

Areas of no Return: Focus on Diyala

Returns Working Group Iraq

February 2019

Returns Working Group
RWG Iraq



DIYALA



Muqdadiya District Background



- **Location:** Muqdadiya is an important urban centre in Diyala governorate, situated about 85 kilometers northeast of Baghdad.
- **Population:** Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen all live in the governorate. Religious communities in the governorate include Sunni and Shia Muslims, Christians, Yezidi's and Ahl Al-Haqq, a religious group with roots in Shia Islam

Overview

- Muqdadiya district in Diyala has witnessed 4 displacements since 2014: around 12,500 families were displaced with nearly 11,600 of those families displaced outside Muqdadiya district.
- Since its liberation in early 2015, two villages in Muqdadiyah district have still not witnessed any returns:
 1. **Al-Khaylaniya village**- located east of Muqdadiya city.
 2. **Toakel village**- located 7 km from the center of Muqdadiya.
- **Al -Khaylaniya** is part of Sinsil area, which is comprised of 21 villages. While people from the other 20 villages on the Sinsil area have returned and resumed their daily lives, the people from Al -Khaylaniya village have not been allowed to return. Al Khaylania village consists of more than 370 families, most of whom displaced to Markaz Muqdadiya, Baquba, Halabja, Khanaquin, Kala, Darbandikhar in Diyala, as well as to Erbil, Baghdad and Sulaymania Governorates.
- **Toakel village**: Toakel is the only village in Diyala that has witnessed displacement twice – following the attacks in 2007 during the Al Qaeda invasion for one year, and in 2014 during the ISIL invasion. All the inhabitants displaced to either Muqdadiyah district in Diyala, Sulaymaniyah ghdad.



ISIL chronology

- **Since 2012**, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) managed to take control over some areas in Diyala, launching suicide attacks in different locations within the governorate.
- More attacks were launched in **early 2013**, with AQI officially merging into the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) in March of the same year, causing a new wave of displacement totaling 138,030 IDPs.
- In **June 2014**, ISIL entered the district of Muqdadadiya, where several clashes were experienced between June 2014 and January 2015. ISIL never managed to establish control over Muqdadadiya city, instead they entered roughly 40 villages north of the city. As such, people mainly displaced from these villages as well as displaced from these villages as well as neighbourhoods north of the city.
- In **January 2015**: After months of heavy fighting, ISF and Shia militias managed to retake the governorate, declaring the liberation of Diyala.



Current situation

- Diyala **continues to witness infiltration attempts**, sporadic attacks against military forces and civilians, operations against militants, and arrests of suspects, as ISIL cells linger on in the rugged terrain of the governorate.
- As recently as **January 2019**, ISIL militants have been arrested in military operations in the regions of Al-Tabj and Bardan in northeastern Diyala.
- Residents also reported to **avoid areas north of Muqdadiya city** due to fear of ISIL and explosive hazards. In fact, security forces are not allowing people to travel in certain areas north of Muqdadiya city for undisclosed security reasons.



Return of IDPs: Toakel village

Return:

- The condition of the government to allow returns in Toakel is related to **security clearance**.
- Some family members have been denied security clearance due to matching and duplication of names with suspected affiliates of extremist groups.

Intention to return:

- There is no intention to return as Toakel is located near terrorists hence security is still an issue.
- There has been temporary return by some IDPs to check on their lands and property. However, they have been targeted by snipers or mines. It is perceived that these mines were planted by the people monitoring the village, who are supposedly reporting to ISIL.
- IDPs interviewed expressed concern that since the people of Toakel have been displaced twice (in 2007 and 2014), there is no guarantee that if they return their houses will not be destroyed again.

Return of IDPs: Al Khaylania village

Return

- There has been no real attempt to return to Al-Khaylaniya village due to tribal conflict, which is linked to a clan dispute between the clan of Al-Khaylaniya and a section of the Bani Tamim clan who live in the village of Al-Bazooul.
- It is further perceived that all the people from Al-Khaylaniya were affiliated with extremist groups as they had all left, and no one has returned or attempted to return.

