

Yazidi children freed from Daesh haunted by health crisis

Author:

Fri, 2020-07-31 02:28

BAGHDAD: Nearly 2,000 Yazidi children freed from the grips of Daesh in recent years are still trapped by psychological and physical trauma, Amnesty International warned on Thursday.

In a new report based on dozens of interviews in northern Iraq, the rights group found that 1,992 children who faced torture, forced conscription, rape and other abuses at the hands of Daesh were not getting the care they need. "While the nightmare of their past has receded, hardships remain for these children," said Matt Wells, deputy director of Amnesty's crisis response team.

The Yazidis are an ethno-religious minority numbering around 550,000 in their heartland of northwest Iraq before Daesh swept through the rugged region in 2014.

Slamming the Yazidis as heretics, Daesh slaughtered thousands of men, abducted women and girls and forced boys to fight on its behalf.

Yazidi children were forcibly converted to Islam and taught Arabic, banned from speaking their native Kurdish. To this day, child survivors suffer "debilitating long-term injuries," as well as post-traumatic stress disorder, mood swings, aggression and flashbacks.

Yazidi children interviewed last year in a displacement camp in the northwest district of Duhok played aggressively, wore all black and spoke Arabic to each other, even months after they were freed from Daesh.

One of them, a 10-year-old girl, had threatened to commit suicide multiple times, her mother said.

Sahir, a 15-year-old former Daesh child soldier, told Amnesty that he knew he needed mental support to cope with his trauma but felt he had nowhere to turn.

"What I was looking for is just someone to care about me, some support, to tell me, 'I am here for you'," he said. "This is what I have been looking for, and I have never found it."



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Displaced Yazidis head back to Sinjar as lockdown bites
UN investigators eye 160 Daesh militants over Yazidi massacres

[Pompeo urges renewal of UN arms embargo against Iran](#)

Thu, 2020-07-30 23:33

CHICAGO: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged the UN to renew its arms embargo against Iran before it expires on Oct. 18, during testimony at Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on the State Department's annual budget.

Pompeo warned that Iran remains a threat to Saudi Arabia, the Middle East, Israel and the West, and pushed to continue sanctions against Iran's Lebanese proxy Hezbollah.

The State Department's operating budget of nearly \$41 billion includes funds for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), but Pompeo made no mention of the possibility of restoring USAID funding to Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation.

"We've rallied nations to our side through diplomacy – witness the designations of Hezbollah from European and South American countries," Pompeo told Senate committee members on Thursday. "And we've bolstered our military readiness vis-a-vis Tehran."

Pompeo said more needs to be done to confront Iran and prevent it from spreading terrorism and violence worldwide.

"The Security Council must renew the UN arms embargo against Iran before it expires on Oct. 18," he added.

"Iran already mines ships in the Strait of Hormuz, launches missiles at Saudi oil facilities and ships arms to the Houthis. Should the Security Council fail to act, Iran will have a freer hand to sow destruction across the Middle East and indeed the world."

Pompeo called for an indefinite renewal of the arms embargo against Iran during an appearance at the Security Council last month.

But he was rebuffed by the Russian and Chinese governments, while American allies seemed ambivalent about the idea.

Pompeo denounced Iran's regime as "authoritarian" and as "an aggressor and not a victim." He said of US efforts to confront Iran: "We've gone full bore on our maximum-pressure campaign. Since May of 2018, we've slashed the vital oil revenues the regime uses for terrorism and illegal nuclear activities by 90 percent."



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Pompeo: US warns against danger of not extending arms embargo on Iran
Iran arms embargo lapse would 'intensify' regional violence: US envoy

[Cash-strapped Palestinians forced to sacrifice time-honored Eid traditions](#)

Wed, 2020-07-29 22:02

GAZA CITY: On the eve of Eid Al-Adha, cash-strapped Saeed Zeitawi bemoaned that for the first time in 20 years he had not been able to buy a sacrificial animal for the Muslim festival.

The 49-year-old Palestinian, who supports a family of eight, told Arab News that this year's Eid holiday would hardly be worth celebrating.

