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THE
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Nobel Lecture

given by
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Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, Distinguished Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen, my warm greetings to you.

I would like to thank The Nobel Committee for bestowing this honour on me. It is a great honour to have been awarded this valuable prize with my friend Dr Denis Mukwege, who has been working tirelessly to help victims of sexual violence and to be a voice for those women who have been subjected to violence.

I want to talk to you from the bottom of my heart and to share with you how the course of my life and the life of the entire Yazidi community have changed because of this genocide, and how ISIS tried to eradicate one of the components of Iraq by taking women into captivity, killing men and destroying our pilgrimage sites and houses of worship.

Today is a special day for me. It is the day when good has triumphed over evil, the day when humanity defeated terrorism, the day that the children and women who have suffered persecution have triumphed over the perpetrators of these crimes.

I hope that today marks the beginning of a new era - when peace is the priority, and the world can collectively begin to define a new roadmap to protect women, children and minorities from persecution, in particular victims of sexual violence.

I lived my childhood as a village girl in Kojo, south of Sinjar region. I did not know anything about the Nobel Peace Prize. I knew nothing about the conflicts and killings that took place in our world every day. I did not know that human beings could perpetrate such hideous crimes against each other.

As a young girl, I dreamed of finishing high school. It was my dream to have a beauty parlour in our village and to live near my family in Sinjar. But this dream became a nightmare. Unexpected things happened. Genocide took place. As a consequence, I lost my mother, six of my brothers and my brothers' children. Every Yazidi family has a similar story, one more horrible than the other because of this genocide.

Yes, our lives have changed overnight, in a way we can hardly understand. Every Yazidi family counts members that are separated from each other. The social fabric of a peaceful community has been torn apart, a whole society that was carrying high the banner of peace and the culture of tolerance has become fuel for a useless war.

In our history, we have been subjected to many campaigns of genocide because of our beliefs and religion. As a result of these genocides, there are only a few Yazidis left in Turkey. In Syria, there were about 80,000 Yazidis, today there are only 5000. In Iraq, the Yazidis face the same fate, their number is decreasing significantly. The goal of ISIS to eradicate this religion will be achieved unless the Yazidis are provided the appropriate protection. This is also the case for other minorities in Iraq and Syria.

After the failure of the Government of Iraq and the Government of Kurdistan to protect us, the international community also failed to save us from ISIS and to prevent the occurrence of the genocide against us, and stood idly by watching the annihilation of a complete community. Our homes, our families, our traditions, our people, our dreams were all destroyed.

After the genocide, we received international and local sympathy, and many countries recognized this genocide, but the genocide did not stop. The threat of annihilation still exists.

The predicament of the Yazidis in the prisons of ISIS has not changed. They have not been able to leave the camps, nothing of what ISIS destroyed has been rebuilt. So far, the perpetrators of the crimes which led to this genocide have not been brought to justice. I do not seek more sympathy; I want to translate those feelings into actions on the ground.

If the international community is serious about providing assistance to the victims of this genocide, and if we want the Yazidis to leave displacement camps and return to their areas, and give them confidence again, the international community should provide them with international protection under United Nations supervision. Without this international protection, there is no guarantee that we will not be subjected to other genocides from other terrorist groups. The international community must be committed to providing asylum and immigration opportunities to those who have become victims of this genocide.

Today is a special day for all Iraqis, not only because I am the first Iraqi to win the Nobel Peace Prize. It is also the day when we celebrate the victory of liberating Iraqi territory from the terrorist organization of ISIS. The Iraqis from the North to the South united their forces and fought a long battle on behalf of the world against this extremist terrorist organization.

This unity gave us strength. We also need to unite our efforts to investigate the crimes of ISIS and prosecute those who welcomed, helped and joined them to control vast areas in Iraq. There should be no place for terrorism and extremist ideas in post-ISIS Iraq; we must join forces in building our country; we must contribute together to achieve security, stability and prosperity for the benefit of all Iraqis.

We have to remember every day how the terrorist organization of ISIS and those who carry its ideas attacked the Yazidis with unprecedented brutality in 2014 with the aim of ending the existence of one of the original components of the Iraqi society. They committed this genocide for the sole reason that we are Yazidis who have different beliefs and customs and who are against killing each other or holding people in captivity or enslaving them.