Intention to return:

- The IDPs expressed that they want to return but cannot due to threats and fear of reprisal acts by the people from Al Bazool village due to the tribal issues.

Tribal dynamics preventing return:

- The IDPs from Al-Khaylaniya had previously visited the head of Muqdadadiya District to hand over a copy of their IDs to apply for return, but this request was denied after they were told that there was an unresolved conflict with the people from Al Bazool village, and that they would not be able to return until this issue is settled.
- This conflict stemmed from the killing of several people from Al Bazool village, and the people from Al-Khaylaniya were accused of having committed these killings.

Displacement from Toakel village

- **Displacement:** All the inhabitants displaced either to Muqdadiyah district in Diyala, Sulaymaniyah or Baghdad. Approximately 170 families who were displaced from Toakel are currently in Muqdadiya district.
- **Living conditions:** Most IDPs pay rent (between 180- 200 USD).
- **Source of income/ livelihoods:** farming, public sector employees (still receiving salaries from the government), daily wages by working in construction, markets and agriculture.
- **Access to services:** IDPs have access to schools as well as health centers. The IDPs who did not bring their IDs were able to obtain/ replace their IDs in the areas of displacement.
- **Needs and gaps:** Mine clearance, village is not secure, lack of infrastructure- such clean water and power.
- **Assistance provided:** The IDPs reportedly received IQD 1,250,000 (approximately USD 1,000) from MOMD as compensation. In addition, some agencies have provided them with NFIs as well as cash grants.
- **Relation with host community:** The displaced people from Toakel supposedly live in harmony with the host community in Muqdadiyah city and have not faced any problems with the government or host community.
- **Tribal dynamics:** Toakel is a mixed village, and the majority of the people are from the Bani Tamimi tribe. The background of the conflict is not sectarian, because both Shias and Sunnis live in Toakel and live together in harmony.

Displacement from Al-Khaylaniya village

- **Displacement:** Out of the 370 families who displaced from Alkhaylania, only 9 families are in Muqdadiyah city, due to the ease in dealing with administrative procedures, obtain documentation and easier access to governmental entities.
- **Living conditions:** Currently, 90% of Khaylaniya IDPs live in Alwand 2 Camp in Khanaqin district, 5% live in rented houses in Khanaqin and 5% live in Kalar district.
- **Source of income/ livelihoods:** Farming, public employees (teachers, military, police etc.), daily wages. Livelihoods support is provided by the international and local organizations as well as MOMD.
- **Access to services:** IDPs have access to the main services (schools, hospitals etc.) in Muqdadiyah city. However, IDPs complained that access to aid offered by authorities to IDPs in Muqdadiya city is denied to them due to their tribal affiliation. Despite holding MOMD cards, the IDPs allegedly did not receive any assistance at the distribution points.
- **Needs and gaps:** Need for PDS cards- it is was reported that PDS assistance had been suspended since 2014 for the people from Al-Khaylaniya until they could return.
- **Assistance provided:** The local government, MOMD, humanitarian agencies, and religious leaders are helping the IDPs in camps and with some livelihood activities.
- **Compensation claims:** The local district council in Muqdadiyah district is currently collecting requests for financial compensation, but no requests have been received from Alkhaylania. In addition, IDPs from Al-Khaylaniya mentioned that they cannot file compensation claims, since they are barred from visiting their village and hence cannot assess the extent of damage to their houses.

Proposal to return:

IDPs from Al-Khaylaniya village:

- Despite some reconciliation efforts have been made by the government (e.g. establishing a reconciliation committee and a tribal committee under the Ministry of Interior), the families displaced from Al-Khaylania don't feel safe to return to the AoO. Other options should be explored by the community and the government if return is not sustainable in Al-Khaylaniya village.
- Advocacy on access to services and PDS cards for IDPs living within the host community.
- Mines survey and clearance to facilitate return.

IDPs from Toakel village:

- Government should improve the security situation in the village to prevent armed actors from entering the village. This will not control the security 100% but will give confidence for the IDPs to return.
- The village has good fertile land for agriculture as well as water sources, and there are opportunities to reactivate the farming in Toakel if the area can be cleared from mines.

Any questions?