



The Daesh-Genocide against the Yazidi community and its religious and cultural identity

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Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,

dear friends,

It is a great honour for me to speak to you.

My name is Michael Blume and since summer 2018 I am Commissioner against Antisemitism in the State of Baden-Württemberg. I am a doctor in religious studies, a Protestant and married to a Sunni Muslim for 26 years. We are having three children and are thus able to prove that interreligious dialogue can be successful and fruitful in a secular democracy with the rule of law.

One reason the Jewish communities recommended me as the first German to become a State Commissioner to combat Antisemitism has been the Special Quota Project of the State of Baden-Württemberg in 2015 and 2016. With the mission and backup of our State Ministry, my team and I were able to evacuate 1,100 mainly Yazidi women and children from Kurdistan-Iraq to Germany. These were people who had been severely traumatized by the genocide purported by Daesh in August 2014.

In Baden-Württemberg, we provided them with therapy, security and educational opportunities. Everyone in our team was crucial, but I want to emphasize here the contributions of psychologist Prof. Dr. Jan-Ilhan Kizilhan and Mirza Dinnayi from Luftbrücke Irak. We also worked closely with the German Consulate in Erbil, with the United Nations and with IOM to do what had to be done.

While working in Iraq, we were directly confronted with the genocidal violence by the so-called Islamic State, which most Muslims prefer to call Daesh. Please see a picture of the once-beautiful city of Shingal, which had been completely destroyed and riddled with mines and traps as we arrived.

