

Open Letter from Concerned Genocide Scholars Regarding the Situation in Syria and Iraq

To: United Nations Security Council

26 August 2014

As scholars of genocide and human rights, we are gravely concerned with the present situation in northern Iraq and Syria. In fact, crimes against humanity and war crimes have *already* occurred in both Syria and Iraq, and there are signs that genocide may be imminent or already taking place.

Through the unanimous adoption of resolution 2170 (2014), under the binding Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the Council condemned in the strongest terms what it called “gross, systematic and widespread abuse” of human rights by the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) and the Al-Nusra Front.

While this was an important first step, we firmly believe that much more needs to be done.

We are gravely concerned that genocide and ethnic cleansing are imminent against religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians and the Yezidi. This assessment is based on the ongoing persecution of ethnic and religious groups, the destruction of cultural sites, the desecration of graves, the confiscation of property and the widespread and systematic killing of civilians, as documented by UN observers on the 13th of August 2014, and in reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Moreover, the ideology of ISIS is rooted in profound intolerance and hatred of the “other.” The situation in Syria and Iraq represents both a humanitarian catastrophe and a source of continuing violence and instability.

We ask the UN Security Council to take further action upon these matters, as required under its mandate to ensure international peace and security. All measures must be considered, including the use of military force. All targeted populations must be provided, under a strong Chapter VII mandate, absolute security by a heavily armed and well-resourced force, along with adequate amounts of food and water. If security is impossible to provide where the targeted populations currently reside, then it is imperative for the UN Security Council to open a humanitarian corridor, with a full military escort, to a safe area. Upon the establishment of a safe area, both adequate food and water must be supplied, along with a well-armed and well-resourced force under a Chapter VII mandate.

Furthermore, we wish to reiterate that all UN member states, acting through the United Nations, have “the responsibility to...help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity,” according to Paragraph 139 of the World Summit Outcome Document (2005), as well as Resolution 1674.

It is our conviction that our failure to act would represent nothing less than willful blindness to an impending genocide. Inaction could result in another catastrophe mirroring the international community’s lax and unconscionable reaction to the 1994 Rwanda crisis. It is time to stand for humanity, to stand for the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Signed,

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