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INFORMATION FILE - II

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## **Genocide against Ezidi Kurds**

**The systematic attacks against Ezidi Kurds (Yezidi) from 3-24 August 2014 must be carefully documented and investigated.**

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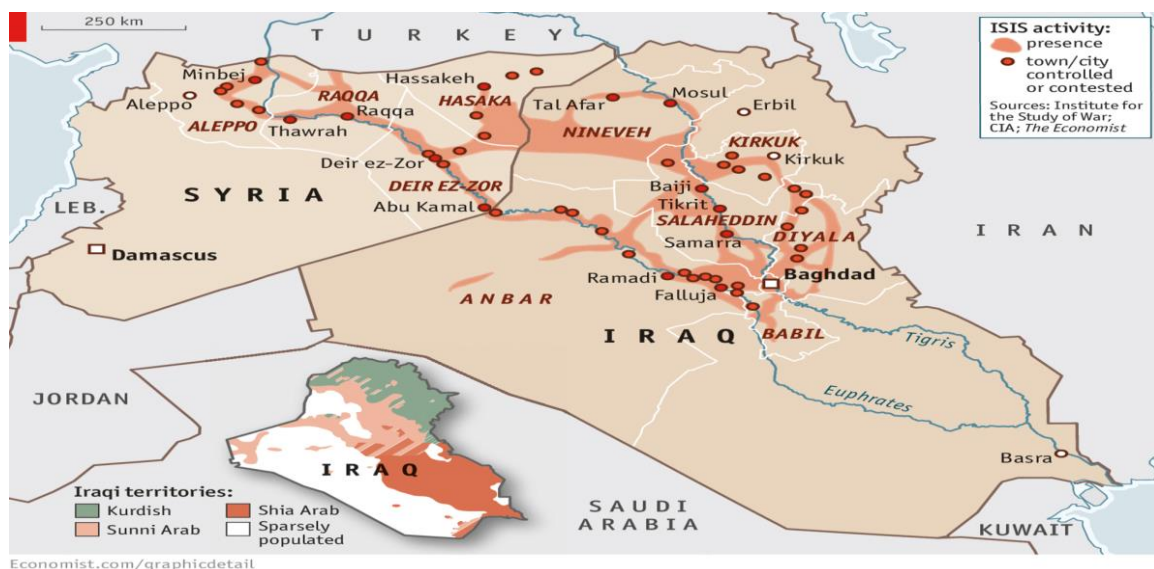
## Introduction

In this dossier we wish to share with you important information about the ongoing war in Syria and Iraq. As you will gather from this information there is a great war happening in the Middle East and especially throughout Kurdistan. The report also shows that the terrorists of ISIS are carrying out a whole scale massacre and an act of genocide against the Kurdish people and other ethnic and religious groups (*Shia, Christian, Ezidi (Yezidi) etc.*) in the region. Kurds are engaged in a legitimate war of self-defence to put an end to this dirty war against humanity. They are fighting ISIS with limited arms and military technology and only have their willpower and the support of the people. The tragedy is that Kurds have been left alone in this war which threatens all of humanity. Despite this the Kurds are resolute in resisting.

## ISIS's attacks in Kurdistan are continuing in Rojava Kurdistan and on the border Iraq-Syria.

When the uprisings began in Syria, the people of Rojava-Kurdistan ("*Rojava*" is the kurdish word for "west", i.e. West Kurdistan/Northern Syria) took their place in the revolution. The Kurds, along with the Assyrians, Keladanis, Arabs and Armenians began to protect their territories by keeping it outside the conflict. The people of Rojava established their self-administration and have been ruling themselves for over two years. This situation led to certain chauvinistic forces, namely the Baathist regime and the Salafists (*ISIS, Al-Nusra and the Islamic Front*), to attack Rojava.

The Turkish state, who does not want the Kurds to be a force in the region, has both supported the attackers and closed of its border with the region to apply an embargo against the Kurds.



Until the middle of 2013, the attacks were sporadic. However, since July of 2013, the ISIS led onslaught has turned into a systematic attempt at annihilation and destruction. For the past fourteen months, the regions of *Cezire, Kobani, Afrin (three Cantons in Rojava-Kurdistan, Syria)* and the Kurdish boroughs in *Allepo* have been under relentless attack. ISIS, has promoted the killing of Kurds as part of the Jihad, and has religiously legitimised the looting of Kurdish property and the taking of Kurdish women as concubines.

