



ESCAPE FROM HELL

TORTURE AND SEXUAL SLAVERY IN
ISLAMIC STATE CAPTIVITY IN IRAQ

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SUMMARY

As they swept through large parts of northern Iraq, fighters with the armed group calling itself “Islamic State” (IS)¹ systematically targeted members of non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities, as well as Sunni Muslims who oppose them. But even within the context of its persecution of minority groups and Shi’a Muslims,² the IS has singled out the Yezidi minority,³ notably its women and children, for particularly brutal treatment.⁴

In August 2014, IS fighters abducted hundreds, possibly thousands, of Yezidi men, women and children who were fleeing the IS takeover from the Sinjar region, in the north-west of the country. Hundreds of the men were killed and others were forced to convert to Islam under threat of death.⁵ Younger women and girls, some as young as 12, were separated from their parents and older relatives and sold, given as gifts or forced to marry IS fighters and supporters. Many have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, and have likewise been pressured into converting to Islam.

Up to 300 of those abducted, mostly women and children, have managed to escape IS captivity, while the majority continue to be held in various locations in Iraq and in parts of Syria controlled by the IS. They are moved frequently from place to place. Some are able to communicate with their displaced relatives in areas outside IS control but the fate and whereabouts of others are not known.

Some of the women and girls who have escaped IS captivity, as well as some of those who remain captive, have given harrowing accounts to Amnesty International of the torture and abuses they have suffered.

Rape and other forms of torture and sexual violence, hostage taking, arbitrary deprivation of liberty and forcing persons to act against their religious beliefs constitute war crimes. Some of the violations and abuses documented in this report also constitute crimes against humanity, including torture, rape and sexual slavery. The IS continues to hold hundreds of captives, including children. Any party, in Iraq or outside, with influence over the IS should use that influence to secure the release of these captives and put an end to abductions, forced marriages, rape and other abuses. Those who have escaped or been released must be provided with adequate and timely medical care and support services.

METHODOLOGY

Between September and November 2014, an Amnesty International researcher in northern Iraq interviewed 42 women and girls who had escaped from the IS, and was able to contact four others, by phone, who remain in captivity. Amnesty International also interviewed scores of displaced Yezidis whose female relatives were or remain in IS captivity, Yezidi community leaders and activists, and medical and humanitarian workers. Several families have provided lists of names of their captive relatives, among them hundreds of women and girls.

Some names, places and other details which could lead to victims being identified have been changed or withheld for security and confidentiality reasons.

RAPE AND SEXUAL SLAVERY

Arwa is 15. She was abducted in August in a village south of Mount Sinjar with scores of her relatives and hundreds of neighbours, and was held in IS captivity in various places in Syria and Iraq, where she was raped, before escaping. Sixty-two of her relatives, including her mother and siblings, are still in IS hands. She told Amnesty International:

“They took us first to Syria, to a place near Hassake. There we were kept in a house with lots of girls. After 10 days a group of us were taken back to Iraq, to Mosul, for two days. Then I was taken to Baiji with one of my sisters and some of my cousins, while four of my sisters and two of my cousins were taken to Syria. In Baiji I was kept in two different places and after about three weeks I was taken to Rambussi, near Sinjar, with my 13-year-old cousin, while my sister was taken to my mother who is being held in another village with other relatives.

“In Rambussi we were held in a house with five other girls. There they did to me what they did to many other girls. I was raped. My cousin was not molested; they wanted to take her to marry her to a man but in the end they left her with us and then we managed to escape. One of the girls said she was not raped but I don't know if it is true; I hope it is true. Another did not talk about what happened to her. The others were raped. The men were all Iraqis. They said that if we killed ourselves they would kill our relatives.”