"There is no point in making Eid without a sacrifice. The joy of Eid this year has gone. The sacrifice is the most prominent ritual of the feast. It brings joy to the hearts of children and makes everyone happy," he said.

Livestock markets in Palestine, where animals are sold for sacrifice, have witnessed a dramatic slump in trade due to a combination of the financial crisis being faced by the Palestinian Authority (PA), the economic fallout from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and the ongoing Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip.

Livestock dealers have been offering to accept staged payments for sacrificial animals in order to encourage citizens to buy. Zeitawi, who lives in the West Bank, said he had paid via instalments last year but that this Eid he would not even be able to afford to take up that option.

As a PA employee his monthly wage had more than halved and payment dates had become irregular. "The salary we receive is barely enough to manage our basic life affairs," he added.

Zeitawi's situation is reflected throughout the Gaza Strip, where 2 million people live. Abed Rabbo Odwan bought a sacrificial calf last year with five friends who together purchased it through installments.

In previous years, when his finances were healthier, Odwan, 45, had bought lamb as a sacrifice but now, he said, even a shared calf was "no longer an

option.”

Odwan, a school headmaster who for years has only received 40 percent of his total salary, added that he supported a family of nine, four of them studying at university, and could barely provide for their basic needs. An animal sacrifice for Eid had become a luxury he could no longer afford.

Abdel Aziz Afanah, whose family owns one of the largest livestock farms in Gaza, told Arab News that Eid seasonal business was at its “worst” in years.

“The situation has been deteriorating continuously since the imposition of the (Israeli) blockade, and the current season has worsened with the pandemic and the salary crisis. The majority of people have been affected financially,” he said.

According to official estimates, about 53 percent of the population of the Gaza Strip lives in poverty.

Issam Asida, a livestock dealer in the West Bank, said there had been a sharp dip in trade at sacrificial livestock markets this season where the supply of animals had outstripped demand.

Despite prices being the same, if not less, than last year, Asida told Arab News that his sales so far had not even reached 20 percent of 2019 levels.

Unofficial estimates indicate that Palestinians sacrifice around 100,000 sheep and calves a year.

Samir Abu Mudalleh, a professor of economics at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, said that most Palestinians were experiencing severe economic pressures, and due to wage cuts the purchasing power of workers had greatly diminished.

“The majority of economic sectors are in crisis, and if the situation continues to deteriorate, the crises may strike all aspects of life and lead to unprecedented collapses.”



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Palestine imposes curfew, bans travel as COVID-19 cases soar
Palestine's only eye hospital appeals for help

[Jordan parliamentary elections due for Nov. 10](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-29 21:33

AMMAN: Jordan is moving to hold elections for the House of Representatives, according to a Royal Court statement issued on Wednesday.

Ali Khawaldeh, director-general of the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, told Arab News the elections will likely take place on Nov. 10. The Independent Election Commission is expected to recommend a date for the elections in the coming days.

Amer Bani Amer, director-general of Rased, a Jordanian NGO that monitors

elections and government activities, told Arab News the current political atmosphere is ripe for a different kind of parliament.

“The robust governmental anti-corruption activities, as well as effective anti-COVID-19 policies, mean that Jordanians are likely to elect a different kind of parliament,” he said.

Amer said the effectiveness and success of a younger parliament will encourage the majority of Jordanians, who are young, to vote for younger candidates.

Samar Muhareb, CEO of the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development Society, told Arab News that events in Jordan make her pessimistic about the state of democracy in the country.

“Democracy is not only elections, it is the rule of law, freedom of expression and assembly, separation of powers, and an independent judiciary and robust civil society. The crackdown on the teachers’ union, and the absence of freedom of unions and expression doesn’t bode well for democratic change,” Muhareb said.

She expressed concern that money will continue to play a role in elections, with the wealthy entering parliament regardless of their abilities. Muhareb added that the role of civil society in Jordan needs to be evaluated.

“They make a cosmetic intervention at the time of elections without real involvement in building a democratic and inclusive society that is ready to make real change,” she said.

Rami Adwan, who promotes political participation among women and youth, told Arab News that many young political activists think the space for civil society is narrowing.