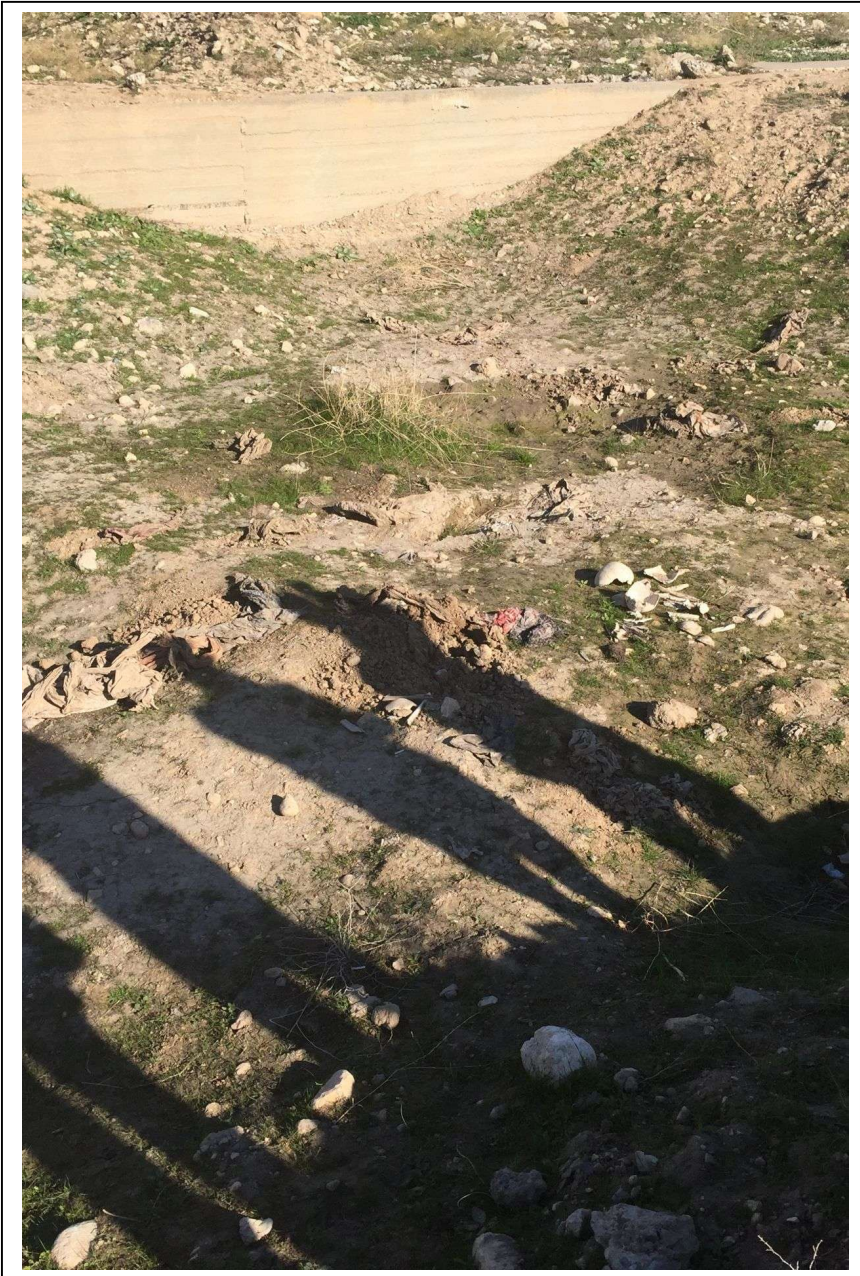


In the middle of the photography, you can see a wooden cross which had been erected by the Kurdish Peshmerga upon freeing the city, hoping that the age-old community of Shingal Christians might return. But as we saw the destructions, the ongoing conflicts and the escalation of the climate crisis to a water crisis, we began to realize that it is unlikely to get back what has been lost.

Although about 60% of the Yazidi women we brought to Germany said that they wanted to return to Iraq after two or three years of recovery, less than two percent did so.

But even more horrific than the destroyed buildings and the experience of tunnels dug especially by Yazidi captives before them being murdered has been the sight of various Mass Graves. Daesh troops murdered great numbers of Yazidi men, but also of older women and of children they could not “use” in their murderous attempt to wipe out the religious tradition of Yazidism.

As we had reached those areas, fighting was still on the way and our Iraqi-Kurdish allies asked for European support to identify the victims and to bury them properly.



But as shocking as these images and experiences have been, there were also reasons not to despair. Many of those admitted from the Special Quota Program have impressed us with their enormous strength; they are - and I would like to strengthen this - not victims, but survivors.

Internationally, Nadia Murad is the best-known beneficiary of the Special Quota Project of Baden-Württemberg. She immediately began to work as a Special Envoy of the United Nations, teamed with barrister Amal Clooney to bring members of Daesh to justice and received a peace

nobel prize for her ongoing and brave work. Nadia's husband Abid is with us and I would like to thank him for his most valuable efforts to the greater cause of supporting the Yazidis, building bridges of understanding and working for Justice. It is so good to have you here, Abid!

Thus, I would like to emphasize that the Yazidis have not only been beneficiaries to our project, but also true partners helping all of us not to despair, but to move forward!

With and after Nadia Murad, many other women have raised their voices against the atrocities of Daesh:

Farida Khalaf, Salwa Rasho, Dalal Khairo, Farhad Alsilo, Jihan Alomar and Lamiya Bashar - to name just a few.

They have all decided to go public and act as human rights activists, especially on behalf of religious minorities, for women's rights and for the prosecution of crimes committed by Daesh. I have witnessed on numerous occasions how their works affected politicians, journalists and entire schools, protecting the teachers and kids from conspiracy myths and radicalization processes.

The children from the Special Quota Project move us with their will to live and also with their desire for educational advancement. A scientific evaluation showed that Yazidi women and German helpers had more positive experiences with more children in the shelters, as the young took the opportunities of a stable school system and of a liberal democracy with the rule of law for all.

As those Yazidis that came with the Special Quota Project got the right to stay, they are becoming a part of our German and European future. More and more are taking German citizenship and they are about to make a lasting

contribution to our continent and civilization.

Of course, our main objective had been to rescue as many women and children as possible. Our first missions took place in secrecy and we didn't invest time or money into Public Relations. But as Nadia and more and more women began to speak out, we began to realize that our Special Quota Project could contribute to: Justice. So, we took a German State Prosecutor with us to Shingal and we offered those Yazidis that were ready to do so to go to German police officers and courts. We even sent some of our German-Kurdish translators to Canada to help our allies to do the same.

I did an expert paper on the genocidal ideology of Daesh and testified in three court cases against purported members of this terrorist group. I still believe that it would be a grave mistake to expect beneficiaries of Special Quota Programs to go public or to go to courts. But I learned to understand that we should support those that want to do it out of their own motivations. If perpetrators are about to learn that they will be brought to international attention and international justice, this might help to prevent future atrocities. Although the rule of law might take its time, I do believe that it is helping the survivors as well as future generations. That is the reason I am here today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The great rabbi Jonathan Sacks, blessed be his memory, taught that all kinds of political and religious violence are variations of psychological dualism, dividing humanity into We-and-Them. As the Jews have been the first people and religion of the Alphabet, believers in conspiracy myths are depicting them as purported super-conspirators that have to be driven away or killed.

