

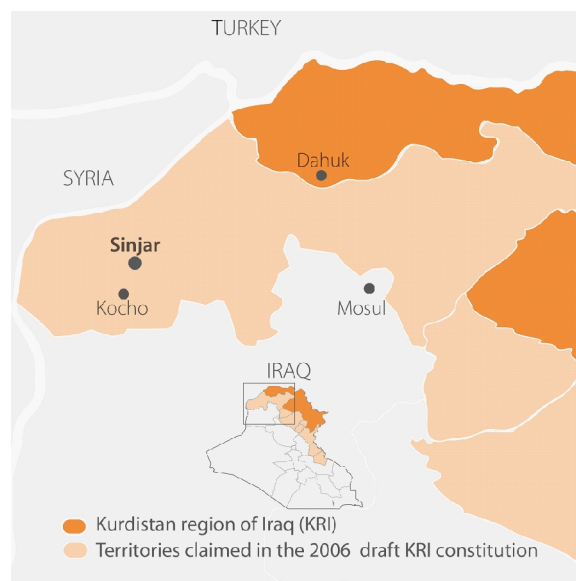
## The Yazidis: An ongoing genocide

The award of the 2016 Sakharov Prize to Nadia Murad Basee Taha and Lamiya Aji Bashar highlights the fate of their people, the Yazidis, one of the communities most affected, in proportion to their total population, by the violence committed by ISIL/Da'esh (or 'Islamic State').

### The Yazidis, martyrs of ISIL/Da'esh

A majority of the Iraqi population is Arab and Muslim. However, in comparison with neighbouring countries, Iraq has great [ethnic and religious diversity](#) (see Figure 1 overleaf). The Yazidi community in Iraq was generally estimated to number [between 300 000 and 700 000](#) before the onslaught by ISIL/Da'esh, and lived mainly in the mountainous region of Sinjar (see map). Yazidis practise a syncretistic religion, a fusion of pre-Islamic beliefs and Muslim practices. Yazidism is not a proselytising but a hereditary religion. One of the key figures in the Yazidi [pantheon](#), the Peacock Angel Melek Taus, an intermediary between men and God, is equated with Satan by some Muslims. In the belief system of ISIL/Da'esh, the Yazidis are 'idolaters' (*Mushrikun*) and 'infidels' (*kuffar*): the doctrinal texts of the organisation justify putting them to [death](#) or [enslaving](#) them. Converting to Islam is not sufficient to save them, as it may be voided on grounds of 'insincerity'.

Map - The Sinjar region in Iraq



In early [August 2014](#), ISIL/Da'esh fighters defeated the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in several areas of north-western Iraq, their aim being to gain control of oil installations. In Sinjar, however, the main objective was to attack the Yazidis. Tens of thousands of Yazidis fled from their villages into the surrounding mountains, where they were then surrounded by the ISIL/Da'esh forces. Hundreds died in just a few days, despite humanitarian [aid drops](#) and [airstrikes](#). Some were [liberated](#) by the Syrian Peshmerga, but thousands were captured and deported to Iraq and Syria. Men and boys over the age of 12 who refused to convert were executed; the rest were sentenced to hard labour. Women were forced to convert and sold as domestic and sexual slaves, or forced into [marriage](#) against their will. Girls over the age of nine and boys over seven are separated from their mothers: the girls suffer the treatment meted out to women, [the boys](#) are sent to military training camps. The slave trade is regulated by edicts issued by ISIL/Da'esh and is reserved for members of the organisation.

The [report of the United Nations Committee of Enquiry on Syria](#) (June 2016), which established the facts referred to above and a number of other crimes, maintains that, with regard to the Yazidis, ISIL/Da'esh has perpetrated crimes of **genocide** within the meaning of Article 2 of the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) as these crimes demonstrate a will to annihilate the Yazidi people. A resolution of the UN Security Council is necessary if the International Criminal Court (ICC) is to address the situation in Iraq and Syria, as neither of these countries is a party to the [Rome Statute](#) of the ICC. A draft resolution on the crimes committed in Syria [failed in May 2014](#); no similar draft resolution in the wake of the Sinjar massacre has been tabled.



## What future for the Yazidis?

While some Yazidis have escaped – including [Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar, the 2016 laureates of the EP Sakharov Prize](#) – or have been [liberated](#), more than 3 200 of them are still being held by members of ISIL/Da'esh. After the [liberation of Sinjar](#) at the end of 2015, very few [wished](#), or were able, to return to their villages; many others are still living in humanitarian camps in Iraq and Syria. The medical and psychological aid reaching the survivors remains very poor. For many of them, the [traumatic events](#) they have endured will be very hard to overcome, especially as there is a long [history](#) of persecution in their regard.