“At present I am not optimistic that elections could produce a different parliament unless the youth realize that they must act to change those who will be in charge of setting their future,” he said.

Musa Shteivi, a professor of sociology at Jordan University, told Arab News that the decision to hold elections on time is important.

“The decision of His Majesty to hold elections on time sends a positive message internally and externally that Jordan is stable,” he said. He added that despite the Independent Election Commission restoring trust to the electoral process, Jordan’s weak party system means a strong parliament is unlikely.

Layla Nafaa, a veteran women’s rights activist, told Arab News that efforts to increase the women’s quota from 12 to 17 percent have failed.

“Our only hope for more women in parliament now is for more women to run for office and for women and men to be more involved in the electoral process and choose women, rather than follow tradition and other reasons to choose men,” she said.



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Jordan elections to

be held in September Jordan to reopen to 'low risk' countries in August

[Yemenis optimistic as sides accept Saudi plan to implement Riyadh Agreement](#)

Wed, 2020-07-29 21:25

AL-MUKALLA: Yemenis on Wednesday expressed cautious optimism after the government and separatists accepted a Saudi-brokered proposal to accelerate the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement.

Leading figures also praised the Kingdom for its pivotal role in sponsoring and mediating tough talks between the two sides that had led to the formation of a new government and the ending of hostilities in southern Yemen.

In a tweet, Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi, Yemen's former deputy prime minister and an adviser to the country's president, described the news as representing the

start of a “new phase” in bringing peace to the war-torn nation.

Yemen’s President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi issued presidential decrees mandating incumbent Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed to form a new government and for the appointment of a new governor and security director for Aden province.

The separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) reciprocated by abandoning its controversial self-rule declaration and pledging its adherence to the terms of the new proposal, including allowing the new government to resume duties from Aden.

The Yemeni government said it would comply with the Riyadh Agreement and its related implementation mechanism, including halting military operations in Abyan.

“The government appreciates the efforts of brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their support for the implementation of the agreement that aims at establishing security and stability, preserving the unity of Yemen, and pushing the wheel of development,” said government spokesperson Rajeh Badi in a brief statement carried by the official Saba news agency.

Ali Al-Katheri, a senior STC member who took part in the discussions in Riyadh, told Arab News that the Kingdom’s diplomatic efforts over recent months had paved the way for the success of talks. He said the agreement would help unify military efforts against the Iranian-backed Houthis and return stability to Aden and other southern provinces.

“We look forward to more efforts by brothers in the Kingdom and the UAE to move toward achieving the urgent implementation of the provisions of the Riyadh Agreement and uniting the efforts of all parties in confronting the Houthi militia and terrorist groups,” Al-Katheri added.

Since early 2018, Aden, the interim capital of Yemen, has been the scene of sporadic battles between the two sides that have damaged the city’s infrastructure and paralyzed government bodies.

Aden residents were hopeful that implementation of the Riyadh Agreement would lead to a revival of government institutions, the paying of salaries, and the restoration of public services such as electricity.

“People have been greatly affected, first by the war with the Houthis, and later by the war between the government and the STC,” Fatehi Ben Lazerq, editor of popular Yemeni news site Aden Al-Ghad, told Arab News.

“There is no option other than a political settlement that would bring back the situation to normal. The situation was not that great before the beginning of hostilities between the government and STC, but things got worse after the war between them,” Ben Lazerq said.

When the separatists announced self-rule in April and expelled the government from Aden and other southern provinces, the government mounted a military offensive in Abyan aimed at recapturing Aden. Dozens of people were killed in

heavy fighting that blocked the main road linking Abyan with other provinces and damaged power and water lines.

Shouqra and neighboring Sheikh Salem became the main battlegrounds, and residents there on Wednesday expressed delight over the Saudi-brokered peace proposal.

“The first thing they should do is withdraw military forces from Shouqra and fix electricity and water supplies,” said Hassan Salem, a resident of Shouqra. He added that some areas had been without electricity and water since the beginning of the government’s military offensive in May. “I was very happy when I heard the news about the agreement.”

Under the proposal, Yemeni government forces and separatists will pull out of contested areas in Abyan and move military units and equipment from Aden.



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