



ONE FREE WORLD
INTERNATIONAL

CANADA'S UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO SUPPORT YAZIDI VICTIMS OF GENOCIDE

OFWI Submission to the House of Commons
Citizenship and Immigration Committee

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Overview

One Free World International (OFWI) has prepared this submission for consideration by the House of Commons Citizenship and Immigration Committee's (CIMM) study "on resettlement issues related to the Yazidi women and girls."

We thank all members of the House of Commons for unanimously adopting MP Michelle Rempel's motion in October 2016 that led to the special Government of Canada initiative to resettle Yazidi genocide survivors announced by Minister Hussen in February 2017.

While media headlines would suggest to casual observers ISIS has been defeated with Mosul, Iraq and Raqqa, Syria liberated from their deadly grip, ISIS still controls large swaths of territory in western Iraq and eastern Syria. 3,000 enslaved Yazidi women and girls remain unaccounted for in these ISIS controlled territories.

This submission is informed by OFWI's direct experience from seven OFWI Missions to Iraq and Syria since fighting with ISIS broke out in 2014. OFWI has helped rescue over 600 Yazidi women and girls from ISIS slavery, visited refugee camps and make-shift displaced communities to inform our aid efforts, raised funds to deliver needed medical supplies, and advocated for assistance for victims of genocide in North American and European capitals.

OFWI has also been assisting multiple families resettled as Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) in the Greater Toronto Area this year to bridge the gap in services delivered to these highly traumatized people.

This submission will focus its recommendations to topics pertinent to CIMM's study. The three recommendations are:

- 1. Resettle 3,000 additional Yazidi Genocide Victims**
- 2. Prioritize Resettlement of Yazidi Sex Slavery Survivors and Their Families**
- 3. Provide Psychological Support Services for Resettled Refugees**

Resettle 3,000 additional Yazidi Genocide Victims

The Government of Canada should extend its commitment and resettle an additional 3,000 Yazidi genocide victims in 2018.

Tens of thousands of Yazidis remain in refugee camps and more are displaced living in makeshift communities on the fringes of an already war-torn society. Most are unable to return to their homes. Through targeted and mass killings, this genocide by ISIS has torn families apart and systematically destroyed their communities. With further instability in region, Yazidis, as a minority population, are left to languish. Canada must do more to demonstrate we mean “Never Again.”

Canada is uniquely positioned to welcome the most vulnerable refugees from the region and OFWI has full confidence Canadians will step up to support these victims of genocide. Resettling more Yazidi refugees to Canada will help this vulnerable population heal and rebuild.

Prioritize Resettlement of Yazidi Sex Slavery Survivors and Their Families

The Government of Canada needs to prioritize the resettlement of Yazidi women and children who were enslaved by ISIS.

The women and children who were enslaved by ISIS are the most vulnerable population needing Canada’s support. These women face a stigma as a result of the abuse and torture they faced. Their stories often involve sexual and physical abuse at the hands of ISIS, all after being forced to watch their husbands, fathers, and brothers murdered.

The road to recovery for these individuals is more than their own communities can handle. In a patriarchal society where speaking of sexual abuse is more than just taboo, it leaves those who speak up ostracized and shamed by their own people. It is next to impossible for them to find the emotional and mental health care support in refugee camps or the makeshift communities they need so they can begin to heal. It is essential to their long-term health and survival that these women be given a chance at life in Canada.

Provide Psychological Support Services for Resettled Refugees

Citizenship and Immigration Canada needs to resource settlement organizations assisting with GAR resettlement to provide lacking mental health support to Yazidi families resettled in Canada.

The Yazidi women who were enslaved by ISIS have faced unfathomable trauma. Many were bought and sold multiple times, raped and beaten, forced to sleep on the floor, drink from toilets, and eat leftovers from the floor, if at all. Many also witnessed their husbands or brothers killed at gunpoint when ISIS invaded their villages in August 2014.

OFWI is providing support to several Yazidi families resettled in 2017 to the Greater Toronto Area and have been able to connect these families with volunteer psychologists to get them help. If not for our intervention, these families would not be getting psychological counselling to begin to heal from their trauma.

Given the Government of Canada's recognition of the unique circumstances Yazidis have faced as victims of genocide and initiating the resettlement of 1,200 refugees, there needs to be recognition that mental health support is required for these refugees.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada in partnership with settlement organizations and other community partners should immediately address this need and develop a nimbler approach to providing this support and give these highly traumatized Yazidi women the healing they need to better succeed in Canada.

About One Free World International

One Free World International: a voice for the voiceless. Conducting daring rescue missions, building bridges between communities, advocating for changes in government policy around the world, and raising awareness about those who are persecuted for their beliefs. Everything OFWI does is to stand up for those who are persecuted as a result of their faith and increase awareness of the plight of those who are forced to endure hardship for their beliefs.

Based in Toronto with 28 chapters around the world, OFWI promotes and protects the rights of religious minorities around the world while building tolerance and understanding for diverse religious beliefs.

OFWI believes that, along with the right to life, religious freedom and freedom of conscience are the first and most fundamental of human rights. The ability to believe (or to choose not to believe) in something beyond our material existence, in accordance with our individual conscience, and to manifest that belief in practices and observances is one of the most essential distinguishing characteristics of the human race.