

NRLS



2019 INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON ISIS

Dimensions, Challenges And Strategies
Of Confrontation



NORTH EAST SYRIA

6, 7 AND 8 JULY

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WHAT

International Forum on ISIS: Dimensions, Challenges and Strategies of Confrontation.

The Forum is hosted by the Rojava Center for Strategic Studies (Navenda Rojava ya Lêkolîna Stratejîk, or NRLS), a research center based in North East Syria, who organised last year's Forum on Ethnic Cleansing and Demographic Change in Afrin.

See below to find out more about the Forum programme and NRLS.

WHO

125 guests from 15 countries across three continents will join the discussion, including: Bernard Kouchner, former French Foreign Minister and founder of Medecins Sans Frontieres; Dominique Inchauspé, registrar of the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice at The Hague; and Peter Neumann, founder of the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation.

International anti-terrorism experts, diplomats, lawyers, and religious, military and political experts will all attend the conference, speaking alongside members of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (AANES) who have led the ongoing struggle against ISIS in the region. International press will also be in attendance.



WHERE

Qamishli region, North East Syria

WHEN

6 to 8 July 2019

HOW

You can follow **@RojavaIC** on Twitter for **live tweet updates** in English – Arabic updates are over at **@NRLS_AR**. We'll also be emailing out a **daily summary and press pack** for journalists and researchers following the Forum remotely, and you can get in touch with Rojava Information Center (RIC) for any further assistance you need to follow or report on the Forum.

WHY

Following ISIS' territorial defeat by the Syrian Democratic Forces on 23 March 2019, the world's attention turned elsewhere. But **regionally and internationally, the ISIS threat is growing day by day**. In North East Syria, ISIS sleeper cells are carrying out daily attacks with increasing frequency, claiming scores of kills each month.

Most seriously, there are up to 13,000 ISIS fighters currently detained in North East Syria – 1000 of them foreign nationals. There are over 13,000 foreign ISIS women and their children in camps across NE Syria, plus many thousands more local and Iraqi ISIS members, families and sympathisers. There is little international movement to resolve this issue, either in terms of repatriating foreign ISIS fighters or in terms of **political, legal and financial support to the Autonomous Administration** as it struggles to deal with this immense burden.

As such, NRLS has organised the International Forum on ISIS to study the ethnic and cultural genocide perpetrated by ISIS against the peoples of the region and in particular the Yezidi community; provide suggestions that could address the security threat posed by ISIS on the internal, regional, and international level; and **discuss the best ways of dealing with the remaining cells and eradicating ISIS' fundamentalist ideology to preserve peace and stability in the region**.



QUOTES

Fatima Hemo is a spokesperson for the Rojava Center for Strategic Studies. She says:

"ISIS were not just a danger to North East Syria, but the greatest danger facing the world. They were defeated as a territorial force by the Syrian Democratic Forces, in partnership with the Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS.

But ISIS has not truly been defeated. Their occupation continued for over five years, in which time they imposed their violent way of thinking on society and won international support – particularly from Turkey and Qatar. North East Syria faces a growing insurgency from ISIS sleeper cells, the burden of thousands of foreign ISIS fighters and their families in SDF custody, and continued support for ISIS among large sections of the population.

ISIS survives, and without a doubt they are building themselves up again, sending lone wolf attackers to Europe and aiming to carry out more attacks across the globe. The war on terror has not been won.

That's why we are welcoming over 125 guests from 15 countries across three continents to the International Forum on ISIS 2019, the largest event of its kind ever held in North East Syria. The Forum will bring anti-terror experts, policy-makers, and legal, religious and regional experts from across the globe to the soil where ISIS' worst crimes were committed, and where they were militarily defeated.

The Forum will provide suggestions to address the security threat posed by ISIS on the internal, regional, and international level, and discuss the best ways of dealing with the remaining sleeper cells and eradicating ISIS' fundamentalist ideology to preserve peace and stability in the region."



Michael Rubin is a fellow of the American Enterprise Institute, who will be speaking at the Forum on historical and political aspects of ISIS terrorism. He says:

"Kurdish fighters in Syria were the most effective fighting force against the Islamic State. They have earned their place at the table, and they have more credibility than others to shape the post-ISIS future."