In the 21st century, in the age of globalization and human rights, more than 6,500 Yazidi children and women became captive and were sold, bought, and sexually and psychologically abused. Despite our daily appeals since 2014, the fate of more than 3,000 children and women in the grip of ISIS is still unknown. Young girls at the prime of life are sold, bought, held captive and raped every day. It is inconceivable that the conscience of the leaders of 195 countries around the world is not mobilised to liberate these girls. What if they were a commercial deal, an oil field or a shipment of weapons? Most certainly, no efforts would be spared to liberate them.

Every day I hear tragic stories. Hundreds of thousands and even millions of children and women around the world are suffering from persecution and violence. Every day I hear the screams of children in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Every day we see hundreds of women and children in Africa and other countries becoming murder projects fuel for wars, without anyone moving in to help them or hold to account those who commit these crimes.

For almost four years, I have been travelling around the world to tell my story and that of my community and other vulnerable communities, without having achieved any justice. The perpetrators of sexual violence against Yazidi and other women and girls are yet to be prosecuted for these crimes. If justice is not done, this genocide will be repeated against us and against other vulnerable communities. Justice is the only way to achieve peace and co-existence among the various components of Iraq. If we do not want to repeat cases of rape and captivity against women, we must hold to account those who have used sexual violence as a weapon to commit crimes against women and girls.

Thank you very much for this honour, but the fact remains that the only prize in the world that can restore our dignity is justice and the prosecution of criminals. There is no award that can compensate for our people and our loved ones who were killed solely because they were Yazidis. The only prize that will restore a normal life between our people and our friends is justice and protection for the rest of this community.

We celebrate these days the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which aims at preventing genocides and calls for the prosecution of their perpetrators. My community has been subjected to genocide for more than four years. The international community did nothing to deter it nor to stop it. It did not bring the perpetrators to justice. Other vulnerable communities have been subjected to ethnic cleansing, racism and identity change in plain sight of the international community.

The protection of the Yazidis and all vulnerable communities around the world is the responsibility of the international community and international institutions in charge of defending human rights, the protection of minorities, the protection of the rights of women and children, especially in areas where conflicts and internal wars take place.

I had the privilege of participating in the Paris Peace Conference. This conference celebrated the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. But how many genocides and wars have taken place since World War I ended? The victims of wars, in particular internal wars, are countless. The world condemned these wars and recognised these genocides. It however failed to put an end to acts of war and to prevent their recurrence.

It is true that there are numerous conflicts and problems in the world, but there are also many initiatives to support the victims and huge efforts are exerted to bring about justice.

For without the initiative taken by the government of Baden-Württemberg and Mr Kretschmann and their assistance, I would not have been able to enjoy my freedom today, to denounce the crimes of ISIS and tell the truth about the sufferings of the Yazidis. It is my view that all victims deserve a safe haven until justice is done for them.

Education plays an essential role in nurturing civilized societies that believe in tolerance and peace. Therefore, we must invest in our children because children, like a blank slate, can be taught tolerance and co-existence instead of hatred and sectarianism. Women must also be the key to solving many problems and must be involved in building lasting peace among communities. With the voice and participation of women, we can make fundamental changes in our communities.

I am proud of the Yazidis, for their strength and patience. Our community has been targeted many times and threatened in its existence, yet we continue to struggle for our right to exist. The Yazidi community embodies peace and tolerance and must be considered an example for the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to address my thanks to the persons who defended and carried my message since the first day, in particular my team who stood by my side day in day out.

I thank all the governments that recognized the Yazidi genocide and the governments that provided support to vulnerable communities. Thank you Canada and Australia for hosting victims of the Yazidi genocide. I thank the United Kingdom for their assistance and initiative to set up an international team to investigate the crimes of ISIS. I thank France and President Macron for their humanitarian support to our cause. My thanks go to the people of Iraqi Kurdistan for their support all along the last four years to the internally displaced people. I thank the Emir of Kuwait and the government of Norway for organising the Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq. I thank my friend Amal Clooney and her team for their huge efforts to hold ISIS to account. I thank Greece for the unlimited support to refugees.

Let us all unite to fight injustice and oppression; Let us raise our voices together and say: No to violence, yes to peace, no to slavery, yes to freedom, no to racial discrimination, yes to equality and to human rights for all.

No to exploiting women and children, yes to providing a decent and independent life to them, no to impunity for criminals, yes to holding criminals accountable and to achieving justice.

Thank you for your hospitality and kind attention. May you all live in lasting peace.