



# EZIDEN WELTWEIT

## INITIATIVE FOR EZIDIS AROUND THE WORLD

In the village of Kocho, located in an arid field in the southern side of Sinjar Mountain, volunteers are painstakingly digging graves for 104 victims of the 2014 genocide.

For those surviving members of the village, the burial is a chance to remember the eternal sacrifices made by their friends and family members. In a single moment, it offers victims the dignity of traditional funeral rites that were so brutally stolen from them.

The remains of over a hundred Yazidis were painstakingly exhumed alongside some 17 other mass graves and were subsequently transferred to Baghdad for DNA analysis by UNITAD and the ICMP. The process has been long and harrowing for family members. For the majority of survivors, they have waited 6 years with no semblance of justice and no answers as to the final resting place of their loved ones. The sense of loss and anguish is insurmountable, yet this juncture gives hope that Yazidis of Sinjar may find some manner of peace. It puts forth the opportunity for family members to sit by the grave and pray; to visit them during the proper feast periods.

Sinjar remains the site of one of the most brutal genocides in living memory. When the Islamic State invaded the village of Kocho on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2014, hundreds of Yazidis were forced to flee into the mountains. Many died of dehydration; the majority were infants and children. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2014, those that remained in the village, including Nobel Peace Laureate Nadia Murad, were forced into a secondary school and taken captive. Men, boys and elderly women were systematically removed in groups and subsequently executed. Nadia's brother Saeed was one of them. He was shot six times by a young ISIS fighter, and only survived because he was left for dead amongst the many bodies. The true number of killings remains unknown. Many were denied the chance to say goodbye to their loved ones. In a single day, IS stole every ounce of principle that should be afforded to them.

Some 3000 Yazidis remain missing and each day makes identification more challenging. Some are believed to have been trafficked to Turkey or Libya, while others are presumed dead. Some remains may never be found partly due to the sheer number of unexploded ordinance left behind when IS fled the area. Some fragments of bone have simply been scattered and vanished entirely. As a result, the process of identifying and cataloguing remains may take years.

The final burial process is one that Yazidis of Sinjar are becoming all too familiar to. The mixture of grief and trepidation, the ceremony and melodic prayers, the agonising goodbyes; all cause huge amounts of distress and re-traumatisation of survivors. There remains a sliver of hope that this is perhaps one final step towards closure.

The funeral procession in Baghdad and subsequent burial will take place on February 4<sup>th</sup> and February 6<sup>th</sup> of this year.

Our condolences remain with the families.



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