

Speech of Dr Hanne Kuchler on  
the Jemal Nebez Award ceremony, 21.09.2025, Berlin

Thank you also, Dr. Mamo, for your words of appreciation for Jemal Nebez, which reminded me of my time as a student of Iranian studies as a minor subject at the FU, back in the 1970s, when Jemal Nebez was an assistant professor at the Institute for Iranian Studies and hoped to see Kurdish studies become an official subject at the Free University.

He was very clear in his statement about the Yazidis, saying that they had a special position among the Kurds, which was related to their unique religion and culture. He considered the texts written in Kurdish about Yazidi beliefs to be linguistic and cultural monuments that were unparalleled.

At this point, I would like to add how twenty years on then, in the early 1990s. I gained insight into the living reality of the Yezidis as refugees and displaced persons in Germany,

Jemal was there, as was the driver of a car that took us from Berlin to a refugee shelter in western Germany. We started in the afternoon, probably on a Friday, a meeting was to take place between a high-ranking Yezidi dignitary and Jemal, and the place was a small, unadorned room with a single picture hanging high on the wall. It was very simple refugee shelter. But the reason for the meeting was special. The Yezidi dignitary wanted to express his gratitude and appreciation to Jemal for having written and spoken so persistently and truthfully about the reality of Yezidis, despite the many prejudices against them.

As an expression of his high regard for Jemal the dignitary presented Jemal with a truly extraordinary, symbolic gift, forged and with a shiny blade in an elaborately handcrafted, ornate sheath. Nebez was to have this at his side to protect himself, to give him the strength to continue.

A journey of several hours there and back, with only a short stay, this rushed meeting between two Kurds who held each other in high esteem, far from their homeland—the place they longed for—made me feel depressed. But Jemal saw it differently. He forged ahead. He took the gift as it was meant, as a symbolic expression of gratitude and affirmation.

I am personally delighted that the second Jemal Nebez Prize is going to a Yezidi and that I am to present you with the honorary plaque for this prize – for your excellent research on the religion and culture of the Yazidis, as a scientist who knows the value of documentation- Documents prevent loss and preserve memory. They ensure the appreciation that Yezidis, their religion, and culture—as a unique part of world cultural heritage—certainly deserve.

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At Jemal's side I took part in a car drive, from Berlin to a refugee shelter in western Germany. Jemal, the driver and I, we started in the afternoon, probably on a Friday. A meeting was to take place between a high-ranking Yezidi dignitary and Jemal, and the place was a small, unadorned room with a single picture hanging high on the wall. It was very simple refugee shelter. But the reason for the meeting was special. The Yezidi dignitary wanted to express his gratitude and appreciation to Jemal for having written and spoken so persistently and truthfully about the reality of the Yezidis, despite the many prejudices against them.

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