

Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Mosul and the Islamic State: Justice and the Future of Mosul (July 21, 2021)

Statement by Karim Khan QC, Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court

I am delighted to say a few words for the launch of the podcast by Omar Mohammed, known as Mosul Eye, that has been broadcast in conjunction with George Washington University. I had the opportunity to work with Omar Mohammad during my mandate as the first special adviser and head of UNITAD- the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for the Crimes of Da'esh. The resolution of the Security Council in September 2017 and the deployment of my team in October 2018 to Iraq marked an important moment. It marked the unanimous determination by the United Nations Security Council that justice and accountability was a key component if the horrors of Da'esh were to be exposed and if the rights of survivors and victims to justice was to be achieved.

Words are not enough. Action is needed. Courage is needed. And the courage that I applaud first and foremost are the survivors. And who are the survivors? The survivors are everybody who came into contact with Da'esh, that were threatened by Da'esh, whose lives, whose beliefs, whose freedom was constrained by this most un-Islamic state. The focus on Mosul is up. Mosul is one of the ancient cities of the world. It has for millennia been a cradle of civilization and even up to the period of Da'esh and definitely until the twentieth century, it distinguished itself because they were, in that one city, a wonderful diversity of peoples. Jewish, Christian, Shia, Sunni, Yazidi, Kaka'i, Shabak, Arab, Carib; the diversity that was there in the market place, that was there in the mosques and in the churches and in the temples, was one reason why Iraq managed to have such a glorious history. Attempts to suffocate it, attempts to homogenize it, is to kill that essence of diversity that is one of the keys for communities or nations to rise up and lead the world.

Omar himself has demonstrated extraordinary bravery, immense courage, because as people being thrown off buildings in Mosul, as Da'esh deliberately tried to broadcast the crucifixions, the killings, the burnings, the drownings, the weaponization of the most innocent of our children, he was willing, at great risk to his own life and the life of his mother, his family, he tried and he succeeded in letting the world know what was happening in the darkness and suffocation that was Mosul. The suffocation that had become Mosul. And in a city of light, the darkness that had descended upon it and that enveloped so much failed to extinguish the light of Omar and so many other individuals in Mosul.

Almost 7 years ago today, Mosul fell in June 2014, just over seven years ago. Four years ago, Mosul was liberated in the sense that Da'esh no longer controlled that city

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and the government of Iraq forces could move in. And when I have been to Mosul over the last few years, I have seen on every trip, a vibrancy start to return. Not only that is evidenced by his holiness the Pope's visit in March of this year, but also with the rebuilding of the mosques and the return of individuals. But justice cannot be forgotten. Because the ideology of Da'esh is what makes it so dangerous. Surah Al-Baqarah of the holy Quran proclaims in Chapter 2: "there is no compulsion in the matter of religion." The truth of this matter is what I said earlier, that for more than 1,000 years, Jew, and Christian, and Muslim, Shia and Sunni, without distinction, Yazidis, could worship, could thrive, in Iraq and in Mosul. This tyranny of Da'esh which seeks conformity, the tyranny of conformity that would take free people and subject them to slavery needs to be exposed—not by polemics, not only by priests and religious leaders in their mosques, in their temples, in their synagogues, proclaiming that this is the antithesis of Islam—but by exposing it in the crucible of the courtroom.

This was the mandate that UNITAD was given by the Security Council. Great work has been done. The announcement of the Security Council in the last report I presented, before assuming my current responsibilities, made it clear that acts constituting genocide had been committed by Da'esh. But the full canopy of crimes requires more urgent investigations. We look forward to the government of Iraq implementing domestic legislation that will allow it to prosecute the crimes of Da'esh not as generic terrorism, but to call crimes what they were- crimes that intended to destroy in whole, or in part, peoples, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. By doing that, we will hopefully manage to achieve what was underlined by the Security Council: the imperative to confront violent extremism. This is the age where moderation needs to be preserved. This is the age when diversity needs to be protected. And this is the age in which complacency must be eschewed. And instead of complacency, as Virgil said, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

This podcast is the sentry on duty. Along with other actors, other individuals that make up the mosaic of Iraq, to call out what took place, not as important discipline of history by itself but the real *raison d'être* of history, to learn from the past, so we're not condemned to commit or to fall victim of the same crimes in the future. I wish this podcast every success and I applaud Omar Mohammad, George Washington University, and all who join hands in this common endeavor to repudiate this most un-Islamic state, and instead, to embrace humanity and actually the name of Islam, which means peace. I end with that. May the peace and blessings of God be upon you all. Thank you so much.