A 16-year-old girl, Randa, was abducted from her village south of Mount Sinjar with her parents and siblings and scores of other relatives. She was sold or given as a “gift” to a man twice her age who then raped her. Her father was killed along with other male relatives. Her mother, who was heavily pregnant when she was abducted, gave birth in IS captivity and continues to be held with scores of other women and children from the family. Some are being held in Syria, others in Iraq. Randa and two of her aunts and two uncles managed to escape at different times. She told Amnesty International:

“I was taken to Mosul and kept there all the time. First in a building which they called the maqarr (headquarters). We were about 150 girls and five women. A man called Salwan took me from there to an abandoned house. He also took my cousin, who is 13 years old; we resisted and they beat us. He took me as his wife by force. I told him I did not want to and tried to resist but he beat me. My nose was bleeding, I could not do anything to stop him. I ran away as soon as I could. Luckily they did not do anything to my cousin, did not force her to marry, and she escaped with me. I went to a doctor here, who said that I was not pregnant and didn't have any disease, but I can't forget what happened to me. It is so painful what they did to me and to my family. Da'esh (the IS)⁶ has ruined our lives. My mum gave birth while being held by Da'esh in Tal 'Afar; now she is being held in Mosul with my little sister and the baby. My 10-year-old brother was separated from my mum and is being held in Tal 'Afar with my aunt. What will happen to them? I don't know if I will ever see them again.”

Arwa and Randa are among more than 200 women and girls who have managed to escape the horrors of IS captivity, but hundreds, possibly thousands, of other women and girls

continue to be held by IS fighters in areas of Iraq and Syria under IS control. Most were abducted on 3 August, when IS fighters seized the towns and villages in the Sinjar region of north-west Iraq, and others on 15 August from the village of Kocho (south of Mount Sinjar), whose residents had not managed to flee on 3 August. The whereabouts of many of the women and children being held by the IS are known, but for others there is no information. Virtually every family has lost track of at least some of their relatives, as they are frequently moved from place to place between Iraq and Syria.

Elias, whose wife and children and other relatives are in IS captivity, told Amnesty International in November that he had finally received news from his 16-year-old niece, with whom all contact had been lost a few days after her abduction, when she had been separated from the other women and children. He said that she had been forcibly married and raped.

The fragmented and sporadic information from those who remain in IS's hands matches the harrowing accounts of those who have managed to escape: systematic physical and psychological torture, including rape and other sexual violence, abuses which constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Even those who told Amnesty International that they had not been physically abused said they had endured constant threats and pressures, as they witnessed the suffering of other captives and lived in fear that the threats against them would be carried out:

“Men came several times to take away some of the girls. Those who resisted were beaten and pulled away by the hair. Some were beaten with electrical cables. I was not afraid of the beatings, but could not bear the thought that they could attack my honour. We were constantly told that we would be forced to marry or sold to some men.”

A young woman who was held with her sister for over a month before both managed to escape told Amnesty International:

“They kept bringing prospective buyers for us but luckily none of them took us because we are not beautiful and we were always crying and holding on to each other. We tried to kill ourselves and the man who was holding us promised not to separate us, but he was becoming more and more impatient. He wanted to get rid of us, to unload the responsibility for us on to someone else, and if we had not managed to escape it was only a matter of time before we would have ended up married by force or sold to some men, like many other girls.”

“Unmarried women and girls were separated from older women and those with children from the outset. They focussed first on the young girls, the pretty ones. They were the first ones to be taken away,” one of those who escaped told Amnesty International. Her account echoes those of other former and current captives.

Some girls told their captors they were married with children, hoping to avoid being sold or forced to marry. “My sister and I told them we were married but they said they would bring a doctor to examine us and those who were virgins and had lied about being married would be punished, so we admitted that we were not married. If we had known that they were going to kill us we would have continued to lie but we were afraid that we would be raped as

punishment so we admitted that we were not married," a young woman said.

However, married women with children are not necessarily spared the horrors of rape and forced marriage. 19-year-old Abla, who was pregnant with her second child when she was abducted last August, said:

"I had my little boy with me and my pregnancy was very visible already but one of the guards chose me to be his wife. He said that if I did not consent to marrying him he would sell me on to another man who would take me to Syria. I let him believe that I would marry him and managed to run away before he could carry out his threats."

DRIVEN TO SUICIDE

“I heard that my 19-year-old sister Jilan committed suicide in the place where she was held in Mosul two weeks ago,” a young man from Sinjar told Amnesty International in early September. Several girls who later escaped IS captivity confirmed the sad news to Amnesty International in November. One of them, 20-year-old Luna, recounted:

“We were 21 girls in one room, two of them were very young, 10-12 years. One day we were given clothes that looked like dance costumes and were told to bathe and wear those clothes. Jilan killed herself in the bathroom. She cut her wrists and hanged herself. She was very beautiful. I think she knew that she was going to be taken away by a man and that is why she killed herself.”

