

Human Trafficking: An ABC of Terrorist Financing



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Excerpts from Sen. Nathalie Goulet's book



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According to a 2018 estimate by the UN's International Labour Organization, human trafficking affects 40 million people worldwide, including 25 million in forced labor,¹ and generates revenues of \$150 billion a year.²

Behind these numbers are people, including women and children, whose exploitation and abuse serves commercial and terrorist interests, yet the international response to these crimes is often weak and disappointing.

To address these abominable crimes more effectively, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which in 2002 established four core international crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression,) should be amended to explicitly recognize all forms of human trafficking as a crime against humanity.

As crimes within the jurisdiction of the court are not subject to any statutes of limitation, this would remove any time limit on when an offence of trafficking could be prosecuted.³



THE YAZIDI GENOCIDE

Trafficking was at the heart of the crimes perpetrated against the Yazidi by Daesh. The Yazidi, a Kurdish-speaking ethnic and religious minority living in northern Iraq, were the target of a large-scale murder campaign carried out by Daesh between 2014 and 2017.

On Aug. 3 2014, Daesh invaded the Sinjar region, home to more than 60 percent of the world's Yazidi population.⁴ Over the next few years up to 10,000 were killed,

Nobel Peace Prize winner Nadia Murad, who was captured by Daesh in 2014, became an advocate for survivors of sexual violence. AFP



nearly 200,000 were driven into exile or forced into indoctrination and recruitment camps,⁵ and some 6,500 women and children were abducted, many to be sold or rented as sex slaves.⁶ Slave markets multiplied, and websites and encrypted applications including Telegram and Signal were used to offer female prisoners and their children for sale as if they were simply commodities.⁷

After an initial period of silence, the global community began to respond to the horrors being visited upon the Yazidi, an engagement reflected in the awarding of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize to Nadia Murad, a former sex slave of Daesh turned human rights activist for her “efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.”⁸

In its 2016 report titled “They came to destroy: ISIS crimes against the Yazidis,” the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic concluded that the acts committed against the Yazidis constituted genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and human rights abuses, and called for their recognition by the international community.⁹

It was not until May 2021, seven years after

The Sinjar region of Iraq was invaded by Daesh terrorists, who committed a massacre against the Yazidi people in August 2014. AFP

the massacre, that the UN investigation team charged with holding Daesh to account for its crimes claimed to have established “clear and convincing evidence” that the terrorist group had committed genocide against the Yazidis as a religious group. The UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh, or UNITAD, also found that the group had committed genocide against the Yazidis in Iraq and the Levant region.¹⁰

Based on these findings, in 2021 a court in Germany sentenced an Iraqi member of Daesh to life imprisonment, the first conviction worldwide for the crime of genocide against the Yazidis.¹¹

In October 2020, the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government reached a joint agreement for the administration, security and reconstruction of the Sinjar region.¹² In March 2021, the Iraqi parliament passed the Yazidi Survivors Law, which recognizes the genocide and establishes a framework for financial reparations.¹³

While these initiatives are to be welcomed, at the time of writing more than 2,700 women and children are still missing and thousands of Yazidis live in refugee camps.¹⁴



THE INHUMAN TRADE IN ORGANS

Human trafficking, whether for forced labor or forced criminal activity or sexual exploitation, or in the form of migrant smuggling, is an unending source of funds for terrorists, as testified to by various studies published by the Financial Action Task Force,¹⁵ the Egmont Group,¹⁶ the European Union,¹⁷ the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. In terms of income and profit combined, these organizations referred to here represent the third-biggest criminal formations in the world. A Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, or MENA FATF, report on laundering money earned from human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes, published in August 2021, provides considerable detail on the institutional response to these crimes.¹⁸

To the long list of sources of funding used by terrorists — kidnapping for ransom, drug trafficking, fraud relating to public funds — we can now add trafficking in human organs.