It's time to stop treating the Kurds as a diplomatic football or through the lens of others. Turkey and Iran, for example, might call Kurds terrorists or repress them politically and culturally, but the Kurds of Rojava have demonstrated the emptiness of such labels. They have built a functioning society out of the ashes of the Syrian war, and one that could thrive if the international community lifts embargoes and sanctions."

Are there problems in Rojava? Certainly. But even against the worst repression and existential struggle, Rojava has demonstrated what is possible when regional governments seek to build rather than destroy."

Joan Garcia is a spokesperson for the Rojava Information Center. He says:

"There is a global conversation going on over ISIS, but the most important voices are not being heard – those of the local people who lost 11,000 of their sons and daughters to ISIS, and who are still struggling to deal with a growing ISIS insurgency, the humanitarian crisis in Hol camp and the burden of thousands of foreign jihadi fighters."

There are exciting ideas being developed here for overcoming ISIS, from an international court for ISIS fighters to women's education programmes in Raqqa and Deir Ez Zor. At the International Forum on ISIS, these ideas will meet with research and proposals from global experts. Lawyers with experience of international justice mechanisms, top policy-makers and global anti-terror experts will meet with those who have first-hand experience of tackling ISIS on the ground."

We're hoping to hear new clarity over the international tribunal for ISIS fighters, a solution for Hol camp residents, and reconstruction and reconciliation in the newly-liberated areas."

This Forum is a first for North East Syria, but we hope it will just be the first step in an ongoing conversation between the region which led the struggle to defeat ISIS and those opposed to ISIS all over the world."

BACKGROUND

The Forum is being held in the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria, the women-led, secular, grassroots-democratic region which achieved autonomy from the Damascus regime following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War.

Following ISIS' attacks on North East Syria and attempted seizure of Kurdish-majority Kobane, **the Kurdish YPG and all-female YPJ forces expelled ISIS from Kurdish-majority territory across North East Syria**. Uniting with local Arab and Christian forces under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), they joined forces with the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, expelling ISIS from the cities of Manbij, Hasakah, Tabqa and Raqqa before defeating them in their final stronghold at Baghouz on 23 March 2019.

The Forum is being held on the soil where ISIS' worst crimes took place, and where they have a continued presence as an organised underground movement. Tens of thousands of foreign and local ISIS fighters, supporters and their families are also being held in prisons and secure camps like al-Hol across North East Syria.

The Forum is being held on the soil where ISIS' worst crimes took place, and where they have a continued presence as an organised underground movement.

Attendees will have the chance to witness first-hand the **post-ISIS reconstruction efforts with regards to infrastructure, society and education** being put in place by the Autonomous Administration, and develop a deeper understanding of the immense burden placed on the local society by ISIS' rise and costly defeat. As such, **the Forum will open with words from those who have suffered under ISIS**, both locally and internationally – including Yazidis, women, and victims of ISIS' international attacks.

Moreover, **each session of the Forum will involve presentations from both regional and international experts**, following open discussion in which all guests will be invited to participate. The Forum will promote cross-cultural dialogue, understanding ISIS as international in origin and so requiring international solutions, rather than simply a burden for North East Syria alone.

In order to achieve this broad-frame perspective on ISIS, the Forum will comprise six sessions. The first five will focus on different aspects of the ISIS threat, namely: historical and political; military and security; economic and social; religious and cultural; and legal. The sixth session will explore recommendations for solutions.

You can find the day-by-day programme below. Key discussion points include:

- Documentation of the crimes committed by ISIS against humanity, women, the environment and historical sites
- ISIS' funding, its economic policy and its impact on the regional economy
- Reparations for victims
- The **proposed political scenarios for running the areas liberated from ISIS** after the military and geographical defeat of ISIS
- The procedure for dealing with local and foreign ISIS fighters and their families in accordance with international laws and conventions
- The **proposal for an international tribunal for ISIS** to be held in North-East Syria

KEY GUESTS

The Forum will be attended by 125 guests from 15 different countries across three continents. They will be joined by local speakers including leading figures from the Syrian Democratic Council, the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria, civil society movement TEV-DEM and women's movement Kongra-Star.

