

Yazidi campaigners use social media to call for road opening

by Meghan Bodette - 19/10/2018 18:32



Yazidi campaigners have turned to social media to pressure the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to open a key road providing safe passage to and from Sinjar province, the home of Iraq's Yazidi community.

The road provides an approximately one and a half-hour route from areas controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government in the north of the country to Sinjar. The only alternative is a five-hour route that passes through Mosul— where ISIS cells still pose a threat. Yazidis who faced genocide at the hands of ISIS in 2014 are rightly reluctant to take this route— preventing many of them from returning home to reunite with their families and rebuild their communities. The *2018 Report on the Status of Sinjar* published by Nadia's Initiative, a non-profit organization founded by Yazidi activist and survivor Nadia Murad, [said](#) that "many Yazidis have expressed continued trauma by having to travel through Mosul, where many were held as slaves, and feel deterred from accessing food and other goods there. Consequently, Yazidis cannot

rely on food [and] support from urban centers in Kurdistan or Mosul."

The report also noted that road closures were "limiting the transport of supplies [and] goods into the region", forming a significant obstacle to "livelihoods and food security" in Sinjar.

The continued closure of the Sehela road is one of many symptoms of both Iraqi and KRG policy towards the Yazidi people. Neither authority has devoted adequate resources to the reconstruction of Sinjar, which was devastated by ISIS massacres that the United Nations and many states around the world classified as a genocide. Many Yazidi IDPs cannot return to their homes— as of March 2018, only about 4,000 people of the 25,000 who fled Sinjar town had [returned](#). Over half of all houses have been destroyed, and mines left by ISIS as they were driven out of the province still pose a danger. Treatment and support for survivors of ISIS captivity are also insufficient.

This sort of neglect is part of what made the region so vulnerable in 2014, and part of a pattern of [mistreatment](#) that Yazidis have faced under both KRG and Iraqi administration. Activists have repeatedly called on both administrations, and on the international community as a whole, to learn the lessons of these atrocities and do more to rebuild Sinjar and empower its communities.

The campaign to open the Sehela road is part of this call— and when it was not heard in private, Yazidi campaigners took to social media to raise their concerns.

"To @IraqiGov and @Kurdistan: Open [#SehelaRoad](#) and treat your [#Yazidi](#) People with dignity. Please join my [Twitter] campaign to get this road open," [wrote](#) Murad Ismael, a co-founder of Yazidi human rights organization Yazda, in the first use of the [#SehelaRoad](#) hashtag on October 10th.

"We have brought this issue to social media because we have asked privately for the Sehela road to be open for more than a year now. Every time they would tell us this week or this month. This is why we should work in the open air to get a simple demand met," Ismael [wrote](#) in another post later the same day.

Many [#SehelaRoad](#) tweets included a map of the two routes— making a visual comparison between the shorter, safer route and the longer, more dangerous one Yazidis hoping to return home are now forced to take.

Neither the Kurdish nor Iraqi authorities have made public statements on the reasons for the road's closure.