Two other girls, aged 17 and 10, who had been held in the same place, confirmed the account of Jilan’s suicide in separate interviews. Wafa’, 27, told Amnesty International she and her sister tried to kill themselves while being held in Mosul:

“The man who was holding us said that either we marry him and his brother or he would sell us. At night we tried to strangle ourselves with our scarves. We tied the scarves around our necks and pulled away from each other as hard as we could, until I fainted. Two girls who were held with us woke up and stopped us and then stayed awake to watch over us. When they fell asleep at 5am we tried again, and again they woke up and stopped us. I could not speak for several days after that.”

Others told Amnesty International that women and girls held with them had attempted or were planning to commit suicide to escape the horrors of captivity and sexual violence. One 20-year-old woman said:

“They took my three sisters away by force, one by one. They were all younger than me. One was only 13 and the others were 15 and 18. I wanted to kill myself, because I could not bear to think what would become of them and because I was afraid they would do the same to me. But I had my 10-year-old cousin with me and I had to look after her. I told my captors that she was my daughter and they believed me as I am 20 but look a bit older and we get married young. My two younger sisters called my father once and said they were in Mosul and had been married by force. We have no news of my 18-year-old sister, where she is held or even if she is dead or alive.”

The relatives of some of the women and girls who escaped the IS fear that the trauma suffered in captivity could still drive them to suicide. “My wife has panic attacks and can’t sleep. I can’t leave her alone because I’m afraid for her safety. If I cannot be with her even for a short while, I find someone else who can be with her,” said the husband of a 19-year-old woman who had escaped. The grandfather of a 16-year-old who escaped IS captivity after having been raped said: “She is very sad and quiet all the time. She does not smile any more and seems not to care about anything. I worry that she may try to kill herself, I don’t let her out of my sight.”

THE PERPETRATORS

According to the testimonies of those who escaped from captivity, the majority of the men they encountered during their ordeal – those who captured, held or abused them, prospective “buyers”, and others – were Iraqis and Syrians. Some were from other Arabic-speaking countries,⁷ and few were from other countries (the latter spoke little or no Arabic and were hence presumed to be from outside the region). Four women and girls said they had been held in the homes of two Australian fighters of Lebanese origin, one of whom was living with his Australian wife (also of Lebanese origin) and children. Most were in their 20s and 30s, some were older, and few were considerably older, up to mid-50s. Many, but not necessarily all, were IS fighters and some were believed to be IS supporters.

Residents of Mosul and Tal ‘Afar, where many abducted Yezidi women and girls have been held, told Amnesty international that they knew of men who had good relations with IS fighters and had “married” abducted Yezidi women or girls in their cities. A Mosul resident said he knew of at least two such cases: “They are local businessmen, not fighters. I don’t know if they bought the girls or what the arrangements are to get the girls but they registered their marriage in the local Shari’a court [established by the IS].” A resident of Tal ‘Afar, who told Amnesty International that he supports the IS, said:

“It is right and proper that these people [members of the Yezidi community] should convert to Islam and that the unmarried women should be married to Muslim men according to Islam. It is not true that they are oppressed, this is just propaganda. They are being fed and well treated like any other wives. I personally know some of the local men who have married these girls and they are good and honourable men.”

Several of those who escaped described being held in their captors’ homes with their captors’ wives, children, parents, and siblings. Fawziya, 18, told Amnesty International:

“In the first 10 days we were not molested, the men brought us food and left us alone. Then we were told each of us must choose a husband or else men will choose us. At that time we were kept together, many of us, more than 100. Then we were split in groups, six girls per group, and each group was taken to a different house in Rambussi (near Mount Sinjar). In the house where I was held each girl was with a man from Da’esh; these men were aged between 30-40 years; we were aged between 15 and 20. The man who took me as his wife was about 30 and was from Mosul. He used me as his wife for four days in that house and then took me to Mosul to his family home. His family did not agree with what Da’esh did to the Yezidi girls but did not do anything to stop it. I was put in a room with his wife, she was also from Mosul, was young and very nice to me. She has two young children, a boy and a girl, with him. His parents did not interfere, but they said that if I did not convert to Islam he should give me away or sell me, and get a Muslim wife instead. He took me and his wife and children to Rambussi and said he was going to give me back to the emir (chief). There were other girls in houses nearby and I eventually managed to escape with some other girls.”

