Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Mr Dastis

Good morning.

Many thanks to the government of Spain for hosting this conference.

This is the third conference after those held in France and the United States, and I am grateful that the issue of persecuted minorities in the Middle East continues to occupy an important place in your agenda.

For thousands and thousands of years, my land has been rich in ethnic and religious minorities. The population of the Nineveh governorate in Northern Iraq, where I grew up, used to include Sunnis, Shias, Christians, Shabaks, Turkmens, Kakais and Sabian-Mandeans, as well as Yazidis like myself.

In the summer of 2014, Da’esh attempted to wipe out these minorities and impose its extremist values through rapes, killings and destruction.

A recent study found that almost 10,000 Yazidi were either killed or kidnapped by Da’esh over a few, tragic days in August 2014. Other minority groups in the region were also attacked on the basis of their religious identities and forced to flee their homes. More than 1.2 million people from Nineveh were displaced by Da’esh attack.

The atrocities committed by Da’esh against minorities are ongoing. We still have more than 3,000 Yazidi women and children in captivity, and the hopes of rescuing them fade with each day that goes by.

While more and more territory is being liberated from Da’esh, the vast majority of the people displaced from Nineveh and elsewhere in Iraq have not been allowed to return to their homes, but continue to live in refugee camps instead.

Sadly, for the time being, the conversation in my country is not about the return of minorities to their homeland or rebuilding trust among different sections of the Iraqi population, but rather focuses on sectarian hostilities and on which group should control each disputed piece of territory. In Sinjar alone, three rivalling forces, the PDK, the PKK,
and Hashid Al Shabi are clashing to try and get control of the region – and we have no say in the future of our homeland.

Christians, Shabaaks, Kakaians, Yazidis and others have no voice, we feel just as powerless as when Da’esh attacked us.

This is why I call on you, and the international community as a whole, to help vulnerable minorities in Iraq and all over the Middle East.

Politics can be complicated, something that I don’t fully understand and I am no expert in, but I know that as humanity, we shall never let the injustice go unanswered.

I therefore call today on you to take action. There is so much you can do.

You can establish an international safe zone in Sinjar and Nineveh Plain and allow the people from these regions to return to their homes under international supervision. You can focus on protecting vulnerable minorities and creating framework for peaceful, long-term coexistence, as well as supporting reconstruction and development in the region.

You can ensure that the thousands of Yazidis that remain in Da’esh captivity are brought back to their families. The UN, the international community and local stakeholders must coordinate their efforts to ensure that the outrage of Da’esh enslavement is finally brought to an end.

And you can continue to put pressure on Iraqi and Kurdish authorities to do everything that is in their power to protect and support minorities, by amending their laws and changing their practices to ensure that minority rights are guaranteed, by accepting the international proposal for a UN investigation of Da’esh crimes, and by facilitating the prosecution of those who have committed atrocities against persecuted minorities.

In Iraq, and all over the world, we shall continue to fight against all those systems of belief which, like Da’esh sick version of Islam, regard religious minorities as a dangerous element to be suppressed and destroyed, rather than a treasure to be protected and cherished.

Thank you