



human rights *first*

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His Excellency
Nechervan Idriss Barzani
Prime Minister
Kurdistan Regional Government
Erbil
Iraqi Kurdistan

January 5, 2017

Dear Prime Minister Barzani,

Human Rights First, an independent, non-governmental organization based in New York, is concerned to learn of the raid by members of the Kurdish Security Services (Assayish) on the offices of the civil society organization Yazda in Dohuk, on Monday January 2, 2017. We respectfully urge you to do all in your power to enable the Yazda office in Dohuk to reopen and to resume its valuable activities without delay.

The raid resulted in the closure of the Yazda facilities in the city and the disruption of the vital medical and psychosocial services provided to Yazidi women and girls liberated from ISIS captivity, and other support services to Yazidis displaced from their homes by the merciless ISIS attack on the Yazidi community.

An official of your government, Akram Jamo, director of the Department of NGOs, said on Thursday January 5, 2017 that the security services in Dohuk had acted without legal authorization in raiding the offices. However, he also said that Yazda had violated local laws and its own bylaws by issuing “political statements” critical of the local authorities and their treatment of the Yazidi minority population.

Despite the apparent acknowledgement by your government that the raid and subsequent closure of the Yazda office was illegal, the offices in Dohuk remain closed.

We urge you to order the immediate lifting of the closure of the Yazda offices in Dohuk so that the organization can continue with its essential work.

We also urge you to make clear that the work of Yazda enjoys the full support of the Kurdistan Regional Government because of the vital contribution it makes to the wellbeing and security of the vulnerable Yazidi community. We urge you recognize publicly that the work of an organization like Yazda, advocating for the rights of a minority community recently subjected to extreme persecution, requires that it be able to speak freely in domestic and international fora about the treatment members of the Yazidi community receive from local authorities. Therefore,

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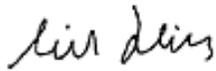
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we urge you to ensure that Yazda will receive no further threats from officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government for exercising its basic right to freedom of expression.

Human Rights First recognizes and appreciates the efforts of the Kurdistan Regional Government to shelter and help provide for Yazidis and other people displaced by ongoing conflict in and around Iraq. In that regard, we believe that your government would wish to ensure that civil society organizations that provide valuable services and assistance to internally displaced people and other communities in need receive all necessary support, and are able to operate in conditions that enable them to carry out their work as well as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Yours sincerely,



Neil Hicks

Director, Human Rights Promotion
Human Rights First