
YAZIDIS IN IRAQ WHO ESCAPED THE ISLAMIC STATE ARE BEING IGNORED BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT 'REFUGEES'

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Majed El Shafie says he's tired of "political correctness" when it comes to discussions about Canada's resettlement of refugees.

Shafie, founder of religious rights group One Free World International, criticized the federal Liberal government at a Parliamentary immigration committee on Tuesday for welcoming Syrian refugees mostly of one particular faith as part of its ambitious efforts to bring in more than 25,000 of them over the course of just a few months.

"Most if not all are Muslim Sunnis," El Shafie said, emphasizing that he has no qualms about the faith itself, but rather feels other more vulnerable groups were left out of the equation. "To bring all 25,000 from one community shows a lack of balance," he continued.

That's why El Shafie is urging Canada's immigration ministry to allow hundreds of Yazidis displaced from their homes in northern Iraq by Islamic State militants to come to Canada through its refugee channels.

He says his group has documented about 1,600 Yazidis living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Kurdistan, including hundreds of women and girls who have escaped captivity under IS where they were beaten and raped, who he says could easily be welcomed into the country by being privately sponsored by individuals and small groups across the country.

"The government has failed big time in helping them," El Shafie told the committee. His plea comes before a Conservative motion on whether the atrocities perpetrated against the Yazidis amount to genocide is set to be debated in the House of Commons on Thursday. If the motion passes, Canada would join the US in declaring the situation for Yazidis a genocide.

In August of 2014, IS began slaughtering, enslaving, and forcibly converting the Yazidi people living in northern Iraq, as part of a larger campaign to control and eliminate the nomadic religious minority, whose faith dates back centuries and espouses a complex beliefs that include aspects of Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam. Nearly 400,000 Yazidis were forced to flee their homes, and around 2,000 Yazidi women and girls are still being held as sex slaves.

Most of the Yazidis El Shafie's group has documented currently live in IDP camps in northern Iraq. This means they technically don't fit the legal description of a refugee, someone who has fled to another country from their home country, something that complicates efforts to bring them to Canada as refugees.

"But we need to look at this as a priority issue, because the community is a very small one facing genocide. If we don't interfere right now and rescue as many as possible, I'm afraid that the Yazidi community itself will disappear," El Shafie said in an interview with VICE News. "These are extraordinary circumstances."

El Shafie has teamed up with the Office for Refugees at the Archdiocese of Toronto, a group that helps facilitate the highest number of private refugee sponsorship in Canada.

He says the previous Conservative immigration minister approved his plan to bring Yazidis to Canada, but that fell through the cracks when the new Liberal government came to power late last year. The minister's chief of staff told El Shafie the minister would review the group's plan to discuss it in the coming days, according to the Canadian Press.

A spokesperson for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada told VICE News in an email that the Liberal government has placed "high priority on helping the world's most vulnerable people." However, the spokesperson added that the immigration department relies on the UNHCR [the UN's refugee agency] to identify refugees for resettlement, meaning that in order for someone to qualify as a refugee, they must be located outside of their home country, not inside of it.

"While delivering on our commitment to resettle 25K+ Syrian refugees over the last 7 months, we continue to process refugees from all parts of the world, including Yazidis. However, we do not discriminate, select or track refugees based on religion, race, gender, or sexual orientation," the spokesperson said.

Kaynak/Source: