

DURABLE SOLUTIONS THEMATIC MEETING REPORT

5 VILLAGES OF NO RETURN IN RABEA - TELAFAR



October 2023

Date: October 16, 2023

Targeted community/area: Mahmoudiya, Jidriya, Saudiya, Qahira and Sfayya

Methodology and objective:

The RWG/DSTWG organized a thematic meeting between local community and local officials to advance solutions in the areas that are blocked, to better understand the reasons behind the non-return and government plans to support the return of these families.

Attendees:

Government Representatives

- Ahmad Jaafar: Mayor of Rabea
- Asry Ahmed: Deputy Mayor
- Mohamed Khalaf: Rabea water Dept.
- Fadi Hamad: Rabea Electricity dept.
- Rasheed Salim: Head of Rabea municipality
- Mahmood Salim: wells dept

Community Representatives

Four community leaders and mukhtars from four of the five villages

- Ghazi Mohammed: Mahmoudiya
- Naser Mohammed: Saudiya
- Moayad Fadhel: Qahira
- Methqal Khalil: Jidriya

UN/NGO Representatives

- Hasan Sulaiman: DSTWG

BACKGROUND

The 5 villages are in Rabea subdistrict in Telafar district, located in the west of Ninewa Governorate. The villages fell under the control of ISIS in 2014 which led to the displacement of the families. According to Mukhtars, the current displaced population of the five villages is around 1,500 families while the village habitants are mainly Arabs. There were only 16 Kurdish families in Sfayya and 4 Kurdish families in Saudiya. The residents left their villages in August 2014 after ISIS armed groups took control of their lands. Many families took refuge in Syria and returned after the liberation took place in February 2015 by Peshmerga forces, but they were not allowed to return by Peshmerga forces so most of them secondarily displaced to Rabea centre, some are renting houses, others are living in unfinished buildings, while there are a few families who are living in tents. Many families are renting in an informal settlement called Al Malayeen neighbourhood in Markaz Rabea and most families are displaced in Markaz Rabea and Mosul.

Village	Population before 2014 crisis	Current Displaced Population	Main areas of displacement	Current Occupancy
Mahmoudiya	560 HHs	760 HHs	Markaz Rabea and Mosul	0
Jidriya	35 HHS	47 HHS	Markaz Rabea and Mosul	0

Village	Population before 2014 crisis	Current Displaced Population	Main areas of displacement	Current Occupancy
Saudiya	400 HHs	450 HHs	Markaz Rabea and Mosul	4 HHs Kurdish
Qahira	120 HHs	135 HHs	Markaz Rabea and Mosul	0
Sfayya	187 HHs	200 HHs	Markaz Rabea and Mosul	7 HHs Kurdish
Total	1302 HHs	1592 HHs		

ATTEMPTED AND BLOCKED RETURN

The return is blocked for these families by the presence of Peshmerga who are controlling the area. According to the community representatives, the security forces "Asayish" have informed that families will soon be allowed to return but this is yet to happen at the time of writing of this report. In August 2017, KRI authorities took the decision for the families of Saudia, Qahera, Sfaya and Jidryya to return. More than half of the families returned for almost 2 months. However, according to community representatives, families from Mahmoudiya were not allowed to return pursuant to this decision. Subsequently in October 2017, the Iraqi Prime Minister Haide al-Abadi ordered the ISF, the Federal Police, and the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Services Forces "law enforcement operation" to move into Kirkuk (a disputed area). Following the tension between KRI and Iraqi forces, KRI security forces evacuated the villages and the families have been unable to return.

