

From the Desk of  
**NADIA MURAD**

Human rights activist and recipient of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, Nadia Murad is a leading advocate for survivors of genocide and sexual violence. Her *New York Times* bestselling memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State*, is a harrowing account of the genocide against the Yazidi ethno-religious minority in Iraq and Nadia's imprisonment by the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).

Nadia's peaceful life was brutally disrupted in 2014 when ISIS attacked her homeland in Sinjar with the goal of ethnically cleansing all Yazidis from Iraq. Like many minority groups, the Yazidis have carried the weight of historical persecution. Women, in particular, have suffered greatly as victims of sexual violence. After escaping captivity, Nadia began speaking out on behalf of her community and survivors of sexual violence worldwide.

Much of Nadia's advocacy work is focused on meeting with global leaders to raise awareness of the genocide against the Yazidi people and the systemic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Nadia is the President and Chairwoman of Nadia's Initiative, which actively works to persuade governments and international organizations to support the sustainable re-development of the Yazidi homeland, as well as survivors of sexual violence globally.

In 2016, Nadia became the first UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking. That year, she was also awarded the Council of Europe Václav Havel Award for Human Rights and Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In 2018, she won the Nobel Peace Prize with Dr. Denis Mukwege. Together, they founded the Global Survivors Fund. In 2019, Nadia was appointed as a UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Advocate.

In her capacity as a member of France's Gender Advisory Council, Nadia advocated G7 member states to adopt legislation that protects and promotes women's rights. Nadia worked with the German Mission to the United Nations to pass UN Security Council Resolution 2467, which expands the UN's commitments to end sexual violence in conflict. Nadia was also a driving force behind the drafting and passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2379, which established the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD).

### **Advocacy Work**

Nadia's Initiative advocates — at the local, national, and international levels — for resources and policy changes needed to protect and support survivors of sexual violence and rebuild communities in crisis. We collaborate with global leaders, governments, and international organizations to raise awareness and direct critical funding necessary to making positive, meaningful change.

- **Gender Equality:** We advocate for global gender equality, an end to violence against women, and the provision of reparations to survivors of sexual violence.
- **Justice:** We advocate for judicial accountability of ISIS perpetrators of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide.
- **Security:** We advocate national governments and the UN to work collectively and comprehensively to improve security and local governance in Northern Iraq.
- **Genocide Prevention:** We advocate for genocide awareness and prevention, including the formal recognition of the Yazidi genocide by nation states and international bodies.

## Healthcare

The healthcare sector in Sinjar was in a beleaguered state prior to ISIS' invasion, with few specialized doctors and services available to residents. Since the destruction in 2014, hospitals have had to rely heavily on support from international organizations to provide basic care. Nadia's Initiative is working to improve the region's healthcare sector by rebuilding hospitals and primary health centers, providing them with critical supplies, furniture, and medical equipment, and training specialized staff to provide survivor-centered, trauma-informed care. Improving the region's healthcare reduces the community's long-term vulnerability.

## Livelihoods

Sinjar has historically been a farming region – 75% of its pre-2014 income was based in agriculture. ISIS attempted to destroy the community's livelihoods by burning down farms, polluting boreholes, and stealing and vandalizing farming equipment, all of which threaten the region's food security. Roads and electrical networks were also destroyed during years of fighting to liberate the region. Small business owners in Sinjar have struggled greatly to resume their livelihoods in the aftermath of such extensive destruction.

Nadia's Initiative is restoring the region's commerce, transportation, and trade by holistically rebuilding farmlands, supporting small business owners, constructing new roads and public works, and restoring electrical networks.

## Education

Education is key to transforming ideas, creating opportunities, and reimagining futures. Access to learning not only opens doors to job opportunities, it also provides children with the skills to stand up for their rights and make change in their communities. Investment in education is an investment in strong and equitable societies.

Sinjar's education sector has long suffered neglect, with dilapidated school buildings and a severe lack of teachers resulting in students receiving infrequent, inadequate education in unsafe environments.

