



AP R2P

Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

P: +61 7 3346 645 • E: r2pinfo@uq.edu.au

FEBRUARY 2017 • ISSUE 37



Associate Professor Richard Devetak, Ms Nadia Murad, Ms Nikki Marczak, Mr Ahmed Khudida Burjus, Professor Alex Bellamy

SPOTLIGHT ON R2P

Yazidi Survivor Nadia Murad Basee Taha and the Ongoing Yazidi Genocide

Public seminar - 2016

A survivor of ISIS enslavement and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Nadia Murad Basee Taha gave a confronting, powerful speech at a public seminar held at the University of Queensland late 2016. The seminar, organised by the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect in conjunction with the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, detailed Ms Murad's horrific persecution and enslavement at the hands of Islamic State forces, as well as the ongoing genocide perpetrated against the Yazidi people, an ethno-religious minority group in the Sinjar region of Iraq. Forced to witness the execution of her family and to become a sexual slave at the

age of 18, she has since travelled the world and given testimony in front of the United Nations Security Council to raise international awareness of the plight of the Yazidi community. Her experience was part of the ongoing genocide of the Yazidi people by ISIS, as its members are forced to convert to Islam or die. Although Nadia was one of the lucky ones to escape, more than 3,000 Yazidi women are still trapped in slavery.

She was accompanied by the deputy executive director of Yazda, Ahmed Khudida Burjus, who has acted as Nadia's translator and companion in her worldwide effort to raise awareness in the international community

of the plight of Yazidi people. Mr Khudida gave a short address that brought home the severity of the genocide and urged the government to commit to taking in Yazidi refugees. Yazda is an organisation dedicated to supporting the Yazidi, documenting those who have been lost and advocating for increased protection and awareness from the international community. Both Ms Murad and Yazda are currently represented by Amal Clooney, who is seeking to bring about an investigation by the International Criminal Court and prosecution for the crimes of genocide and enslavement against those responsible.

After these presentations, Professor Katharine Gelber, Deputy Head of the School of Political Science and International Studies, moderated a panel discussion comprising Nadia, Ahmed, Nikki Marczak of the AIHGS and Professor Alex Bellamy, director of the Centre.

Proir to her visit to The University of Queensland she met The Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Turnbull and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. She also presented at the University of Sydney, co-hosted by the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Speech: The Ongoing Yazidi Genocide by Nikki Marczak, Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

Thank you Professor Devetak, Professor Gelber and thank you particularly to Alex Bellamy and the R2P Centre here at the University of Queensland who very generously agreed to host this event at short notice. Thank you also to everyone who has come here in solidarity with Nadia, and the Yazidi community. You've heard from Nadia her own personal experiences, and Ahmed has shown you exactly how these crimes were carried out and the systematic nature of what the Yazidi community endured and indeed, continues to endure.

In June, an independent commission of inquiry on Syria found the genocide against Yazidis is ongoing, although Nadia didn't need a report to tell her that. Eighteen members of her family are either murdered or missing. Over the last few days, she has shown me a picture of a toddler, her niece - missing. She has shown me her nephew, who is now being indoctrinated as an ISIS fighter. She has shown me a photo of her mother before she was killed, baking flatbread in the outdoor oven - and this was her life in the village, destroyed. This is genocide.

The crimes ISIS has committed and continues to commit to this day, align with every element of the United



Ms Nadia Murad, Mr Ahmed Kudida Burjus, Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Turnbull and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop.

Nations Genocide Convention. The proof – including survivor testimony, forensic evidence and ISIS's own statements of intent to eradicate the Yazidi people - is unequivocal.

As Ahmed explained, ISIS separated men and women, and shot the men and the elderly into mass graves. In fact, along with Yazda's team on the ground collecting evidence, Father Patrick Desbois, who has spent years finding evidence of mass shootings of Jews during the Holocaust, has now turned his attention to documenting mass graves of Yazidis. The evidence of massacres is extensive. In addition, when they first attacked, ISIS deliberately cut off escape routes, and denied civilians access to food, water and shelter, leading to significant numbers of deaths. This calculated creation of conditions that led to civilian deaths is clearly covered under the genocide convention.

But genocide is not just about murder. It is fundamentally about destroying the continuity of a community. From our own history in Australia, we are well aware that the genocide convention refers to the forcible transfer of children of the group as an act of genocide. This has clearly occurred in the Yazidi case. Yazidi girls and women are being targeted systematically, with rape, sexual trafficking, forced marriage and pregnancy, all of which are accompanied by forced conversion. Groups of girls and young

women were taken to large halls where they were collectively converted and married to ISIS fighters. One of the women held by an Australian ISIS fighter was banned from crying and told by her captor: "Forget about your home and family.... Forget about your gods, for good, because we have killed them all."

As Nadia told the United Nations, ISIS did not commit these crimes randomly, but actually in accordance with official policy. The abduction of thousands of Yazidi women and children was planned in advance. Buses were used to transport them. Warehouses and other facilities had been set up to hold them.

