

## **6th session of the Forum on Minority Issues**

### **III. Protection of the existence of and prevention of violence against religious minorities**

Yasa-Kurdish Centre for Legal Studies and Consultancy on Item III

Thank you, Madame Chair,

I speak on behalf of Yasa-Kurdish Centre for Legal Studies and Consultancy, organisation which advocates the rights of Kurdish people in and outside Syria, which is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Although the Syrian constitution guarantees the freedom of faith, religious minorities are suffering greatly under the Syrian regime. The situation of the Yazidis is especially bad. Ethnically, they belong to the Kurds and so form an ethnic and religious minority. The Yazidi population is estimated at 30,000, they are being discriminated by the Muslim majority because their religion is transmitted orally and does not belong to the religions of the Book. They are mistakenly portrayed as devil worshipers, therefore, crimes committed against Yazidis have been justified in the name of Islam.

Since, Ba'ath Party took power of Syria in 1963, Yazidis have extensively suffered from the government's discriminatory policies. Many Yazidi landowners and farmers were disposed of their lands, which were given to (...) Arab settlers with no kind of compensation. In addition, the Syrian regime deliberately neglect of the economic development and essential services in the Kurdish areas that have forced many Yazidi to leave their homeland. In 1963, the Syrian government ranged and exceptional census revoking citizenship of 150,000 Kurds. The majority of the affected belonged to the Yazidi minority. The revocation of citizenship implicates the loss of rights such as access to education and to the public health care system. Additionally, the affected people cannot vote, register their marriages, or be employed by governmental institutions.

The situation has sharply deteriorated since the upbreak of civil war. Many Jihadists and other extremist groups flew to Syria seeking to establish an Islamic State based on Sharia law. Syrian Yazidi and other minorities are increasingly being targeted because of their religious belief. We are reported about murder, violation and displacement.

Syrian Yazidis, like the majority of Syrian Kurds, are part of the peaceful opposition seeking to be recognised and accepted in a new Syria. The rights of ethnic and religious minorities in Syria should be protected constitutionally. And those religious minorities should be permitted to perform their religious rights in ceremonies. A new constitution should end discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities by guaranteeing tolerance, justice, equality and freedom. Additionally, the international community should put pressure on states like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Arab (...) states to stop their support to extremist groups fighting in Syria.

Thank you for your attention.