### **Humanitarian safe corridor on the border Iraq-Syria for civilian**

With the taking of Mosul, 10th June 2014, ISIS gained many opportunities. On the 2nd of August, ISIS began a new attack against Kurdistan. ISIS attacked the Ezidi (Yezide) town of Sengal and prepared for a massacre. Following this development, YPG forces fought their way through ISIS and reached mount Sengal. Here they created a safe corridor for the hundreds of thousands of Ezidi's trapped on the mountain without any water or food to cross into Rojava Kurdistan. There are still over ten thousand Ezidis on mount Sengal.



Foto: Kurdish Guerrilla, helping civilians on their way to Rojava

ISIS is now beginning to attack the corridor formed by the YPG. Their aim is to break this corridor to massacre the remaining people on the mountain. To this end, on the 18th of August ISIS deployed all of its heavy artillery to the Rojava end of the corridor in *Je`zaa* (town situated on the Syria-Iraq border). According to the information coming through more than 24 YPG fighters lost their life in clashes with ISIS gangs in the *Ja`zaa*. At least more than 140 ISIS militants were killed in the last five days of heavy clashes in *Ja`zaa* and the villages of *Bêgara, Hemedan, Zerga* and *Arcê*. The ISIS attacks are still continuing. However, the world has turned a blind eye to this resistance and the attacks of ISIS in this region.

The Western forces and its public realised just how inhuman this ISIS organisation is during its attacks in Iraq. Against ISIS's attacks, Iraq and Southern Kurdistan are being supported by Western powers. However, this support is not being offered to the people of Rojava; despite the fact that the most effective resistance against ISIS has been ongoing in Rojava.

The Rojava region is still enduring an embargo. Hundreds of thousands of people in Rojava, including the Ezidis, are awaiting international attention and humanitarian support. The threat of ISIS in Rojava has not been nullified. If ISIS succeeds in its attacks in Rojava, a worse humanitarian tragedy is at the door.



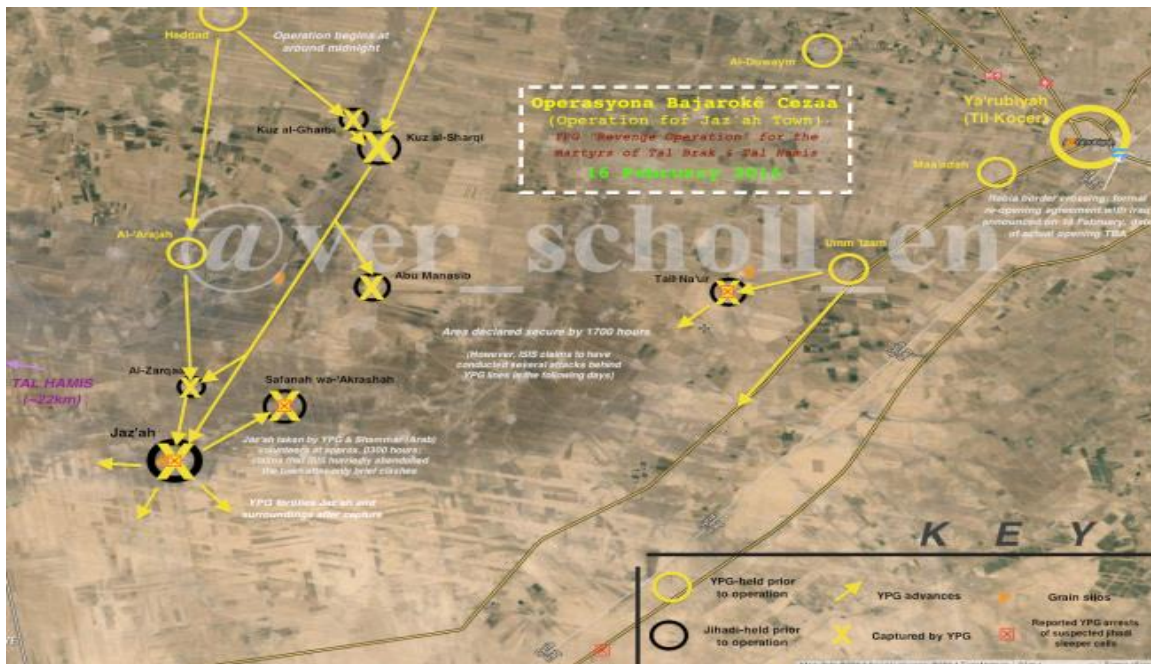
In light of this; the embargo on Rojava should be lifted with immediate effect and the freedom struggle of the people of Rojava must be supported.

