

Overcome with grief, Nadia Murad, ISIS survivor, returns to hometown

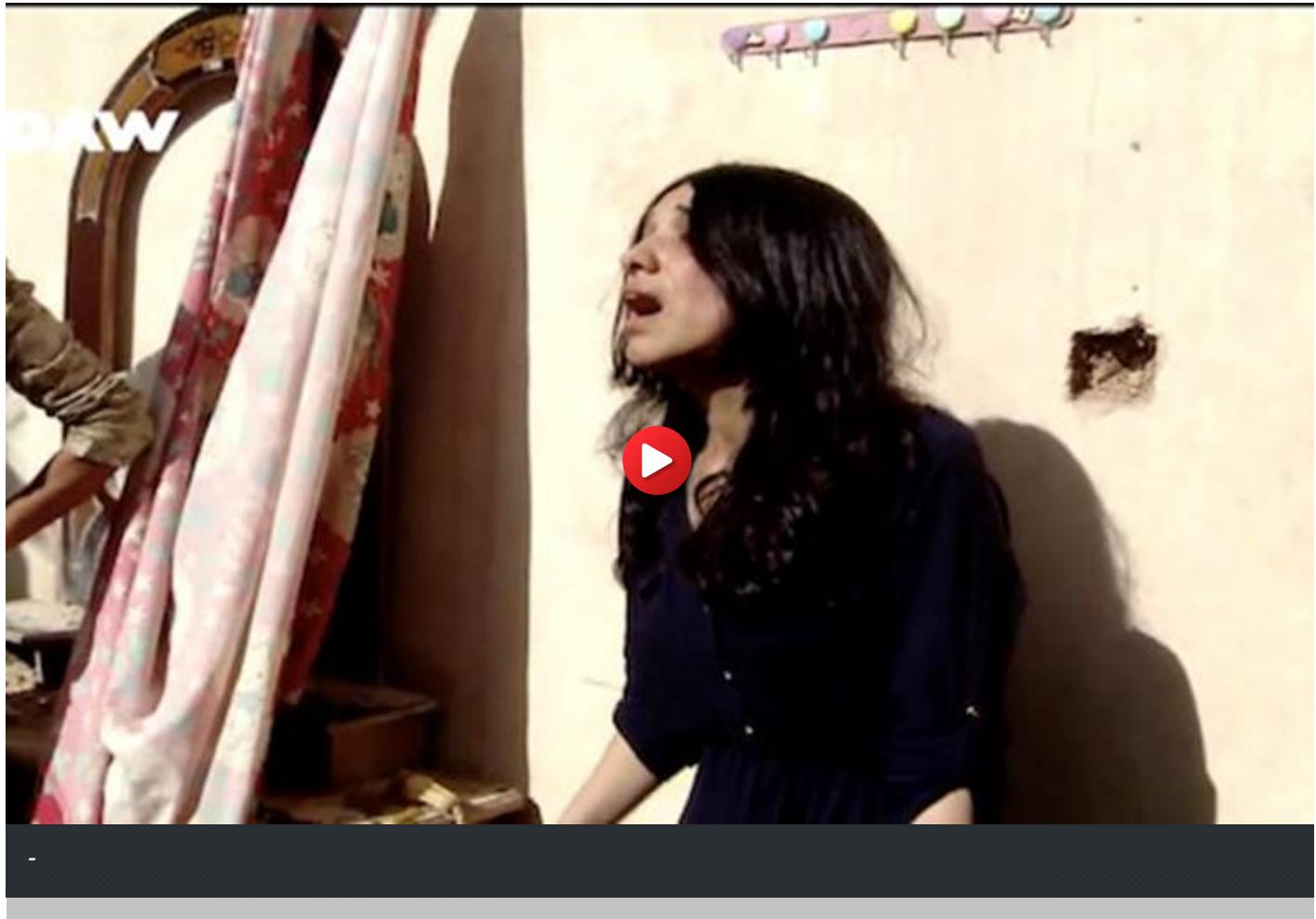
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KOCHO _ Nadia Murad, ISIS survivor and UN Goodwill Ambassador, returned to her hometown of Kocho on Thursday.

The small farming village south of Shingal was overrun by ISIS on August 3, 2014. Nadia was taken captive along with her two sisters. Six of her nine brothers were killed in Kocho. Her mother was also killed by the extremist group.

ISIS was defeated in Kocho by the Hashd al-Shaabi on May 25.

Nadia visited her family's home, which is now damaged, and the school where a large number of her family and neighbours were massacred.

"Nearly 1,700 children and men were piled up in the school," Murad, in tears, recalled, speaking at the school where ISIS had separated girls from boys, women from men.

An ISIS leader had called them to convert to Islam and abandon their religion, but they had refused, she said. "Now the village is surrounded by mass graves."

"What remains of the village is the bones of our brothers, our fathers, and mothers. Even in our house there is nothing left from my mother that I can take with me. But this has been left from my elder brother, whom we considered like a father. Only this is left," she said, holding the military uniform of her brother.

She recalled the bitterness of mothers watching their children being killed.

"Eight to 10 people were killed at each house in Kocho," she said.

She called on the Iraqi government to try the perpetrators of what "atrocities" committed against their community.

"ISIS destroyed our values," she said of the group who considered Yezidis infidels. "We lost everything. We lost our future."

ISIS showed no mercy to the Yezidi people, she said, asking for the Iraqi government to agree to establish a special court in order to bring justice.

"Because there are thousands of Yezidis like me," she said. "We have only the clothes left of our siblings and our mothers. My mother... for an hour I went around my home and searched everything, but I did not see anything from my mother."

She said that they know the identity of the masked militants, neighbours of the al-Mitewati, al-Khatuni, and al-Kejala tribes, who committed atrocities against her people.

"We recognized them from their voices because they used to sit here thousands of times. My mother and hundreds of mothers were baking for them. They shared with us water and food in our homes. They welcomed ISIS with an open arm at one o'clock. They ululated for

ISIS and came. They came and saw us as unbelievers."

Kocho is a symbol of ISIS atrocities against Yezidi people. It is 18 kilometers south of Shingal town. Some 4,000 Yezidis used to live there.

When ISIS militants attacked Shingal and its surroundings in August 2014, they arrested thousands of Yezidis, many from the village of Kocho. Some of them were collectively killed in the village. Others, girls and women, were sold or taken by ISIS. The fate of thousands of Yezidis remains unclear.

According to data in March from the KRG Office of Yezidi Affairs, of the 6,255 Yezidis who were kidnapped in August 2014, 3,878 are still in ISIS captivity, nearly 1,800 of them women and children.

Nadia has laid partial blame on the international community for what happened to the Yezidis, explaining that in the period before the group besieged Kocho and carried out a massacre, they had asked for help.

"While it was under siege for 12 days under the Islamic State [ISIS] in the summer of 2014, we called for help. But a genocide was committed against us. The men were killed in masses. Women were kidnapped and raped. Children were torn away from their mothers," she has said in earlier statements.

Back in her hometown, the UN Goodwill Ambassador pleaded for the international community to now step up and assist in bringing justice. "The Yezidis have no international support," she said. "I became a victim. I became a survivor. I became an asylum seeker. My message to the world is come and see."

"Today is the day of revenge," she declared. "I ask Abadi and I ask the Iraqi government to help us with justice, because with justice we will be able to return to our homes with trust."

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