humbly request that your office publicly acknowledge and denounce the Islamic State’s actions as genocide and act with all due haste to ensure that this ongoing, abominable crime is halted, prevented and punished and that the religious freedom and human dignity of all people currently suffering under the Islamic State are allowed to flourish.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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