- **Within this framework, our urgent call is for the UN and the EU to get into contact with the administration in Rojava in order to offer the necessary support.**
- *We call upon the international community to include Rojava-Kurdistan (Western-Kurdistan, Syria) in the support and humanitarian aid that is being provided to South Kurdistan (Iraq).*
- *Also, we appeal to the international community to lift the embargo and to open access to the borders that are closed in Rojava.*
- *We call for an independent and impartial legal investigation into the crimes committed against the Ezidi community by ISIS in the Sinjar region.*
- ***The People of Rojava Resisting against ISIS Must be supported!***

## Massacres against Ezidis (Yezidis) in *Kocho* village by the ISIS

During heavy clashes around Sinjar-Mountain are continuing new attacks by ISIS terrorists on the Iraq-Syria border. Clashes broke out between HPG (*People's Defence Forces*), YBŞ (*Shengal Resistance Units*) and gangs calling themselves Islamic State (IS) in the area *Cezaa* (in Arabic *Ja`zaa*) province, *Bêgara*, *Hemedan*, *Zerga* and *Arcê* villages. ISIS is trying to seize the security corridor which is protected by YPG between *Til Kocer* and *Sinjar* (*Shengal*). This corridor, created by YPG, prevent greater massacres saved the life of thousands of Kurdish Ezidis.

Meanwhile, heavy clashes broke out between the resistance defending *Sinjar* and ISIS gangs in the village of *Heyalê* on 20 August. The HPG (*Peoples defence Forces*) and YBŞ (*Sinjar Resistance units*) destroyed few vehicle and killed many gang members and the gangs had to flee from the village. The village has been totally liberated.



*Kocho*, an Ezidi village inhabited by 250 families, had been surrounded by IS fighters since 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2014. All personal firearms were initially seized from the Ezidi families upon an order by one of the IS commanders, called *Abu Hamza*. The same commander issued an ultimatum to the Ezidi villagers with the message: “**Convert to Islam or face death within 24 hours**”. As the deadline for the imposed ultimatum passed, IS-gangs informed the villagers that nothing would happen to them, regardless of the ultimatum. Similar ultimatums were imposed in the nearby villages of *Tal Qasab* and *Hatamiya*. In the latter village, many Ezidis succeeded in escaping during the first days of the arrival of IS to the area. This resulted in a tightened encirclement of *Kocho* by way of reinforcing positions at three locations around the village by IS fighters.



On 15<sup>th</sup> August 2014, IS gangs gathered all villagers in the primary school, which they had turned into their headquarters, and divided men and women into separate groups. The women were taken to an unidentified location and their whereabouts are still unknown. The boys and men were pushed into the back of a KIA pick-up vehicle, in groups of 20-25 persons, and driven away to a location between 500-1000m from the village. At least three groups were taken away in this way. The boys and men were lined up and forced to crouch on the ground in a tight cluster. One ISIS gang filmed them, and then several other ISIS terrorists opened fire under while screaming *Allahu Akbar* in Arabic ('*God is Great*'). The youngest victim was 10-12 years old and the oldest was an 80 year-old man.

Several of the victims who were wounded but surrounded by dead bodies pretended they were dead and later managed to escape after the ISIS gangs had left the execution scene. Three of the survivors were interviewed by Amnesty International's Senior Crisis Response Adviser in northern Iraq, *Mrs. Donatella Rovera* (see annex).

The first statements from victims from *Kocho* village provide strong testimonies of ISIS attacks against the civilian Ezidi population. The execution of men and boys and the hostage taking of women must be investigated thoroughly as they constitute grave breaches of international criminal law and international humanitarian law. The element of "intention" must be properly investigated in this regard (*to see if it conforms to the 'intent' stated in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948*) as the information collected until now strongly indicates that the attack on the Ezidis of *Kocho*-village may amount to an act of genocide. The broad and systematic attack on Ezidi civilians between 3<sup>rd</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> August 2014 must also be carefully documented and investigated.

## **A grave humanitarian crisis in Kurdistan and Mesopotamia**

After the Islamic State (IS), also known by the acronyms ISIS, ISIL and DAISH, attacked regions west of Mosul city in Nineveh governorate on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2014, more than 450,000 people were displaced. Most of them belonged to the rich mosaic of minority communities in the region. The Sinjar region has for thousands of years been the homeland of several ancient religious communities and minority faiths such as the Yazidis, Christians, Kakais and Chaldeans. Ethnic communities such as Arabs, Assyrians, Kurds and Turkmens make up most of its population. This rich and diverse geographic area is an essential part of ancient Mesopotamia.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2014, IS armed forces took control of the Sinjar region after a large attack that caused an unexpected withdrawal by the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. Without any early warning or evacuation plans, the minority communities of the region fled in panic, fearing deadly attacks and persecution by the radical jihadist group. More than 200,000 Ezidis in Sinjar city fled to Mount-Sinjar, a 100 km-long mountain range. Those who were left behind in the city and in adjacent villages were taken hostage or killed in summary executions. Following the mass exodus of the Ezidis, the international community saw a grave humanitarian crisis unfold, as IS fighters encircled the mountain area from all sides. Close to 50,000 Ezidis were trapped on Mount-Sinjar without access to food, water, medicine or shelter.