Nadia's Initiative is improving education in Sinjar by rebuilding and furnishing primary, middle, and secondary schools, providing students with school supplies, investing in early

childhood and post-secondary education, and constructing school libraries throughout the region. Ensuring access to quality education facilitates the healing process for children who have survived conflict and protracted displacement.

## **WASH**

Access to clean water is a basic human right, yet it is a rare resource in a water scarce region like Sinjar. Returnees to Sinjar must grapple with destroyed and polluted water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure. Few can afford to purchase bottled water. Many face severe health issues resulting from consuming contaminated water.

To counter this, Nadia's Initiative is rebuilding the WASH infrastructure in villages, schools, clinics, and farms throughout Sinjar. Reconstruction work is complemented by water management trainings and hygiene awareness sessions aimed at empowering the community to independently manage their own water sources and lead healthier lives.

## **Women's Empowerment**

Women in Sinjar have experienced immense trauma and suffering yet are often neglected in the region's redevelopment initiatives. Many long for opportunities to gain economic independence, provide for their families, and become active leaders in their communities.

Nadia's Initiative designs survivor-centric women's empowerment programs aimed at addressing the needs of women and girls in Sinjar by providing them with small business trainings and grants, rehabilitating their farmlands, rebuilding their homes, and empowering them to become advocates for change within their communities.

## **Cultural Preservation and Memorialization**

For centuries, Yazidis have been targeted for their unique religious beliefs. ISIS' destruction of Yazidi sites of worship was the latest in a long line of genocidal campaigns against the community. Providing Yazidis with safe spaces to worship and sites of remembrance is critical to the community's healing and social cohesion.

Nadia's Initiative restores Yazidi temples with input from clergy, activists, and local families charged with guardianship of the shrines. We construct cemeteries and memorials to honor those who were killed and preserve the history of the community.

## **Awards & Recognitions**

- Nobel Peace Prize
- First United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking
- Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought
- Council of Europe Václav Havel Award for Human Rights
- Clinton Global Citizen Award
- Hillary Clinton Award for Advancing Women in Peace and Security
- International DVF Award

- Glamour Women of the Year
- United Nations Association of Spain Peace Prize
- Bambi Award
- Justice O'Connor Prize
- Vital Voices Global Trailblazer Award
- UC Merced Spendlove Prize
- TIME 100 Most Influential People
- Forbes 30 Under 30
- Seton Hall University Honorary Doctorate
- Marisa Bellisario International Prize
- Global Goals Changemaker Award
- Elisabeth B. Weintz Humanitarian Award
- Frank and Cheri Hermance Atlas Award
- Oxi Courage Award
- Doctor of Humane Letters from Chapman University
- Forbes Middle East 30 Under 30

#### Publications

- The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic Statement
- [“Outraged by the Attacks on Yazidis? It Is Time to Help.”](#) *The New York Times*, 10 February 2018.
- [“I was an Isis sex slave. I tell my story because it is the best weapon I have.”](#) *The Guardian*, 6 October 2018.
- [“Prioritizing ISIS over survivors?”](#) *Thomas Reuters Foundation*, 12 March 2019.
- [“UN Security Council should stand in solidarity with survivors of rape in conflict.”](#) *Thomas Reuters Foundation*, 23 April 2019.
- [“My people were massacred five years ago. The genocide continues.”](#) *Washington Post*, 31 July 2019.
- [“I am a survivor of Islamic State violence. Don't forget us.”](#) *Washington Post*, 4 April 2019.
- [“Seeking Justice and Dignity for Survivors.”](#) *UN Chronicle*, 9 December 2019.
- [“We must protect women from sexual violence during coronavirus lockdown and beyond.”](#) *Thomas Reuters Foundation*, 19 May 2020.
- [“Yazidis have been forgotten during Covid. They need justice, jobs and a return home.”](#) *The Guardian*, 24 February 2021.
- [“America, Take a Stand for Yazidis.”](#) *Newsweek*, 4 June 2021.
- [“ISIS slaughtered my Yazidi community. We don't want your pity -- we want justice.”](#) *CNN*, 16 August 2021.