

Helping the Yazidi Victims of Genocide

Submission to the House of Commons Citizenship
and Immigration Committee

by Natalie Boldt

Overview

I have prepared this submission for consideration by the House of Commons Citizenship and Immigration Committee's study on "resettlement issues related to the Yazidi women and girls".

It is my understanding that ISIS still controls large amounts of territory in Western Iraq and Eastern Syria. There are still 3,000 Yazidi women and girls that remain unaccounted for in these ISIS controlled territories.

The Yazidi people have been on my heart for over a year now and during this time have educated myself on who they are, the help they need and the unique position that Canada is in to help them. Myself and a friend recently travelled from our home just outside of Edmonton, AB to Toronto ON, where we had the opportunity to meet with Rev. Majed El Shafie from One Free World International. He took us around to 3 of the Yazidi families that he has helped resettle.

We were able to spend time talking with and listening to the horrific stories of what these families have gone through at the hands of ISIS. We were able to assist them with some of their daily needs and gain a better understanding of what life looks like for them now. It was very clear to us that as thankful as they are to be in a safe country, without more help from the government and the aid of a community helping them, their hope for a better life and integration will be difficult.

The recommendations in my submission are:

- 1. Bring over the remaining 1,200 Yazidi refugees promised and resettle an additional 3,000 Yazidi Genocide Victims**
- 2. Prioritize resettlement of Yazidi sex slave survivors and their families**
- 3. Provide psychological support services for resettled refugees**

Resettlement and Challenges Faced

The Government of Canada promised to bring over 1,200 Yazidi refugees before the end of 2017, and as of yet, has not fulfilled this promise. The Government of Canada should extend its commitment and resettle an additional 3,000 Yazidi genocide victims in 2018.

Canada is in a position to welcome the most vulnerable Yazidi refugees from Iraq and I believe that Canadians such as myself will step up to support these victims of genocide. Resettling more Yazidi refugees to Canada will help them heal and rebuild.

Tens of thousands of Yazidi's remain in refugee camps and more are displaced in the surrounding areas of this war-torn country. Most are unable to return home for fear of being executed or because their homes and families have been destroyed. Through targeted and mass killings, this genocide by ISIS has destroyed families and their communities. Canada can and must do more to help.

I would also request that Edmonton, Alberta become an area where Yazidi women and girls be relocated as I have been putting together teams of women who are ready and willing to help. These include female doctors, counsellors, real estates agents and more who are willing to offer their services.

Some of the challenges faced by the Yazidi's when they arrive in Canada is that they are not made aware that there are already other Yazidi families established in their area. The government has not done a good job of connecting them with the Yazidi communities, making the newly arrived refugees feel, fear and isolation. Also when it comes to finding housing, it is left up to the refugees to find their own. Without familiarity of the Canadian culture and more importantly the barrier of language, it's incredibly difficult for these families to find suitable housing. Once they do find a suitable place to live, it's very difficult for them to cover rent based on the very limited money allocated to them. Often after paying rent they are left with no money for food, clothes or other necessities.

Prioritize Resettlement of Yazidi Sex Slave Survivors and Their Families

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

It's critical that Canada support this most vulnerable population of Yazidi women and children. These women face a stigma as a result of the abuse and torture they have

faced. Their horrific stories tell of how they have been raped and beaten at the hands of ISIS, all after being forced to watch their husbands, fathers, and brothers murdered.

Recovery and healing can seem overwhelming after all these women and children have been through, seen and heard. Sadly many of them are left with intense shame that can often lead to suicide because speaking of the sexual abuse and torture they've been put through is taboo to speak about in their communities. It is nearly impossible for these women and children to access any sort of health care dealing with their mental and emotional state in their current living conditions. I can't stress enough that these women and children be given a chance at life in Canada in order to survive.

Provide Psychological Support Services for Resettled Refugees

Mental Health support for resettled Yazidi families in Canada is lacking. Citizenship and Immigration Canada needs to assist these families with proper access and resources.

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 and eat off the floor, drink from toilets and in one story we heard, one mother without knowing was forced to eat her own daughter. Many of these women's daughters were raped in front of them as well as witnessed the murder of their husbands, fathers or brothers that were killed by ISIS when they invaded their villages in August 2014.

It is my understanding that the Yazidi families that have been resettled in Canada have access to mental health but since being here, it was stated recently that less than 5 have accessed any of this help. As stated above, mental health is not something the Yazidi's would willingly seek out due to the shame that goes with all that has happened to them. They may be unaware of the services offered or many not fully understand what talking to a professional about mental health issues would even look like. They also have limited access to transportation due to the fact that they are illiterate and haven't had anyone show them how to use public transportation.

In order for these highly traumatized women and children to better succeed in Canada they must be given the support and better access to mental health. Through Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in partnership with settlement organizations, I believe these needs can be addressed and met.

About Myself

My name is Natalie Boldt and I am a wife and mother of 3 beautiful children. I am a teacher by profession and believe that as a Christian it is my calling to help the poor, the needy and the most vulnerable around the world. I can't help but realize the privilege of living in a country like Canada where my needs are more than just met. I live a quiet, comfortable life where my children are healthy and we are not afraid for our lives. My heart breaks at the thought of what my life would look like if I were born as a Yazidi in Iraq under the control of ISIS. As a wife, mother, daughter and sister, how can I turn away from the trauma and torture that these women have endured at the hands of persecution.

It was such a privilege and honour to go to Toronto and meet with these Yazidi families. Their stories are more than any human being can comprehend but with the love and care of people like Rev. Majed El Shafie these women can take off the coat of shame and live as survivors instead of victims. They truly are heroes.

Since returning home from Toronto, I have been talking with many people who are interested in helping be a community for the Yazidi families that are being relocated. It is my hope that a family will be relocated to the Spruce Grove/Edmonton area so that teams of women can come around them and help them with their day to day needs. This would include driving them to appointments, to and from school, getting groceries with them, setting up bank accounts, filling out paperwork, helping them with their English etc. These families deserve better from Canada than a safe place to live and a monthly pay check. They don't want to be a burden to society; they desire to have a new future and I believe that we can help them with that. It is my heart's desire that we will come around these most vulnerable people and fill them with the dignity that every human being deserves. That they would feel loved, valued, accepted and that we can be there strongest advocate!

I believe that along with the right to life, religious freedom and freedom of conscience are the first and most fundamental of human rights. It is my hope that through Citizenship and Canadian Immigration we can fulfill the promise to bring 1,200 Yazidi women and children here before the end of 2017. I would implore you to also recognize that the people of Canada do want to help the Yazidi's and if we work hard to make people aware and properly equip them, we can help make a difference and create a new future for the Yazidi people.

Thank you all for your time and consideration.