As Mount-Sinjar was in the proximity of the Syrian border, a Syrian Kurdish armed group, *People's Defense Forces*, YPG, intervened during the first 48 hours to open a humanitarian corridor from where the Ezidis could reach help in Syria, after 12-24 hours of walking. Many elderly and children died of dehydration or exhaustion. Iraqi and Kurdish authorities, together with UN agencies and humanitarian organisations, sought desperate measures to reach the stranded Ezidis by airdrops of humanitarian aid. As the world had turned its attention to Mount-Sinjar to engage in concerted efforts for delivering aid and life-saving assistance, IS fighters perpetrated a mass killing in an Ezidi village 15km south of Sinjar city.



**Annex:**

**Testimonies from Kocho: The village ISIS tried to wipe off the map**

August 18, 2014

Donatella Rovera

*Elias* - One of the survivors of an ISIS attack on Kocho, northern Iraq.

Elias, a 59-year-old nurse, told me: "At 11-11.30 (on Friday 15 August) ISIS called all the residents to the secondary school, which has been their headquarters since they came to the village two weeks ago. There they asked that we hand over our money, our mobile phones, and for the women to hand over their jewelers. After about 15 minutes they brought vehicles and started to fill them up with men and boys. They pushed about 20 of us onto the back of a Kia pick-up vehicle and drove us about one kilometer east of the village. They got us off the vehicle by the pool and made us crouch on the ground in a tight cluster and one of them photographed us. I thought then they'd let us go after that, but they opened fire at us from behind us. I was hit in the left knee, but the bullet only grazed my knee."

He showed me a bullet-sized hole in his trousers, by his injured knee.

*"I let myself fall forward, as if I were dead, and I stayed there face down without moving. When the shooting stopped I kept still and after they left, I ran away. Five or six others were also alive and they also ran from the place. The rest were all killed. I know two of them, they were right next to me: Khider Matto Qasem, 28, and Ravo Mokri Salah, about 80 years old. I don't know who the others were; I was too scared to look around, I couldn't focus. I don't know what happened to my family, my wife, my seven children, my son's wife and their two children; I don't know if they are dead or alive or where they are. I can't contact anyone as they took our mobile phones."*

*Khider*, a 17-year-old student, told me that he was also part of the first group of men and youths who were bundled into vehicles and taken to the village's outskirts to be shot.

*"There was no order, they (ISIS) just filled up vehicles indiscriminately. Me and my cousin, Ghaleb Elias, were pushed into the same vehicle. We were next to each other as they lined us up on the ground. He was killed. He was the same age as me, and worked as daily labourer, mostly in construction. I have no news of what happened to my parents and my four brothers and six sisters. Did they kill them? Did they abduct them? I don't know anything about them."*

Khider escaped with what looked like a superficial bullet wound to his back.



Khalaf - one of the few survivors of an ISIS attack on Kocho, northern Iraq

A third survivor, *Khalaf*, a 32-year-old father of three young children, told me: *“I was in the third group. Before me, they (ISIS) took away two other vehicles full of men and youth. We were driven a very short distance east, maybe 200 – 300 meters. There was nobody else where we were taken. We were 20 or 25 crammed in the back of the pick-up, I don’t know for sure. When we got there they made us stand in a row and then one of them shouted ‘God is Great’ [‘Allahu Akbar’] and then there was shooting. There were maybe 10 of them (ISIS) but they were behind us, I don’t know how many of them opened fire. I was hit twice, in the left hip and the left calf.*

*“After the shooting stopped I heard the vehicles leave and another man and I got up and ran. I went in one direction and he in the other. I don’t know where he is now. I don’t know where anyone is, my children, and my family. Where are they? Have they taken them? How can I find them? Among those killed near me was Amin Salah Qasem, the brother of the Elias [the nurse who survived the first group killing], and his son ‘Asem, aged 10-12, and seven others whose names I know and another 10 or 12 whose names I don’t know because I could not see properly. I was so terrified; I kept my head down and when it became quiet and I was sure they had left I just ran away.”*

**Unknown death toll** The total number of those killed in Kocho is not known. According to the three survivors I interviewed, after assembling the villagers at the local school, ISIS fighters took away at least three groups of men and boys to be killed – 20-25 at a time. Most of the men and boys in the first and third groups were killed, while it is believed between six and eight managed to escape. It is not known if any survived in the second group, also numbering 20-25 people. It is not known how many other groups suffered the same fate. There are reports that hundreds of men, women and children from Kocho were taken to Tal Afar – halfway between Sinjar and Mosul – where ISIS groups are holding other abducted Ezidi civilians. But that could not yet be confirmed.

