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Iraqi student hopes scholarship will help boost education for Yazidis

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People visit the 'Valley of Peace' cemetery during the Muslim festival of Eid Al Adha in Najaf, Iraq, on Sunday (Reuters photo)

BEIRUT — A Yazidi boy who fled persecution by the Daesh terror group in Iraq hopes his scholarship to study at an international school will help him to improve orphans' education in his war-ravaged homeland.

Aido Khiri Omar, an 18-year-old student from Mosul in northern Iraq has started his first week at United World College in Dilijan, Armenia — an international boarding school that hosts students from 82 countries.

"It was really a golden chance for me to get a good education in another country... because the education in Iraq is very poor," Omar said in an e-mail to the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Omar wants to create education opportunities for orphans in Iraq, where learning has been severely disrupted by conflict and displacement.

"The children study in tents, and are also living in tents they have nowhere to go to do their homework... Many Yazidi girls do not complete their education and go to school as it is dangerous for a girl alone," he said.

Daesh insurgents overran the Yazidi religious community's heartland in Sinjar, northwest Iraq, in August 2014, systematically killing, capturing and enslaving thousands of Yazidi inhabitants.

UN investigators estimate more than 5,000 Yazidis have been rounded up and slaughtered and some 7,000 women and girls forced into sex slavery.

Iraqi forces recaptured the city of Mosul this year after months of fighting to wrest it from Daesh's control.

Omar is the first recipient of an annual Lamiya Aji Bashar Scholarship. Bashar is a Yazidi rights advocate who was among thousands of women and girls abducted, tortured and sexually abused by Daesh militants after the militants rounded up Yazidis in the village of Kocho, near Sinjar in 2014.

The scholarship was established by Aurora Humanitarian Initiative in partnership with the activist.

"This scholarship is the opportunity of a lifetime for young people from my community," Bashar said in a statement.

Omar wants to study biology, chemistry and global politics in the two-year International Baccalaureate programme.