RETURN EFFORTS AND INTENTION TO RETURN

Community representatives expressed the strong desire of all families to return as they consider return as the solution for all the problems and challenges they are facing in areas of displacement. The villages representatives have made numerous attempts to advocate for return including:

- **Advocacy with Najm Juboory, Governor of Ninewa:** Community representatives have met with the governor twice. On each occasion the representatives have stated their right to return, and they seek the governor support to facilitate their return. The governor promised to follow up on their cases.
- **Community demonstrations:** These took place in front of the office of the mayor of Rabea, with community members expressing their desire to return and seeking support from authorities to facilitate their return.
- **Advocacy with KRI authorities:** Tribal and community leaders representing the 5 villages met with former KRI president Mr. Masood Al Barzani seeking his support to facilitate their return. The former president promised that he will follow up. A few days after the meeting, the five Mukhtars received phone calls from KRI security forces "Assayish" asking the Mukhtars to provide lists of names for families who are willing to return for security checks with no mention of any timeline for the return.

KEY CHALLENGES AND NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY THE COMMUNITY AND LOCAL OFFICIALS

Political engagement:

The mayor frankly stated that the main obstacle to return is political and fell beyond the power of the meeting attendees. He was also clear that he has advocated for this with the authorities in KRI and ready for any support from his side. The mayor also talked about the contact that the security forces made with the Mukhtars following the 5 villages representatives meeting with Masood Barzani and he expected that the return will not take place before December 2023.

Current situation in the villages:

Families are not allowed to go to the villages and assess the situation themselves. According to mukhtars, they believe that houses are mostly damaged as their villages were military areas for longtime. For the same reasons, they believe the services are also in need of rehabilitation or reconstruction. Authorities stated that they will support the families with providing services, especially electricity and water, once the return is granted. The head of municipality mentioned that they would support in removing debris and open the roads.

Current situation in areas of displacement:

Most of the families are living in Al Malayeen Neighbourhood which is a big informal settlement in Markaz Rabea. Families have limited access to services such as water and electricity. The families are sharing the wells which are not sufficient, the main electricity source is far with no internal network, and the streets are not paved and in need of maintenance. Both IDPs and host community are using Rabea health center which lacks medicine and specialists, while there is one primary school caravan which is very crowded.

Livelihoods:

Community representatives mentioned that the families are under a very difficult situation as they have lost their source of income as most of the displaced are farmers. Agriculture lands are now invested by farmers from inside KRI as the HHs make agreements every season with the Kurdish farmers, whereby the Kurdish farmers take the responsibility of the whole farming process without the presence of the landowners who are prevented from accessing their lands by KRI forces. After the harvest is completed, they give the shares to the landowners, but as per community leaders, the landowners are not aware if this is fair as they cannot reach their lands to see for themselves. As mentioned, the 5 villages are under the control of KRI forces. However, some agricultural lands are under the authority of central forces. Therefore, even if the farmers cannot access their villages, they can invest their lands as the lands fall outside Peshmerga control. According to Mukhtars, agricultural lands of Jidriya and Qahera are completely under Peshmerga control. Meanwhile, 50% of agricultural lands in Mahmoudiya, Saudiya and Sfayya are under Peshmerga control and 50% under Iraqi federal forces control.

Compensation:

Families cannot complete their applications as there should be a validation visit to the destroyed or damaged houses by the compensation committee. As the villages are blocked, the committees can't have access to the villages to assess the state of their homes or for the inspections to occur.

Registration with MoMD:

Most of the families have fled to Syria or Mosul and didn't have the chance to register as IDPs with MoMD, as according to MoMD, IDPs are individuals displaced from a conflict area who moved to a safe area. As a result, these families cannot apply for the return grant while only the families who managed to travel to KRI had the chance to register with MoMD. As per the Mukhtars, around 30% managed to register with MoMD from the whole families displaced from the 5 villages.

Proposed action points:

The mayor requested the RWG/DSTWG to arrange a conference to advocate for returns to the 5 villages. He suggested to have the conference in Erbil or Mosul and to ensure that the Ninewa first governor Serwan Rozbiany attends the conference as he could be part of the solution with his authorities and connections with KRI authorities. The mayor also requested that such a conference would require the attendance of authorities from KRI who are involved in the decision-making process.

RWG/DSTWG to advocate with Ninewa governor first deputy Mr. Serwan Rozbiany to facilitate families to visit their property and escort the compensation committee to the 5 villages with the families so they can complete their applications.



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