According to Kocho residents with whom I had been in contact prior to the incident, the village had a population of more than 1,200. Contact has been lost with them since Friday. Their relatives living elsewhere remain unable to get in touch and are extremely concerned for their safety.

Kocho had been under siege by ISIS groups since they took control of the Sinjar region on 3 August, and contact with residents has since been difficult.

Survivors of last Friday's killing told me that pressure from ISIS fighters increased significantly a week ago, after residents of the nearby village of Hatemiyah, which had similarly been surrounded by ISIS, managed to escape:

*"Since then surveillance on us became much tighter. We couldn't go anywhere or do anything. We just stayed in our homes. ISIS initially demanded that we should convert [to the armed group's fundamentalist brand of Sunni Islam] but later said we did not need to if we did not want to, and said nothing would happen to us. But we were afraid."*

As it turns out, the people of Kocho were right to be afraid.

Now the pressure is on to find out what has happened to the rest of Kocho's residents.

Source: <http://livewire.amnesty.org/2014/08/18/testimonies-from-kocho-the-village-isis-tried-to-wipe-off-the-map/>

## **Conclusion**

What is less well known, and under reported in the media, is the brutal attacks against innocent civilians, Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians and Arabs in Rojava (*Western Kurdistan, Syria*), many of whom have fled there from other parts of war-torn Syria and are now among the over 1.4 million IDPs there, who have so far been unsupported by international UN or IRC humanitarian aid.

Since the occupation of Mosul on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, ISIS has vastly intensified its attacks in Iraq and has perpetrated numerous massacres aimed against specific communities. Firstly the *Christians (Assyrians-Chaldeans)* were targeted, their churches destroyed, people killed, properties confiscated and thousands forced to flee for their lives from ancestral lands that their families had lived on for thousands of years. The *Yezidis, Shebeks* and Kurdish Muslims in Mosul, and the *Shia Turkmens* in Telafer have suffered similar atrocities and violations.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> August this year, ISIS attacked the town of Sinjar, near Mosul. Sinjar is populated by the Ezidi (Yezidi) Kurds, and home to their holy places. The ISIS attacks and threats to murder anyone who resisted them have forced over one hundred thousand people to flee their city and take refuge in the surrounding mountains, where there is now an ongoing humanitarian crisis of mammoth and unprecedented proportions. At the same time, ISIS has taken tens of thousands of people hostage, and there are confirmed reports of the murder of many of the men, and the raping and selling of Ezidi (Yezidi) women and girls as slaves.

The ISIS threat, as it continues to advance across both Iraq and Syria wreaking barbarous vengeance on anyone in its path, endangers not only the innocent civilians, men, women and children, but the whole region, and indeed the world. It is a radical fundamentalist Islamist, Jihadist and Salafi group that commands a wide international network, recruiting young and easily radicalised men from many countries, including European ones.

At the start of the uprising in Syria, many governments, including western ones, failed to see ISIS as a threat and instead regarded it leniently because it was supposedly opposed to the Assad regime and appeared to be fighting alongside of the *Free Syrian Army*. Unfortunately ISIS is still supported by *Qatar, Saudi Arabia* and *Turkey*, in spite of the fact that ISIS threatens the stability of the whole region, and targets all non-Muslims (*Christians, Yezidis, Druzes*) as well as *Shias, Alevites* and all Kurds irrespective of their faith.

It is vital for the peace of the region and the lives of all its people, that ISIS is defeated and that all support from regional states is withdrawn immediately.

The Kurds stand as the dominant force against ISIS in Syria and in Iraq. Yet the Rojava Kurds (*Western Kurdistan*), where the YPG, YBŞ (*Shengal Resistance Units*) are defending their borders against ISIS attacks and defending villages and their populations against pillage, murder, rape and abductions, have not had the necessary support they require and deserve.

***We call upon the international community to include Rojava-Kurdistan (Western-Kurdistan, Syria) in the support and humanitarian aid that is being provided to South Kurdistan (Iraq).***

***Also, we appeal to the international community to lift the embargo and to open access to the borders that are closed in Rojava.***

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