Another girl said of her captor’s family: “His wife was very nice to us and felt sorry for us.

She cried with us and wanted to help but she couldn't."

A young woman who was held in several family homes said: "Abu Faysal's parents tried to convince us to convert to Islam but in a nice way, without pressure, they just said it would be better for us." But the man's parents did nothing to stop the abuses against the girls. "A man came to the house to take Khaya [one of the captive girls] away and she resisted and was beaten until she fainted and then the man took her away."

Several other girls who were held by foreign fighters told Amnesty International that the wife of one of them helped them to communicate with their families and eventually to escape: "She was more than a mother to us. I could never forget this woman, she saved our lives," said one of the girls. The girls said that two foreign fighters told them they would register them at the Shari'a court as their wives so that they could stay together as a group. They did not abuse any of them, and spent most of their time away from home fighting at the front.

A 13-year-old girl who was held with her toddler sister in her captor's home told Amnesty International she had not been abused and that her captor had actually saved her:

"He took me to his home and I slept in a room with his older wife while he slept in another room with his younger wife. The older wife was very nice to me. He said he had bought me because he felt sorry for me and wanted to send me and my little sister back to my family and indeed he did so."

RULE OF FEAR

The IS has not tried to hide or deny its crimes. On the contrary, more than any other group, it has gone to great efforts to publicize gruesome details of the atrocities perpetrated by its members against captured soldiers and civilians alike, giving them ample resonance through videos and statements widely distributed on social media, often in multiple languages. It has used its reputation as a brutal and ruthless actor to instil fear in its enemies and anyone else in its path.

Its strategy has produced the desired results – both Iraqi and Kurdish forces fled in the face of the IS advance, making it easier for it to seize large areas of the country and leaving civilian residents from minority communities unprotected. After IS captured the entire Sinjar area and abducted thousands of Yezidi residents, Peshmerga forces⁸ and residents from the Yezidi and other minority communities who lived in towns and villages further east fled in fear of the IS advance. “Yes I am a Peshmerga, but I have a wife and children who need protection, so my priority had to be to take them to safety before *Da’esh* attacked the area. I could not leave my family to be taken hostage or slaughtered by *Da’esh*; so we fled,” a Yezidi member of the Peshmerga forces told Amnesty International. “The fear of the crimes *Da’esh* could commit against the women and children of my family is much greater than the fear of being killed by *Da’esh*,” another Yezidi man said.

In a matter of weeks the IS carried out a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing in northern Iraq. It forced hundreds of thousands of members of ethnic and religious minorities, who had lived in the region for centuries – including Shi’a (who are a minority in northern Iraq), Assyrian Christians, Turkmen Shi’a, Shabak Shi’a, Yezidis, Kakai, and Sabeen Mandaeans – to abandon their homes and villages.

The IS has also boasted about subjecting abducted Yezidi women and girls to sexual violence and slavery, seeking to legitimize these abhorrent and criminal practices according to their own interpretation of Islam. Discussing the treatment of the Yezidi minority population in areas under IS control in its publication (Dabiq),⁹ it states:

“Unlike the Jews and Christians, there was no room for jizyah (non-Muslim residents) payment. Also, their women could be enslaved... After capture, the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Sharī’ah¹⁰ amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations, after one fifth of the slaves were transferred to the Islamic State’s authority to be divided as khums [fifth]... Before Shaytān [Satan] reveals his doubts to the weak-minded and weak hearted, one should remember that enslaving the families of the kuffār [infidels] and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Sharī’ah...”

