

Attitudes of Sinjari Yezidi IDPs toward Babies of ISIS Rapes of Yezidis

Intended remarks of Dr. Paul M. Kingery, American Researcher and Executive Director of MedEast Organization, a 10 year veteran of aid efforts in the Kurdistan Region, former Chairman of the Board of Rwanga Organization, former Professor and Chair of the Academic Committee of American University Kurdistan, and former consultant to the UNDP and Board of Refugees and Humanitarian Assistance in Dohuk, at the First International Conference on the Yezidi Genocide in Erbil, at the Divan Hotel, August 15, 2018.

Representatives of MedEast Organization, Mr. Jordan Greaser, Dr. Paul Kingery, and Mr. Khalid Khudeda, conducted a survey of 100 IDP Yezidis heads of household in late July 2018 in a village of mixed ethnicity in Semel District of Dohuk Province. The topic was acceptance and support for the Yezidi women and girls who survived ISIS capture and rape. Most respondents were men, although widows were also surveyed.

29% of those surveyed said they had female relatives who were impregnated by ISIS members while in captivity.

99% said that the child of an ISIS father and a Yezidi mother should be allowed to stay with its mother in Iraq, even in a non-Yezidi community (97%), but only 56% said the mother and child should be reintegrated into Yezidi homes and communities, and only 54% accepted the woman/girl marrying a Yezidi. If she did marry, only 30% said her husband should adopt her baby from ISIS. Similarly, 30% said the baby could be baptized into the Yezidi religion. This is despite the fact that Yezidi religious leaders reject their baptism entirely. So the people are more accepting of these babies than is reflected in the policies of their religious leaders.

95% said there should be facilities in their Yezidi communities that protect these women and children of ISIS fighters. 72% said the Yezidi community has a responsibility to protect them in their own community. The difference between 72 and 95 may reflect support for non-Yezidi services in Yezidi communities. There are currently no such facilities operated by Yezidis that accept the women/girls with their babies. Yezidi shelters for women in Qanqi and Sharia squarely reject those with children of ISIS fathers at the door and some admit that they defiantly tell them to return to the families of their Muslim rapists in Mosul or elsewhere.

Of the several Yezidi girls with ISIS babies that we have interviewed in the course of our work, all of them wanted to keep their babies, but only 2 were able to do so, 1 by pretending the child was from her husband, the other by staying in a safe house operated by non-Yezidis until she could immigrate to Canada.

What happened to the hundreds of others born or unborn? We have only anecdotal evidence. Many fetuses were aborted upon the mother's release. There was a German doctor doing mass abortions of such children a few years ago. Iraqi doctors are always ready to perform such abortions as well. When girls/women are nearer full term in their pregnancies, doctors are less likely to abort the fetus. When such children are born in hospitals, their grandparents and other family members generally assure that the child is abandoned in the hospital. If this happens in Mosul, the babies are sent to Baghdad, but a UN source spot checking on them in Baghdad

reported that 100% had died within 3 days of transfer. Azadi Hospital in Duhok reported that they were unable to get KRG and Yezidi facilities to accept the abandoned babies, so they were forced to hire a caregiver to keep the children in the hospital until they could be transferred directly to Baghdad. The babies kept by their mothers are able to stay with them in the Women's Shelter in Dohuk, but one mother who tried this reported constant persecution from Muslim women sharing a room with them.

In some cases, when Yezidi girls were freed by YPG in Syria, their Iraqi families were contacted, and the Yezidi grandmother of the baby from an ISIS father secretly arranged for her daughter to be separated from her child in Syria before returning to Iraq. Upon arrival in Iraq, the mother would realize she had been tricked, and suffer enormous emotional consequences, sometimes trying to find her baby, sometimes succeeding, and sometimes leaving her family and Yezidi husband and children to reunite with her ISIS baby in a non-Yezidi community. Others tried to arrange to stay in a safe house operated by foreigners. There was an unsubstantiated report of such a baby being drowned in Mosul Dam, and one man from a camp claimed to a UN staffer that he participated in killing an ISIS baby in revenge for the genocide, but the veracity of these two claims could not be verified. In one case, the girl arranged to give her baby to a non-Yezidi family, which claimed it as their own natural child and got away with registering the birth. Careful data collection from a variety of sources might paint a slightly different picture than we see now with anecdotal information.

We have learned from experience that the babies of Yezidi women/girls with ISIS fighters are only able to get IDs with great difficulty under Iraqi law. An organization must take on the case and agree to pay the costs. A sympathetic judge must agree to help with the process. The mother is likely to be severely mistreated by court authorities in the process, and muqtars are likely to refuse to provide needed documentation. Even upon success with getting the ID, the child is not identified as Yezidi or Kurdish, but Muslim Arab. While the mother can choose the child's given first name, it will also bear the name of the ISIS rapist and his father. The cost of such an ID runs about \$2500 including legal fees, and several trips to Tel Kef, Mosul, and Dohuk. The process takes months. This cost is prohibitive for a single mother. International aid is needed for such legal cases.

Not surprisingly, most women/girls who choose to keep their babies want to leave Iraq because they fear their child may be injured or killed. Iraqi passports can be sometimes expedited if the woman and child are accepted to immigrate to a foreign country, but otherwise take 3 years unless 400,000 IQD is paid to the passport office authorities to expedite it. They have to wait long periods in unsafe conditions to complete such documents. The German Consul has developed a program to take such girls and babies to Germany without Iraqi IDs. This is a ground-breaking program. We wish that the Iraqi government and the KRG would develop similarly streamlined services to such women and babies to ease the great difficulty they face in trying to restart their lives after captivity and rape.

This is a highly sensitive topic, on which no formal research has yet been published to our knowledge. The lack of facts considerably hampers progress. KRG officials report to me that groups of activist Yezidis have launched an organized effort to prevent the KRG from caring for such Yezidi mothers with babies from ISIS. These activists may be surprised to learn from this

survey that there is considerably more support for the appropriate care of these mothers and their babies in Yezidi communities than they believe. Yezidi religious leaders may also realize that their policies against these babies are out of tune with the will of the Yezidi people, who are divided on the issue of such babies becoming Yezidi but widely support the appropriate care of the babies in the care of their mothers in Yezidi communities. International agencies may find opportunities in this situation to fund and demonstrate model residential facilities for the care of these mothers and babies under conditions of high security, particularly run by foreigners.