In the same, dualistic delusion, Daesh depicted the Yazidis as purported “Devil Worshipers”. According to their teachings, the Ottoman Empire crashed “because” it had allowed Yazidis to survive.

Of course, this is not true. The Ottoman Sultan Bayazid II. forbade the printing of Arabic Letters around 1485. Therefore, the Empire remained stable and did not go through the dynamics of European bookprint including witch hunts and outbursts of Antisemitism, the Reformation, the Täuferreich von Münster (a kind of Christian Daesh around 1535) and the 30 Years’ War. But it also missed the chances of increasing alphabetization such as dynamic education, enlightenment, technologies and democratic republicanism. Therefore, it began to fall back and to go down up to this day. A lot of reformers such as Kemal Atatürk switched from the Arabic Alphabet to a Latin or Cyrillic one, but the rift of education has not yet been closed.

But as any dualistic and antisemitic movement, Daesh is not about reforming itself, but about blaming others. And as one of their prophecies said, the future commander of their army would be a “Son of a Slave”, the enslavement and rape of Yazidi women had been a part of their apocalyptic teachings. Daesh had been genocidal from the start in its clearly stated aim to completely eradicate a native, religious minority by murder, forced conversions and enslavement.

And even now, tens of thousands of Yazidis are stuck in camps, with Muslim majorities and some fringe Christian groups trying to win them over and to destroy their religious identity. Their numbers dwindled to about half a million in Iraq, with the Yazidi communities in Turkey and Syria threatened by extinction. Yazidi communities big enough to survive outside of Iraq are to be found in

Armenia, in the European Union, Canada and maybe in some parts of the United States of America.

Historically, Yazidism - like several other smaller religious minorities in the region - goes back to ancient tribal religions influenced by Zoroastrianism.

Over the millennia, these traditions, which are still mainly oral, incorporated Jewish, Christian and Islamic elements without giving up their own identity.

The technical term for this incorporation of aspects of other traditions into one's own religion is "Syncretism" - and it is completely normal.

Judaism was also influenced by Zoroastrianism and subsequent religions, Christianity arose from a fusion of Jewish, Greek and Roman traditions, and the Islamic Koran even presupposes knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. There are very close resemblances to Turkish and Kurdish Alevism, which also had a caste system and the strict rule that only children born to two Alevi parents could join the faith.

In Yazidism, those teachings are still in place, although they are about to evolve in liberal democracies just like those of Alevism did. In both traditions, there is not a central book, but songs, art and sayings supporting a family-oriented culture. Although there is patriarchal and sometimes violent resistance, the integration of Yazidis into Western educational systems and democracies is moving forward.

Yazidism - like Judaism and Alevism - is strictly monotheistic: there is only one God - in Yezidi Ez da, "God created" - who also rules over all the worlds and angels. Thus, many German Yazidis are preferring the name of Ezidism without the old Y sounding like an early

Sunni ruler, Yazid. They are also known in German as “Volk der Engel”, people of the angels.

Accordingly, the supreme angel of the Yazidis, Melek Tausi, is said to have extinguished the fires of hell with his tears. To speak dualistically of a devil as a kind of counter-god to the One God is therefore avoided by Yazidis as an insult to God and the angels. As other religions are referring to the same God, Yazidis do not see any need nor possibility to convert Non-Yazidis. All human beings are on the way to the same source of Light and Life and thus all religions deserve to be respected with some Yazidis traditions teaching about the possibility of rebirths.

While pillars symbolizing the sheitan are ritually stoned in Mecca, my team and I were invited by Yazidis in the temple of Lalish to the custom of throwing a soft silk cloth on a stone pillar that brings good luck. There is simply no devil to be defeated in Yazidism. Evil is not personalized, not attacked and certainly not related to a specific group of people. Ezidism is a monotheistic and monistic faith.