According to a recent “Questions and Answers” believed to have been issued by the IS’s “Office of research and religious edicts”:

“Unbelieving [women] who were captured and brought into the abode of Islam are permissible to us, after the imam distributes them [among us]... If she is a virgin, he

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*[her master] can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first]... It is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of... It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse; however if she is not fit for intercourse, then it is enough to enjoy her without intercourse..."*¹¹

THE DIFFICULT ROAD TO RECOVERY AFTER CAPTIVITY

The women and girls who have escaped IS captivity are in a situation of acute emotional distress. In addition to having to cope with the trauma of the violence they have survived, they are grieving for relatives killed by the IS and desperately worried about those who are still being held captive. For many of them, their entire immediate family – parents, brothers and sisters – are still being held. Aside from the physical and psychological suffering, they now find themselves forcibly displaced from their homes and having to live as guests in the shelters of more distant relatives and neighbours, who are likewise displaced. This situation causes them additional material and emotional discomfort as it entails an unusual arrangement for conservative rural Yezidi communities, where unmarried girls live with their parents and siblings, and married women with their husbands and close family. They are financially dependent on these relatives, who are themselves forcibly displaced and suffering great hardship.

According to Yezidi customs, marriage with members of other faiths and sexual relations outside marriage are not accepted. Such practices are considered to be shameful for the whole family, and in the past women and girls believed to have had relations with men of other faiths have been victims of so-called “honour killings”.¹²

After the first women and girls escaped from IS captivity in late August 2014, the Yezidi spiritual leader, Baba Sheikh, reportedly called on members of the community not to punish or ostracise women and girls who had been victims of sexual violence at the hands of the IS, or those who were forced to convert to Islam, and to welcome them back and support and care for them. However, the stigma remains. Some of the relatives of abducted Yezidi women and girls interviewed by Amnesty International were concerned not just about the suffering inflicted on their captured relatives, but also about the negative social consequences of the abductions for the future of these women and girls. Some said that it would be difficult to find suitable husbands¹³ for those who had been abducted, even if they had not been victims of sexual violence, because it was assumed that all those abducted had been raped.

Some of the women and girls who were sexually abused in captivity have not been able or willing to talk about the violence they endured, particularly those whose parents and other immediate family are still missing and who have no one they can turn to for support and advice.

Three girls told Amnesty International that they had been raped but said they had not told their relatives. Some of the escapees said they had not been subjected to any form of sexual violence in captivity, but other women and girls held with them said that they had actually been raped.

Those who are unable to talk to their relatives about the violence they have suffered face additional difficulties in seeking and accessing the medical care and support they desperately need. The limited medical and psycho-social support services which are

available, provided by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Directorate of Health and by humanitarian organizations, are mostly located far from where the women and girls who have escaped IS captivity are sheltering.

Notably it is difficult or impossible for them to find out about and travel to the places where such services are provided on their own, as they are dependent on their relatives to cover the cost of transport and to accompany them (especially as they are often sheltering in locations unfamiliar to them).

Many survivors of sexual violence, therefore, find themselves in a catch-22 situation. Their relatives are their only source of support, but because of stigma and shame, they do not feel able to share with them what happened, or to seek their help in accessing the services they urgently need.

While the subject of rape and other sexual violence of abducted women and girls has been discussed openly by Yezidi community leaders in the media, most Yezidi men and women interviewed by Amnesty International have tended to say that while the rape of captive women and girls is systematic, their own relatives were not subjected to such abuses. This may be reinforcing the stigma around rape and contributing to former captives feeling that they cannot reveal the details of rape or other sexual violence for fear of bringing shame on their families. At the same time, there has been significant pressure on women and girls who escaped IS captivity to speak to national and international media. Local media fixers and activists have often brought journalists to interview the escapees without first seeking their informed consent. In some cases, relatives have pressured them into giving interviews even when they clearly did not feel comfortable. An Amnesty International researcher witnessed at least three such cases first hand, and was told of others by escapees and their relatives.