Organ trafficking has emerged relatively recently as a lucrative business for terrorist organizations, with Daesh in particular using

it to replenish its coffers. In 2015, Mohamed Ali Alhakim, the Iraqi ambassador to the UN, raised the alarm over organ trafficking he claimed were perpetrated by Daesh, highlighting the executions in Mosul of a dozen doctors who refused to harvest organs. “We have bodies,” he told the UN Security Council after corpses missing kidneys and other parts were found in shallow graves. “Come and examine them. There are clearly organs missing.”¹⁹

Daesh officials denied any wrongdoing. But the Reuters news agency acquired a document, that had fallen into US hands following a raid in Syria, which showed that Daesh officials had approved the practice of harvesting organs from prisoners whom they viewed as apostate.²⁰

The document stated that removing organs from a living captive to save a Muslim’s life, even if doing so proved fatal for the captive, was permissible under the group’s distorted interpretation of Sharia.²¹

In 2015, at the height of its strength and power, Daesh claimed to be the richest terrorist group in the world, purporting to hold nearly \$2 billion.²² The group’s oil resources have often been overestimated but are no longer its only source of funding.

Yazidi migrants from Iraq were stranded outside the camps in Serres, Greece, for nearly two weeks in 2022. Getty Images

Terrorist organizations are increasingly resourceful, constantly developing new methods and seeking new sources of income to accomplish their goals. Among them, organ trafficking generates millions of dollars.²³

In his 2016 annual report, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, shed light on the covert financial process behind these horrific crimes, which for Daesh included selling the bodies and organs of dead soldiers or wounded prisoners.²⁴

Now that the circumstances are known, several international organizations and institutions have taken up the issue and aim to crack down on the phenomenon.

The Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs, Tissues and Cells, which came into force in 2018, is a direct result of the work of the Committee of Experts on Trafficking in Human Organs, Tissues and Cells, or PC-TO. It provides a framework for eradicating the trafficking of human organs.²⁵

In a report published in July 2021, Interpol revealed that criminal groups are attracted by the high profits to be made from this type of trafficking, adding that these organizations maintain links with the medical sector.²⁶

The global shortage of human organs makes the activity all the more lucrative for the money-hungry terrorist organizations. In Africa, organ trafficking has been adopted by Boko Haram, the Support Group for Islam and Muslims and Al-Shabaab.²⁷

The situation calls for an urgent response because of the obvious violation of human rights. Unfortunately, however, this form of trafficking is now built into the financing strategies of several terrorist groups.

The UN Security Council adopted a sanctions regime in 1997. Its update in July 2017, along with the adoption of Resolution 2368, indicated that the freezing of the assets of terror groups should also cover the proceeds from human and organ trafficking.²⁸

In 2019, Security Council Resolution 2462 listed the sources of terrorist fundraising, and pointed explicitly to organ trafficking.²⁹

MIGRANT SMUGGLING

The MENA FATF document provides some figures on the situation in 2019:

International cooperation is crucial and Interpol has often led operations to



Iraq's ambassador to the UN, Mohamed Ali Alhakim, raised the alarm at a Security Council meeting in 2015 over organ trafficking by Daesh. AFP

dismantle the various networks. For example, between November and December 2021, an operation codenamed Turquesa III “saw authorities in 34 countries carry out targeted, coordinated enforcement actions to arrest 216 criminals and rescue over 10,000 victims.”

According to a 2013 FATF report for Nigeria, in 2011 security operatives in the northwest of the country arrested an individual who confessed that Boko Haram uses “Al Majiris” (child beggars), the physically challenged and the elderly to appeal for donations in order to raise funds to support the group’s activities. The individual revealed that these beggars were positioned at strategic locations in major towns and were used as spies for the terrorist organization.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, PROSTITUTION AND OTHER TRAFFICKING

Confronted with these appalling crimes, the international community has sprung into action. Among the 10 priorities announced on May 26, 2021, at the European Council, three concern the fight against human trafficking in connection with terrorist financing.

In addition, the UN has proclaimed July 30 World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.

I am not sure it will be enough.

Perhaps NGOs in the region, and Middle East and other global organizations, can establish funds to help fight this criminality,

This would provide considerable help for the victims who are mostly women.

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