

Amal Clooney and Jenner & Block File Lawsuit in US Court Seeking Accountability for Genocide Against Yazidis

News

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December 14, 2023 – Hundreds of Yazidi-Americans today filed a lawsuit against French conglomerate Lafarge S.A. for aiding and abetting terrorism conducted by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) against the Yazidi population. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in the Eastern District of New York under the civil provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act, seeks to hold Lafarge accountable for its admitted criminal conspiracy with ISIS and to obtain justice for the Yazidi people. Nobel Prize winner and human rights activist Nadia Murad is the lead plaintiff in the case.

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The plaintiffs are more than 400 members of the Yazidi ethnic and religious group that primarily originates from Iraq. These plaintiffs – all American citizens – and their families are survivors of a systematic genocide against the Yazidi people that began in Sinjar, Iraq in 2014.

Case Background

On August 3, 2014, ISIS began its campaign of genocide against the Yazidi population in Sinjar, Iraq. Approximately 400,000 Yazidis fled, over 6,400 were enslaved, and an estimated 5,000 were killed. Many of the thousands of Yazidi women and girls captured and sold as sex slaves to ISIS fighters remain missing today. ISIS's campaign included mass executions, abductions, torture, sexual violence, the use of child soldiers, and the destruction of the Yazidis' homeland. There was not one Yazidi that was untouched by ISIS's genocide, and, today, over 200,000 Yazidis remain internally displaced in camps in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The group of 427 plaintiffs includes Yazidis who were injured by ISIS, owned land and homes that were destroyed, or had family members who were displaced, injured, kidnapped, or killed by ISIS.

“When ISIS attacked Sinjar, my family was killed, and I was taken captive as a slave. I was exploited and assaulted every single day until my escape,” shares Yazidi Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad. “Unfortunately, my story is not unique among Yazidis. It is the reality of thousands of Yazidi women. Even more tragic is that our horror took place under the awareness of and thanks to the

support of powerful corporations like Lafarge. Still, the responsible parties have not been held accountable. In filing this lawsuit, I stand alongside my fellow Yazidi-Americans seeking justice and accountability from those whose actions enabled our nightmare.”

As outlined in the complaint, the plaintiffs are suing Lafarge under the Anti-Terrorism Act, a US law designed to hold accountable those who provide support to, or aid and abet, foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) like ISIS. The United States had long designated Al-Qaeda and its offshoots as FTOs, and added ISIS by name and alias on May 15, 2014.

Lafarge has admitted to a conspiracy that aided ISIS by providing millions of dollars in cash to ISIS, and is alleged to have provided ISIS with cement to construct underground tunnels and bunkers used to shelter ISIS members and hold hostages, including captured Yazidis. Lafarge’s support continued and increased at the peak of ISIS’s brutality in the Middle East, as ISIS publicized beheadings of U.S. citizens and journalists and began its campaign of executions, rape, and terror against Yazidi civilians.

“It is shocking that a leading global corporation worked hand in hand with ISIS while ISIS was executing American civilians and committing genocide against Yazidis. We hope that this case will send a clear message that supporting terrorists cannot be ‘business as usual’ and that there will be justice for the victims,” says human rights lawyer Amal Clooney.

In 2022, following a Department of Justice investigation in which it did not fully cooperate, Lafarge pled guilty to conspiring to provide material support to terrorist organizations. Specifically, Lafarge S.A. and its subsidiary, LCS, admitted that they paid nearly \$6 million to ISIS and another terror group, the Al-Nusra Front (ANF). The complaint alleges that by paying millions of dollars to these two terrorist groups, they knowingly funded their acts of coordinated violence.

As part of its guilty plea, Lafarge agreed to pay over \$777 million in fines and forfeiture to the United States. None of this money, however, has been used to pay compensation to the victims.

“Lafarge paid millions to ISIS, which committed genocidal atrocities on innocent civilians. While last year’s guilty plea was unprecedented, it is not enough. Lafarge needs to be held to account by those harmed by its unlawful conduct,” says Lee Wolosky of Jenner & Block.

The plaintiffs are represented by Lee Wolosky, Andrew J. Lichtman, and Alyssa G. Bernstein of Jenner & Block and Amal Clooney and Alisha Mathew from the Office of Amal Clooney. Partners Brent Caslin and Todd C. Toral and Associates Lauren M. Benigeri and Rupali Srivastava from Jenner & Block contributed to the matter, along with Nadine Reiner and Patricia Peña-Drilon from the Office of Amal Clooney.

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