
NOBEL LAUREATE RETURNS TO IRAQ, PLEDGES TO WORK FOR PEACE

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Iraqi activist Nadia Murad met her country's president in Baghdad on Wednesday after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy on behalf of victims of wartime sexual violence.

Murad, a member of Iraq's Yazidi minority, was among thousands of women and girls who were captured and forced into sexual slavery by Islamic State militants in 2014. She became an activist on behalf of women and girls after escaping and finding refuge in Germany.

She arrived in Baghdad from Stockholm on Wednesday, and was received by President Barham Salih.

"There is no meaning to the Nobel prize without the ongoing work for the sake of peace," Murad told group of community leaders and foreign ambassadors at the presidential palace.

Yazidis are followers of an ancient faith who are falsely branded devil-worshippers by Sunni extremists. When the Islamic State group swept into northern Iraq in 2014, the militants massacred thousands of Yazidi men and enslaved an estimated 7,000 women and girls.

Many managed to escape as U.S.-backed Iraqi forces gradually drove the militants from all the territory they once held in a grueling 3-year campaign, but some 3,000 Yazidi women and girls are still missing.

Murad called on the Iraqi government and the U.S.-led coalition to search for the missing. She also called on the government to rebuild her hometown, Sinjar. More than 80 percent of Yazidis are still living in displacement camps.

In her Nobel speech on Monday, Murad urged world leaders to put an end to sexual violence, saying "the only prize in the world that can restore our dignity is justice and the prosecution of criminals."

Iraq's president said Murad "embodies the suffering and tragedies Iraqis have gone through in the past and represents the courage and determination to defend rights in the face of the oppressor."

The Yazidis had endured a "heinous and a rare crime in history," Salih said and called on parliament to pass a law recognizing it as a genocide.

Murad later met Hadi al-Amiri and Falih al-Fayadh, top leaders of Iraq's Popular Mobilization militia umbrella, which played a key role in the war against IS. The militias are jointly responsible, with Iraqi federal forces, for the security of Sinjar.

As Murad was receiving her prize in Oslo, Iraq celebrated the anniversary of its costly victory over IS, which still carries out sporadic attacks and controls a remote enclave just across the border in Syria. The war left tens of thousands dead, and destroyed entire neighborhoods and towns. Some 1.8 million people are still displaced from their homes.

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