Guests we're particularly excited to welcome from abroad include:



ERGUN BABAHAN

Editor of Millet newspaper, former editor of Sabah newspaper

MULTU CIVIROGLU

Kurdish analyst, with a focus on Syria and Turkey, columnist for several Turkish newspapers



ELIZABETH DECREY WARNER

Founder and President of Geneva Call, former MP for the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland

INES DAIF

Freelance journalist for Le Figaro and L'Orient-Le Jour, PHD on international rights in Syria, survivor of the November 15 Paris attacks



LEO GABRIEL

Journalist, documentary filmmaker, social anthropologist

BRIAN GLY WILLIAMS

Professor of Islamic History at the University of Massachusetts – Dartmouth



NICHOLAS HERAS

Fellow of the Center for a New American Security

MEJDULIN HESEN

Member of the Women's Advisory Council of the Special Envoy of Syria, founding member of the Marathos Foundation for Citizenship and Human Rights

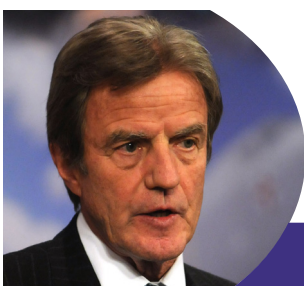


AMY AUSTIN HOLMES

American University of Cairo professor, fellow of Harvard's Weatherhead Center

DOMINIQUE INCHAUSPÉ

Professor of Law at the University of Paris, registrar of the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice at The Hague



BERNARD KOUCHNER

Former French Minister of Foreign Affairs, co-founder of Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders)



PETER KNOOP

Diplomat, former director and current member of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), responsible for the Dutch government's counter-extremism strategy

DR. KHALID ISSA

Director of the Syrian Research Center in Paris



DR. MICHAEL LUDERS

Political consultant, long-time Middle East correspondent for Die Zeit

PETER NEUMANN

Founder of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation



SALEH MOHAMMAD NIKBAKHT

Prominent Iranian lawyer and academic, spokesperson for Society of Political Prisoners

MAHMOUD PATEL

Professor at the University of Western Cape, South Africa, international law expert, human rights activist



DR. AHMED RAGAB

Richard T. Watson Associate Professor of Science and Religion at Harvard Divinity School



MICHAEL RUBIN

Fellow of American Enterprise Institute, former Pentagon official, former staff advisor to the Secretary of Defence

ANNE SPECKHARD

Director of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE)



FEHIM TASTEKIN

Columnist for al-Monitor, former columnist for Radikal and Hurriyet

VLADIMIR VAN WILGENBURG

Correspondent and analyst, specialist in Kurdish affairs, MA in Kurdish Studies



A full list of guests and speakers is available upon request.

WHO ARE THE ROJAVA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES (NRLS)?

NRLS



The Rojava Center for Strategic Studies is an independent, non-profit institution. NRLS was founded in Qamishlo on 12 December 2012, and opened offices in Afrin on 22 December 2012 and Hasakah on 28 June 2016. The Afrin branch was closed following the Turkish state's invasion and occupation of the Afrin region in early 2018.

NRLS comprises seven departments: Studies, Political Analysis, Media, Diplomatic Relations, Translation, Archive and Surveys.

NRLS' work includes:

- **Conducting the 2014 and 2016 censuses** on behalf of the Autonomous Administration
- **Drafting the 'Social Contract' for the Autonomous Administration**, codifying the legal and ethical principles through which North East Syria is governed
- Mapping the borders of Rojava and later North East Syria
- **Organising the 2018 International Forum on Ethnic Cleansing and Forced Demographic Change in Afrin**
- Setting up workshops and specialised committees to follow political, military, security, economic and social developments in the world, Middle East, the Kurdistan region and West Kurdistan (Rojava) in particular
- Conducting research and survey questionnaires with the aim of identifying problems, issues, obstacles and threats, as perceived by the society of North East Syria
- Analysing this data and extracting outcomes to obtain future-oriented views on the strategic level, and sharing these with the relevant authorities
- **Organising forums, seminars and lectures**, and publishing research papers

International Forum on Ethnic Cleansing and Forced Demographic Change in Afrin

The International Forum on ISIS is the second international Forum organised by NRLS, building on and expanding on the successes of the International Forum on Ethnic Cleansing and Forced Demographic Change in Afrin, held in North East Syria in December 2018.

The three-day Forum was the first of its kind to be held in North East Syria, attended by David L. Phillips, Bernard Kouchner, Michael Rubin, Dr. Thomas Schmidinger, and other regional and international experts. The International Forum on ISIS will build and expand on the successes of the Afrin Forum, with many more guests travelling from overseas to join the conversation.

