


U.N. Report: ISIS Is Committing Genocide Against Yazidis

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From Opposing Viewpoints in Context

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MONTAGNE: When the Islamic State seized territory in northern Iraq a couple years ago, among the hardest hit was a minority group, the Yazidis. In their ancestral home, many escaped up their sacred Mount Sinjar. Still, thousands of women were carried off into slavery while their men were massacred. A new report from the U.N.'s Human Rights Commission accuses ISIS of genocide, detailing how ISIS is attempting to wipe out the Yazidis in their home territory. Vitit Muntarbhorn is one of the authors. Thank you for joining us.

MUNTARBHORN: Thank you.

MONTAGNE: We have heard about the Yazidis when ISIS overran the area they live in. But remind us why they are especially targeted by the Islamic State.

MUNTARBHORN: The Yazidis are a very old community with their own religion. And unfortunately, and wrongly, they are classified as devil worshipers by ISIS. And this is a very major reason why they are not only persecuted by ISIS, but they're also targeted for destruction by ISIS. That does not see the Yazidis as so-called people of the book, who might exist with ISIS.

MONTAGNE: Yes, because their religion certainly does predate Christianity. It's an ancient religion.

MUNTARBHORN: Absolutely. But unfortunately, they've been classified wrongly as kafirs, so to speak, in terms of being pagan and being infidels. And this is why they are particularly targeted for destruction through the very open policies and literature of ISIS, which can be found on the internet.

MONTAGNE: Well, tell us about that. ISIS treats Yazidis as spoils of war when it comes to the women and as people who should be destroyed when it comes to the men and boys.

MUNTARBHORN: There's a very sort of clear, organized (unintelligible) policy behind what this group does. For example, when people are taken as spoils of war, particularly women, they can be sold. And they are sold. One victim testimony that I read was that the person was sold 15 times into sexual enslavement, as well as other forms of enslavement, such as forced labor.

MONTAGNE: So it's all very organized, and it's according to certain rules.

MUNTARBHORN: Indeed, absolutely - abused multiple times, physically attacked, injured, as well as sexually attacked - and ultimately, because so little has been done to help the Yazidis, when the women are seeking to escape, often they also land up in the trap of having to pay between \$20,000 to \$40,000 to escape and come back to their family.

MONTAGNE: Is there any expectation that this report - well, it moves it to another level in terms of what the public knows and in terms of governments, those member states of the U.N. - is there anything that will happen for these people?

MUNTARBHORN: We would hope that this would trigger more immediate and more effective and assertive action, particularly from the top, particularly the Security Council. And what is important, also, is that the Security Council already has sanctions, already has resolutions against terrorist groups, including ISIS. So another possibility, perhaps, is to extend the existing measures to cover ISIS in terms of referring them as perpetrators to the International Criminal Court.

MONTAGNE: Thank you very much for joining us.

MUNTARBHORN: Thank you very much.

MONTAGNE: Vitit Muntarbhorn is a member of the Independent U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Syria.

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