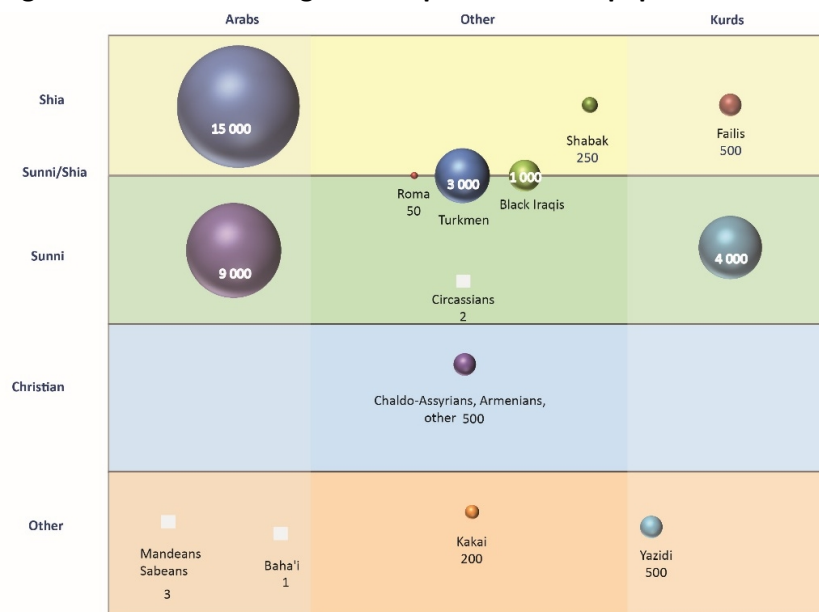
The future of the Yazidis in an Iraq liberated from ISIL/Da'esh is still uncertain. Although the [Iraqi constitution](#) grants freedom of religion and of worship, the Yazidis are still a [minority suffering discrimination](#) in access to employment, justice and security. The Iraqi government, much weakened by the fighting, terrorist attacks and tensions with the Kurdistan regional government, has no real plan for the future of the country's minorities. The Sinjar region is part of the [territories in dispute](#) between the central government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Autonomous Region. The Yazidis and other minorities living in these areas have suffered displacement or [pressure to assimilate](#) in one or other of the dominant groups ('[Kurdification](#)' or '[Arabisation](#)'). Often presented by the Kurdish authorities as '[real](#)' [pre-Islamic Kurds](#), the Yazidis accuse the Kurdish forces in Iraq of [failing to defend them](#) during the attack on Sinjar. Since its recapture, [Kurdish Peshmerga and Yazidis](#) have clashed and compete for control of the region. The Iraqi constitution provides for a referendum – which has never been organised – which would allow the residents of these territories to determine under whose authority they wish to be administered. Some Yazidi representatives reject a straight two-way choice between the national government and the Kurdish regional government: they wish to see [autonomous self-administration](#) by the minorities.

## European Union position and action

The European Union '[condemns unreservedly](#)' the violence committed by ISIL/Da'esh. In [Iraq](#), [Syria](#) and [Turkey](#), the countries with the most displaced and refugee Yazidis, the European Commission and the Member States have steadily stepped up their humanitarian aid since 2014. Among the victims of ISIL/Da'esh who have tried to reach Europe and who escaped death at sea, almost 1 500 Yazidis are still detained in Greece, waiting to lodge an asylum application; according to the UN Committee of Enquiry on Syria, it is not clear to what extent the Yazidis, who are victims of genocide, sexual violence and torture, can be identified as belonging to a vulnerable group. [Germany](#), which has the largest Yazidi community in Europe, has accepted a thousand Yazidi refugees, and provides them with medical and psychological care.

In [October 2016](#), the European Parliament called on the Iraqi government to make the right of return of the displaced peoples a policy priority. Parliament proposed that the minorities in the region be 'included in a new administrative set-up' in order to prevent future tension between the Kurdistan regional government and the Iraqi authorities. It called for humanitarian aid and development assistance to be coordinated in such a way as to ensure a return to stability in Iraq. In [February 2016](#), Parliament called on the UN Security Council to refer the violations committed in Iraq and Syria to the International Criminal Court. MEPs called for the EU to establish a permanent Special Representative for Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Figure 1 – Ethnic and religious composition of the population of Iraq



Figures in thousands

Data sources: [Minority Rights](#), 2014 2016– [IILHR](#) 2013.