One woman told Amnesty International that she went to a place where she thought she would be receiving medical care for her panic attacks, but instead found a television crew wanting to interview her. Two others said that they received a visit from a foreign man who said he was a doctor, but seemed to be a journalist: "He said that to cure our depression we should get out of the house and go for walks in the fields and sit in the sun. He had a large video camera and filmed us but said that our faces would not be shown." Three other girls who received the visit of a television crew while they were being interviewed by an Amnesty International researcher said that they did not want to speak to journalists but that they felt they could not refuse because the family who hosted them had brought the journalists to them.¹⁴

Some Yezidi community leaders and activists have told Amnesty International that it is necessary for former captives to talk to journalists in order to raise the awareness of the international community about the plight of Yezidi women and children in IS captivity and that this would cause no harm to the women and girls as long as their faces and identities were concealed. They were seemingly unaware of the pressure being put on the former captives and of the negative impact this could have on their well-being and ability to recover from the psychological trauma caused by the sexual violence and other abuses they suffered in captivity.

THE CONDUCT OF THE ISLAMIC STATE: WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

International humanitarian law (IHL, the laws of war) applies in situations of armed conflict. In Iraq, there is currently a non-international armed conflict involving forces aligned with the central government and the KRG, including international coalition members, and the armed group the Islamic State and other armed groups opposed to the government. The rules of IHL therefore apply and are binding on all parties to the conflict, including the IS. These rules and principles seek to protect anyone who is not actively participating in hostilities, notably civilians, and anyone, including those who were previously participating in hostilities, who is wounded or surrenders or is otherwise captured or incapacitated.

Torture and cruel treatment, rape and other forms of sexual violence, hostage taking, arbitrary deprivation of liberty and forcing persons to act against their religious beliefs are prohibited and constitute war crimes.¹⁵

Under IHL, individuals, whether civilians or military, can be held criminally responsible for war crimes. Leaders and commanders of armed groups must be particularly diligent in seeking to prevent and repress such crimes. Military commanders and civilian superiors can be held responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates if they ordered such acts or if they knew, or had reason to know, such crimes were about to be committed and did not take necessary measures to prevent their commission, or to punish crimes that have already been committed.¹⁶ Individuals are also criminally responsible for assisting in, facilitating, aiding or abetting the commission of a war crime.¹⁷

Crimes against humanity are prohibited acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population as part of a government or organizational policy.¹⁸ The violations and abuses documented in this report also constitute crimes against humanity. The IS have deliberately targeted the civilian population, and their crimes have been widespread, as well as systematic in nature, and have been part of the group's organizational policy. The crimes against humanity committed by IS include murder, enslavement, imprisonment, torture, rape and sexual slavery, and persecution.

The UN Security Council, in Resolution 1820 (2008), condemned sexual violence in armed conflict. It noted that "women and girls are particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence, including as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group". And it stated that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide".

The Security Council affirmed its intention "when establishing and renewing state-specific sanctions regimes, to take into consideration the appropriateness of targeted and graduated

measures against parties to situations of armed conflict who commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in situations of armed conflict.”¹⁹

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite worldwide condemnation, the IS has shown no intention of putting an end to the war crimes and crimes against humanity which its fighters have been committing on a large scale, including against the Iraqi women and girls they have abducted and continue to hold captive. Any party, in Iraq or outside, with any influence over the IS should use that influence to secure the release of these captives.

A small proportion of those abducted have managed to escape IS captivity, many after having been subjected to acts of unspeakable brutality. But the survivors interviewed by Amnesty International are not receiving the help and support they desperately need. Survivors of sexual violence should be proactively sought out and provided with adequate and timely medical care and support services. The KRG and the UN agencies and humanitarian organizations who are providing or putting in place such services should ensure that they are physically, geographically and financially accessible, and that survivors are provided with adequate and timely information on the available support services and how to access them. Information and materials about medical and psycho-social services, and must be made available in the appropriate languages so survivors are able to access them.

Such services should include prompt medical and forensic examination in accordance with survivors' wishes, including trauma support and counseling; sexual and reproductive health care including emergency contraception, HIV counseling, testing and post-exposure prophylaxis, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, the option for safe and legal abortion services and maternal health support; legal and financial assistance; access to shelters or housing, education and training; and assistance in finding employment.

It is crucial that the privacy and confidentiality of those who have escaped IS captivity is respected at all times, whether or not they say that they have not been subjected to rape or other sexual violence. Notably, journalists should not attempt to interview escapees without ensuring they have given their informed consent, and relatives, activists and community leaders should not put any pressure on escapees to speak to media or others if they do not feel comfortable doing so.