In Yazidi myths, the connection between the religions is particularly evident in the symbol of water. Noah's ark landed in Lalish after the Flood; Adam is also buried here. The "white spring", guarded by women and referring to creation itself, with whose waters Yazidis children are baptized, goes back to Christian predecessors.

Deep in the mountain is the "Zemzem spring", which is named after those in Mecca:

When Islamic scholars visited their colleague Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir in the 12th century and asked for water to purify their prayers, the host touched the rock with a stick - and fresh water from Mecca gushed forth.

In the Islamic tradition, Sheikh Adi is still regarded as an orthodox Sufi master; in the Yazidi world, however, he is also regarded as an incarnation of the peacock angel Melek Tausi. His grave in Lalish, which was destroyed several times by Islamic fanatics, is still protected and honored by the Yezidis today.

In the immediate region, only Armenia has so far been able to offer security to Yezidism as an independent religion with its own temple - not least due to the historical mutual support of Armenian Christians and Yezidis during the persecutions by the Ottomans, Nationalist Turks and also Kurdish Islamists.

Even in Turkey, Yazidism has never been recognized as an independent religion and is practically extinct today; nevertheless, Yazidi burial grounds and holy sites are repeatedly desecrated.

One of their first European meeting houses was built in the German town Celle. With around 200,000 people of Yazidi origin, Germany is home to the largest Yazidi group after Iraq, about equal in numbers to German Judaism and Buddhism.

According to Yazidi traditions, there have been more than 70 "fermans" throughout history, violent and often genocidal attacks on their settlements and holy sites.

Al-Qaeda had already carried out bloody terrorist attacks on the religious minority in Iraq.

In August 2014, troops of Daesh finally stormed the large Yezidi settlement areas in the Shingal and even threatened the Lalish Shrine.

They carried out a particularly cruel massacre of men and the enslavement of women and children in Kocho, the village from which Nadia Murad and many other

beneficiaries of the Special Quota Project came.

Daesh shelled the villages with heavy artillery, murdered over 5,000 Yezidi men, raped and abducted over 7,000 women and children and took them into captivity. After more than nine years of sexual exploitation, slavery and torture, over 2,000 of these captives have still not been found.

Nadia Murad said in her moving speech on December 1, 2016 in the State Parliament of Baden-Württemberg, quote:

"Terrorists and traitors have managed in many places to destroy the trust between religions and peoples in such a way that there is no end to the violence."

– End quote –

A few weeks after the genocide, representatives of the Central Council of the Yezidis showed images of these terrible events to Baden-Württemberg's Prime Minister Winfried Kretschmann. As a result, the State Government decided to join forces with the democratic parties in parliament and civil society to implement a humanitarian admission program.

And the genocide continues to this day.

Just a few months ago, there were renewed religiously motivated calls for violence against Yazidis in Northern Iraq and the autonomous Region of Northern Iraqi Kurdistan. Displaced persons are being denied the right to return to their home areas, and some are even having to flee from refugee camps where they are threatened by hatred. The false allegations against the Yazidis are spreading rapidly via digital channels. As a result, they reach a great many people in a very short space of time.

This form of digital hate speech does not only exist in Iraq. Here in Germany and in many other countries, we can also observe how quickly fake news and conspiracy myths against Jews and Yazidis are diffused by digital media. X, formerly called Twitter, has been plagued by antisemitic and pro-Iranian messages by its owner Elon Musk and Telegram is referred to as "Terrorgram" with our security folks.

The common space for understanding the world is disappearing. And therefore, the global outreach of science, religious tolerance and the rule of law became more important than ever. If we would stop believing in it, stop working for it, minority groups would be the first to suffer before all of civilization would come down. It has happened in the past and I spoke just last week in our State Parliament – the Landtag – about the first and failed violent coup by Adolf Hitler exactly 100 years in the past, on the 9th of November 1923. It is now clear that the Second World War and the Shoah could have been prevented if the legal system of the Weimar Republic would have stopped him then.

As Eurojust-Prosecutors from various States and Organizations, your work is pivotal to step in against apocalyptic and genocidal movements such as Daesh, Hamas and the imperialist regime of Vladimir Putin. By fighting dualism especially against Jews and Yazidis and by bringing forward the idea of Special Quota Projects for minorities endangered by genocide, you might be able to uphold the most precious truth of all traditions of Justice: That every life is worth the effort!

Thank you very much & may God bless your work!