You can read a report on the International Forum on Afrin here:

<https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/8b49eed8-b25b-4e5d-b4d2-99121643a051>

WHO ARE THE ROJAVA INFORMATION CENTER?



ROJAVA
INFORMATION
CENTER

The Rojava Information Center (RIC) is an independent, volunteer-staffed organisation based in North East Syria. RIC is advising and assisting NRLS on media strategy before and throughout the International Forum on ISIS, and will be the point of contact for foreign press both on the ground at the Forum and for those following remotely via the live-stream, social media or our daily updates.

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RIC was established in January 2019 with the aim to provide journalists, researchers and the general public with **accurate, well-sourced, transparent information**. It works in partnership with civil and political structures, journalists and media activists across the region to get journalists the information they need and put them in touch with the people of Rojava.

So far, RIC has **assisted reporters and researchers** from: the Wall Street Journal, The Independent, The Guardian and Haaretz; the BBC, ITV, NBC and ABC; news agencies Associated Press, Agence-France Press, DPA, EFE and ANSA; Cambridge, Yale and Madrid Universities; and many other national and international newspapers, websites and news sources with their work.

FULL PROGRAMME

For those following the Forum remotely, you can use this programme to select which of the six sessions you want to drop into. We will share any updates to the programme on Twitter at @RojavaIC.

All sessions will comprise presentations by the speakers on the panel, plus a time for questions from the floor.



Day 1: 6 July 2019 (9:00-19:00)

Opening remarks

- Reception: 8:00 – 9:00
- Opening remarks from NRLS: 9:00 – 9:15
- Short film about ISIS terrorism: 9:15 – 9:30
- Live testimonies from victims of ISIS terrorism: 9:30 – 10:30
- Words from the guest of honor: 11:00 – 12:30
- Opening of the art and photography gallery on ISIS Terrorism 13:00 – 13:00
- Lunch break: 13:30 – 14:30

FIRST SESSION: *Historical and political aspects of ISIS terrorism:* 14:30 – 17:30

Moderator: Dr. Farah Saber

Speakers: Dr. Azad Ali, Dr. Michael Rubin, Dr. Bayar Mustafa Dosky, Dr. Jalal Znati, Ms. Fawza Youssef

DOCUMENTARY FILM ABOUT ISIS

Part One: 18:00 – 19:00

Day 2: 7 July 2019 (9:00-19:00)

SECOND SESSION: *Military and security aspects of ISIS terrorism:* 9:00 – 11:15

Moderator: Dr. Mohammad Abd-Alqader

Lecturers: Dr. Nicolas Heras, Dr. Saad Bin Omer, Zana Omer, SDF Commander (TBC)

THIRD SESSION: *Cultural and religious aspects of ISIS terrorism:* 11:30 – 13:45

Moderator: Mr. Mounir Sheikhi

Lecturers: Dr. Mansour Teyfori, Dr. Amy Austin Holmes, Mr. Thomas Garrett, Mohammad Jihad Abrary

FOURTH SESSION: *Economic and social aspects of ISIS terrorism:* 14:45 – 17:00

Moderator: Dr. Mohammad Shawqi Mohammad

Speakers: Dr. Ahmed Youssef, Dr. Muheeb Saliha, Dr. Ahmed Pelda

FIFTH SESSION: *Women's perspective on ISIS terrorism:* 17:30 – 19:00

Moderator: Ms. Lina Barakat

Speakers: Ms. Berivan Muhammad Yunis, Ms. Zozan Sima

Day 3: 8 July 2019 (9:00-17:00)

SIXTH SESSION: *Legal aspects of ISIS terrorism:* 9:00 - 11:45

Moderator: Dr. Mukhtar Ghabashi

Speakers: Dr. Mahmoud Patel, Ms. Majdolen Hasan, Mr. Luqman Khider Ibrahim, Dr. Dominique Inchauspe, Dr. Ahmed Ragab

SEVENTH SESSION: *Proposals and solutions to deal with ISIS terrorism:* 12:15-15:45

Moderator: Dr. Zozan Ibrahim

Speakers: Dr. Thoreau Redcrow, Dr. Peter Neumann, Dr. Peter Knoop, Mr. Cheleng Omer, Dr. Saleh Mohammad Nikbakht, Dr. Seveen Saeed

**READING OF THE FINAL STATEMENT
Press Conference: (16.30 – 19.00)**