¹ Previously known as Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)

² Shi'a Muslims make up the majority of Iraq's population but were a minority in the areas which have been seized by the IS.

³ Yezidis are ethnic Kurds who practice an ancient monotheistic religion, which has links to Zoroastrianism, a pre-Islamic religion which originated in the Persian Empire. They worship the "Peacock Angel", considered by some Muslims and followers of other religions as representing Satan and the

reason why Yezidis have endured centuries of persecution on accusations of “devil worshipping”. See for example: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/who-yazidi-isis-iraq-religion-ethnicity-mountains>

⁴ For more details see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/gruesome-evidence-ethnic-cleansing-northern-iraq-islamic-state-moves-wipe-out-minorities-2014-0> and <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE14/011/2014/en/b3a0980f-ee7a-4554-b1ce-108e0a496440/mde140112014en.pdf>

⁵ Yezidi men who manage to escape from IS captivity have told Amnesty International that they had been forced to convert to Islam under threat of death. Scores of Yezidi men who were captured on 3 August, when IS fighters stormed the Sinjar region, were shown converting to Islam in a video distributed on social media around 20 August, in which an IS commander says that those who do not want to convert can die of hunger and thirst “on the mountain” (a reference to Mount Sinjar, where Yezidi fighters and some civilians have been sheltering since 3 August, surrounded by IS fighters)..

⁶ The Arabic term commonly used to refer to the IS

⁷ Yezidis are Kurdish-speaking. Many of the women and girls interviewed by Amnesty International did not know Arabic well enough to recognize the different accents.

⁸ The Peshmerga are the armed forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

⁹ Dabiq, Issue 4, available at: <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf>

¹⁰ Same as Shari’a. Shari’ah is the spelling used in the cited publication

¹¹ Translation available here: <http://www.memrijttm.org/islamic-state-isis-releases-pamphlet-on-female-slaves.html>

¹² A 17-year-old Yezidi girl from Bashika, a town east of Mosul, Du’a Khalil Aswad, was stoned to death by a group of the town’s men in 2007 because of her relations with a Muslim teenager; See: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/iraq-%E2%80%98honour-killing%E2%80%99-teenage-girl-condemned-abhorrent> and <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE14/027/2007/en/4df2a4b2-d398-11dd-a329-2f46302a8cc6/mde140272007en.html>

¹³ Yezidi society is structured on the basis of a caste system. In this context, a suitable husband means, among others, one from the right caste (not from a lower caste).

¹⁴ In this case the girls were being hosted by a family from their home town, as all their relatives had been abducted and they had no relatives in the KRG.

¹⁵ ICRC Customary IHL Study, Rules 90, 93, 96, 99, and 104.

¹⁶ ICRC Customary IHL Study, Rule 153.

¹⁷ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 25.

¹⁸ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Art 7 (2)

¹⁹ S/RES/1820 (2008)

ESCAPE FROM HELL

TORTURE AND SEXUAL SLAVERY IN ISLAMIC STATE CAPTIVITY IN IRAQ

As they swept through large parts of northern Iraq, fighters with the armed group calling itself “Islamic State” (IS) systematically targeted members of non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities, as well as Sunni Muslims who oppose them. But even within the context of its persecution of minority groups and Shi’a Muslims, the IS has singled out the Yezidi minority, notably its women and children, for particularly brutal treatment.

In August 2014, IS fighters abducted hundreds, possibly thousands, of Yezidi men, women and children who were fleeing the IS takeover from the Sinjar region, in the north-west of the country. Hundreds of the men were killed and others were forced to convert to Islam under threat of death. Younger women and girls, some as young as 12, were separated from their parents and older relatives and sold, given as gifts or forced to marry IS fighters and supporters. Many have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, and have likewise been pressured into converting to Islam.

Up to 300 of those abducted, mostly women and children, have managed to escape IS captivity, while the majority continue to be held in various locations in Iraq and in parts of Syria controlled by the IS. They are moved frequently from place to place. Some are able to communicate with their displaced relatives in areas outside IS control but the fate and whereabouts of others are not known.

Some of the women and girls who have escaped IS captivity, as well as some of those who remain captive, have given harrowing accounts to Amnesty International of the torture and abuses they have suffered.

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