A system of categorising the women was applied in every case, separating married from unmarried, those with children from those without, and then as if this is not dehumanising enough, the women were assigned numbers, sometimes even price tags, displayed naked in marketplaces or photographed for potential buyers. Dehumanisation is a central element of genocide, and the trafficking of Yazidi women has turned human beings into a commodity. One man told a woman he had purchased, "You are like a sheep. I have bought you."

In 1998 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda recognised that rape can be an act of genocide. In addition, it stated that forced pregnancy within the context of genocide constitutes a measure to pre-

vent births within the group. This is also covered under the Convention. The UN has even found that some Yazidi women who were abducted while already pregnant, have been subjected to forced abortion, with perpetrators telling them they do not want any more Yazidis to be born.

These are crimes against women, and crimes against Yazidis. In this intersection of genocide and violence against women, perpetrators believe they are permitted, even obligated to commit these acts, because the victims are Yazidi. ISIS's online magazine, Dabiq, explicitly directs its followers to kill, rape and enslave Yazidis and even gives them detailed instructions about how to do so in accordance with their ideology. The enslavement of Yazidi women is genocidal partly because of the sexual violence it entails, but also because it deprives them of their own identity, culture and community, and appropriates them and children born of rape into the perpetrator group. The women's names are changed, and they are prevented from speaking their own language.

The Genocide Convention also refers to causing members of the group serious bodily or mental harm.

Although Yazidi leader Baba Sheikh has welcomed survivors back to the community, perpetrators know that their crimes will have a permanent impact on their victims, both physical and psychological, thereby contributing to the destruction of the community. ISIS members are very conscious of the damage they are doing to Yazidi girls and women. One supporter wrote on social media: "Yes they are idolaters, so it's normal that they are slaves, in Mosul they are closed in a room and cry, and one of them committed suicide LOL [laugh out loud]."

This is just one of the numerous examples of utter brutality that I've read in my research, but sometimes the reality hits when you least expect it. Last week, while booking accommodation for Nadia and Ahmed, Nadia asked me to book only one room, because she is afraid to sleep on her own. When Nadia addressed the UN Security Council in December last year, she said that she hoped humanity had not disappeared. But this genocide has been going for two years. As early as October 2014, the UN knew that ISIS was committing crimes against humanity in Iraq, and subsequent reports by various human rights or-

ganisations on the ground found that those crimes, particularly against Yazidis, may constitute genocide.

Yet today, as we have heard, there are more than 3,000 women and children still in ISIS captivity. And thousands are displaced, waiting for countries like Australia to offer them a safe haven. So with all of this in mind, I'd like to hand over to Professor Bellamy now to talk more about the obligation of the global community to prevent genocide and to protect civilians from the sort of horror that Nadia has been through. Thank you.

Nikki Marczak is a director of the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Lemkin Scholar 2016 with the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. This speech is based on her forthcoming chapter, "A Century Apart: The Genocidal Enslavement of Armenian and Yazidi Women", in M. Connellan and C. Fröhlich (Eds.), A Gendered Lens for Genocide Prevention, (Palgrave).



Ms Nadia Murad with Ms Nikki Marczak (Courtesy of Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies)



Ms Nadia Murad and Professor Alex Bellamy

Presentation by Professor Alex Bellamy Centre Director Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

In 2015, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon observed that: “The scale, brutality and global impact of the acts committed by non-State armed groups like ISIL, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab represent a powerful new threat to established international norms. Although the commission of atrocity crimes by non-State armed groups is not a new phenomenon, the brazen manner in which certain non-State armed groups seem to have embraced the use of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity as a strategy for advancing their objectives is unprecedented”. Today we have been given a sense of what this gross challenge to basic common decency actually entails in practice. It is a humbling experience to share the stage with Nadia Murad, a survivor of genocide who has experienced terrible suffering and exhibited immense courage. I want to emphasize that I am choosing my words carefully. I believe that the atrocity crimes committed against Nadia and the Yazidi people constitute genocide. Nadia has walked through the valley of the shadow of death and she came out at the other side.

Now she stands tall, fearing no evil. We must all stand with her. Over many years as Director of the Asia Pacific Centre for R2P, a partnership between UQ and Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, I have had the privilege of meeting many survivors of genocide and mass atrocities. Their stories – like the one we have heard tonight – are a chilling reminder that we have not yet consigned appalling acts of inhumanity and barbarism to the dustbin of history. That the struggle against genocide is one that must be waged by every generation, including our own. That international principles such as the Responsibility to Protect are not quaint ideas to be debated and discarded in the ivory towers of the university but are very much matters of life and death. Whether, or not, the international community delivers on its responsibility to protect matters to real people, in real places, today. Nadia’s experience is testament to that; and testament to the fact that we have so much more to do before we can say that we have turned the responsibility to protect into a daily lived reality.

