

**Nadia Murad, Yazda and Amal Clooney welcome the
start of exhumation activities in Kocho, Sinjar**

12 March 2019

As officially [announced](#) yesterday, the Iraqi authorities, in cooperation with the UN Investigative Team for Accountability of Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD), will begin the exhumation of mass graves in the village of Kocho, Sinjar on 15 March 2019. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad, global Yazidi NGO Yazda and their joint legal counsel Amal Clooney welcome this important milestone in the investigation of crimes committed by ISIS against the Yazidi minority in Iraq.

This step answers our long-standing call for meaningful action in relation to the many mass graves discovered in Sinjar since the region was liberated from ISIS. A [report](#) issued by Yazda in January 2016 identified the location of 35 mass graves and kill sites in the area. A further [report](#) issued in August 2018, following Kocho's liberation, documented the situation of these sites and called for UNITAD and the responsible local authorities to accelerate their efforts to exhume mass graves. Nadia Murad repeatedly [urged](#) the international community to support these efforts, including in her hometown of Kocho, whose mass graves are believed to contain the remains of many of her family members who were brutally executed by ISIS militants on 15 August 2014, together with most of the village's male population.

We welcome the cooperative approach adopted by the Iraqi authorities and UNITAD in the preparation for and implementation of the scheduled exhumation activities, and the involvement of international forensic experts tasked to ensure that international standards and best practices will be applied throughout the exhumation process. We call on all competent authorities to ensure that these standards are respected at all times, including in the excavation of mass graves, the collection of any evidence relevant to the investigation of ISIS crimes, and the identification of victims and repatriation of their remains to grieving families.

We also welcome the involvement of representatives of the Yazidi community in the lead-up to the excavation and we call for this engagement of victim communities to continue throughout the exhumation process. Members of the Yazidi minority, and in particular survivors and relatives of the victims of ISIS, should continue to be duly consulted and informed about the

progress of the planned exhumations, including the treatment of remains and their identification and the proposed timeframe and procedure for the repatriation of remains to their families to allow their burial in accordance with Yazidi religious rites.

We hope the exhumation scheduled to begin in Kocho on 15 March will be part of a comprehensive effort which will result in the exhumation of all ISIS mass graves in Sinjar and beyond, the return of victims' remains to their families and the investigation of the relevant crimes, leading to the prosecution of the responsible ISIS militants.