The Responsibility to Protect is a disarmingly simple international principle, endorsed by every state in the world. It says, simply, that all states have a responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against

humanity; that the international community should assist states in fulfilling their responsibility; and that when the state manifestly fails to protect its population, the international community should take timely and decisive action through the UN Security Council to protect populations from these atrocity crimes.

As soon as the so-called ‘Islamic State’ emerged into view, we at the Asia Pacific Centre for R2P and our friends elsewhere, such as at the Global Centre for R2P in New York, recognized that the group – with its extremist ideology of hate and mass violence – constituted a clear and present danger to populations in its vicinity. Numerous times, we have argued that R2P demands concerted action to assist the government of Iraq to wind back IS, prevent atrocities and restore the rule of law. I have also argued that R2P requires decisive action against IS in Syria as well.

It seems clear that international support has helped turn the tide against IS, but that there is so much more than needs to be done.

All too often, people lucky enough to live in the relative comfort of the West, untouched by the horrors of genocide and mass atrocity, throw their hands up in cynical despair at the difficulty of the challenge. “R2P has failed” they say. There is nothing to be done, they lament. But when we look at stories like Nadia’s, it becomes strikingly clear that it is not the principle that has failed – the principle that all peoples should be protected from genocide and other mass atrocities – but our commitment to it. The international community has simply not done enough to fulfill its solemn commitments.

Likewise, many in Australia and elsewhere get their politics confused over this case. Over the past few years I’ve heard many commentators argue that because the 2003 invasion of Iraq was wrong, so too is military intervention to protect the Yazidis and others from the so-called Islamic State. Such arguments are misplaced in the extreme and would serve only to compound past mistakes. Worse, they would leave the innocent minorities of Iraq and Syria

alone to their fate because 'we' in the international community lack the courage to protect them. But there is no moral high ground to be found by abandoning peoples to their fate. We have a responsibility to protect.

First, the international community must step up its effort to wind back IS control of territory in Iraq and Syria. R2P calls for timely and decisive action against atrocity crimes. Australia, the US and others may have provided timely support, but it has not yet proven decisive. David Kilcullen is right, in my view, to call for a further intensification of military efforts against IS designed to secure a decisive blow against them. More must be done – including through the use of force – to ensure the protection of ethnic and religious minorities.

Second, we must ensure that those responsible for the monstrous crimes committed by IS are held accountable for their actions. The UN Security Council should, without further delay, refer the case of the IS genocide of the Yazidis to the International Criminal Court for investigation and prosecution.

Third, support should be offered to the victims of genocide and mass atrocity. In the first instance, safe passage to sites of protection must be offered. Then, full access to the rights bestowed on refugees must be granted. Support should also be given to help people rebuild shattered lives. Children must be protected and given access to education. The traumatized must be given access to care.

Fourth, we need to step up efforts to counter violent extremism. Through programs such as the UN's Implementing the Responsibility to Protect, the Action Plan for Preventing Violent Extremism, the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Human Rights Up Front the UN has identified a range of measures for advancing atrocity crime prevention through collective action. We also need to strengthen efforts to control the transnational flows that support violent extremism. These include action on the control of small arms and light weapons, the financing of NSAGs and the movement of people

and extremist ideas across borders.

Fifth, we urgently need a global campaign to reaffirm faith in international humanitarian law. As the UN Secretary-General argued in this year's report on R2P, we must also show much greater resolve in defending and upholding the norms that safeguard humanity. If we do not, the difficult gains made over the past few decades will be eroded. We should therefore launch a vigorous and comprehensive global campaign to restore faith in international humanitarian law by promoting their value, demanding greater compliance, and pursuing those that continue to violate the law.

Ultimately, though, much hinges on the choices that we as individuals make. 200 of us have come tonight to hear Nadia's story. We all face a choice about what we will do with that information. R2P calls on each and every one of us to shoulder some of the responsibility for protecting populations from genocide and mass atrocities. Governments will only act if their peoples demand it and there is much that can be done through civil society too. We can share the story we have heard tonight. We can volunteer to support humanitarian organizations that answer the call when it is needed. We can use our skills as activists to persuade governments and international organizations to fulfill their R2P by better protecting those in need. We can raise money to support emergency relief and protection. We can channel our talents as analysts to shed light on the dark corners of the world where genocide and mass atrocities thrive. We can do much more besides.

The Responsibility to Protect is a responsibility shared by us all.

As the ICRC's head of research, Hugo Slim, once put it, when it comes to preventing genocide we may not yet be at "Never Again" but we are surely now at "Not Every Time". Let tonight be a catalyst that pushes us all to do more to realize the modest ambition of a world free from genocide.

Thankyou.



ASIA PACIFIC CENTRE FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

Building 39A

School of Political Science
& International Studies

The University of Queensland,
St Lucia Brisbane QLD 4072

P +61 7 3346 6435

E: r2pinfo@uq.edu.au

W: www.r2pasiapacific.org



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA