

PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT

AREA OF BLOCKED RETURN

AKASHAT COMMUNITY DIALOGUE



7 March , 2024

Date: 7 March , 2024

Target community: Area of Displacement -Qaim and Rutba, IDPs from Akashat

Location of Discussion: Rutba

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE:

In January 2024 the RWG team conducted two focus group discussions and five key informant interviews focusing on IDPs from Akashat who are displaced in Qaim. A similar exercise was conducted with IDPs from the same area who are displaced in Rutba. Following the FGDs and KIIs, the RWG team facilitated a durable solutions discussion between 17 IDP community representatives and government representatives (Rutba mayor, heads of water, Education, Electricity, and Roads directorates). The objective of the meeting was to provide a space for the community to voice their concerns with the local authorities to convey their needs, intentions, and to advocate for their preferred solutions pathways.



Figure 1 Participants in a focus group discussion

Government Representatives

Table of Attendees			
#	Name (Arabic)	Name (English)	Position
Community Representatives			
1	احمد عايد تبان	Ahmed Ayed Tabban	Community Leader
2	عبدالفتاح سعود مطر	Abdulfatah Saood Mutar	Community Member
3	فلاح خليف كنوش	Falah Khlef Kanoosh	Community Member
4	اسعد حمودي عليوي	Asaad Hamoodi Alewi	Community Member
5	حامد زعير	Hamid Zaer	Community Member
6	صبيحي ثابت سعيد	Subhi Thabit Saeed	Community Leader
7	صالح فرحان زعير	Salih Farhan Zaetir	Community Leader
8	محمد عامر صكر	Mohammed Amej Sagr	Community Member
9	محسن خلف دعيوج	Muhsin Khalaf Daewij	Community Member
10	مخلف عبدالله طلفاح	Mukhlif Abdullah Tilfah	Community Leader
11	عبدالصمد فايق طلفاح	Abdulsamd Fayeque Tilfah	Community Member
12	مرتضى عبدالحسين حسين	Murtada Abdulhussein Hussein	Community Leader
Local Authorities			
13	عماد محمد الدليمي	Emad Moahmmed Aldulaimi	Rutba Mayor
14	ايمن عبدالعزيز محمد	Ayman Abalzeez Mohammed	Rutba Police Chief
15	ليث عبدالاله عبدالرزاق	Layth Abdulillah Abdulrazaq	Rutba Electricity Director
16	عبد الحميد ولي عبد	Abdulhameed Wali Abd	Rutba Education Director
17	مشتاق نافع سظام	Mushtaq Nafea Satam	Rutba Municipality Deputy Director
NGO/UN Representatives			
18	سامر سليمان	Samer Sulaiman	RWG
19	عقيل سالم	Aqeel Salim	RWG
20	عادل عدلي	Adel Audli	NRC
21	شيماء العلوي	Shaymaa Alaalwi	NRC

INTRODUCTION

Akashat is a city located in the Al-Walid sub-district in the district of Rutbah close to the borders of the district of Al-Qaim, in Anbar Governorate.

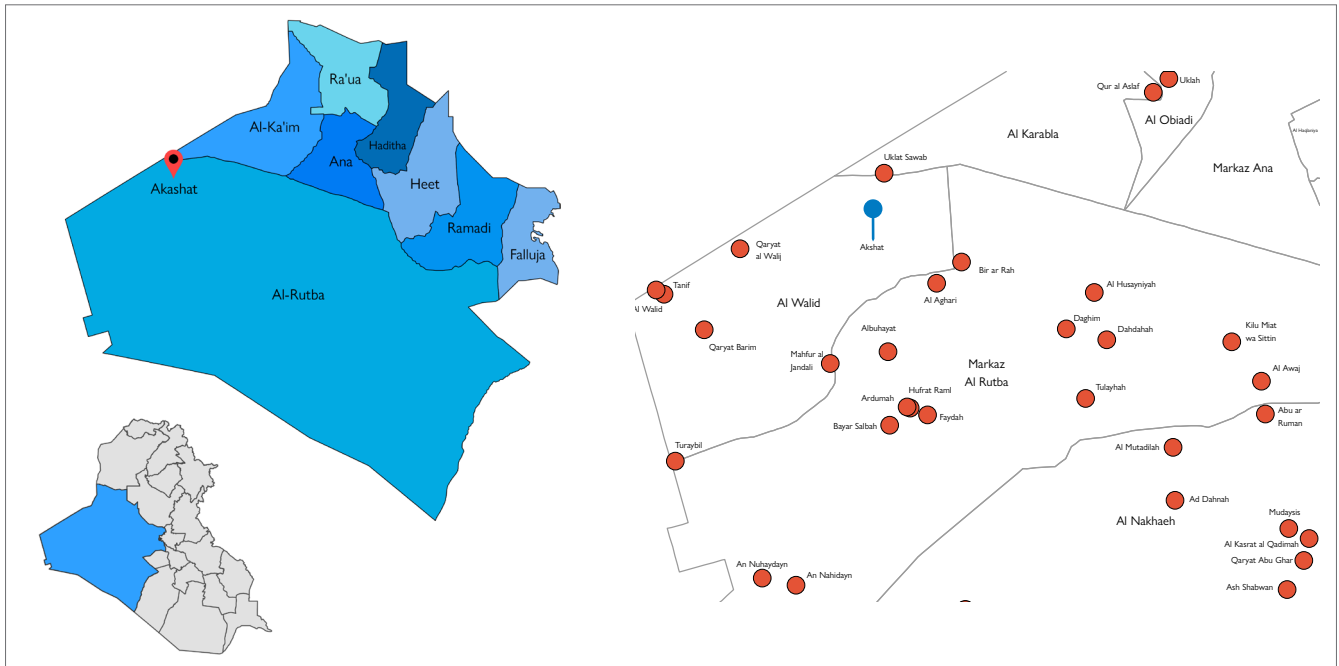


Figure 2: Map of Akashat

This area is rich in phosphate and other minerals such as quartzite, dolomite, quartz, and heavy sand. As a city, Akashat is diverse with people from different governorates employed at the Akashat phosphate plant. Despite this, most of the population have tribal roots with Qaim and Rutba. The area (city and surrounding villages) population is about 5,000 people, who are currently displaced in different areas, mostly in Qaim and Rutba. Akashat is currently under the control of the Popular Mobilization Forces.¹ Returns have been allowed since the city was liberated in 2017.

DISPLACEMENT HISTORY

The people of Akashat were displaced after ISIL took control of the city in 2014, and they moved to several areas of Iraq, most notably Qaim, Rutba, and Erbil. Nearly 30% of the population of Akashat in Qaim and Rutba now live in rented homes or with relatives. The city was liberated in 2017 in a military operation launched by the Iraqi military, Anbar Police, and the PMUs, however, no returns have been registered so far as the area is blocked under the control of the PMUs. According to the PMUs the locations is still insecure, and the citizens may be in danger if they return.



Figure 3: Participants in the Akashat Community Dialogue

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

All participants in both FGDs in Qaim and Rutba and the KIs highlighted the importance of providing the basic services in Akashat before they return with apparent focus on water, electricity, and schools. “All schools are destroyed, and we cannot return if our children have no schools to study in” said old male participant in the Rutaba FGD. Another male said that the electricity network inside the city is destroyed, and it needs to be rehabilitated.

¹ The area is under the control of the following Altfoof, Ali Alakbar, Hzb Allah, Tribal PMF.

Housing:

Majority of the IDPs live in rented houses or with their relatives in Qaim. One of the displaced females said that they want to return to their homes just to get rid of paying rent for shelter which drains a large percentage of their monthly income. Most families are now working as daily workers while others are on the government payroll. Moreover, two female and five male respondents said that their houses in area of origin are damaged and even if the area is open, they will need support to rebuild the houses to enable return. Abu Emad, Mukhtar of Akashat said that the main issue for people is that if they are allowed to return many of the houses have been destroyed, burned, or damaged and these would need to be rehabilitated. The participants in the discussion session requested support with cash for rent programs until the area opens again. While the majority of IDPs know the status of their housing some did not know. "I got pictures of my house, and everything was stolen, even the frames of the windows. We cannot go back home without compensations." One of the female head of households in Rutba.



Figure 5: Picture of damage to housing shared by FGD participant



Figure 4: Damage to roof of one of the houses in Akashat

Livelihoods:

All participants said they are facing difficulties in getting jobs or work opportunities in Qaim and Rutba. One of the females' participants said that her son (under the age of 18) has moved to Baghdad to work as a daily worker just to be able to pay the rent and the medicine bills for her chronic diseases. In addition, many of the male participants mentioned that they hardly find jobs as the host community are preferable than IDPs." "However, even the host community is suffering from lack of livelihoods", mentioned a male participant in Qaim. One of the KIIs confirmed that people of Akashat are facing issues regarding their income as they have no decent job opportunities in Qaim. One KII declared "Akashat IDPs have no jobs here in Qaim and they cannot pay for the rent anymore", pointing out that all families want to return to their homes regardless how their livelihood situation would be. One of the male participants in the FGDs in Rutba said "I work 3-5 days a month only and the rest I stay at home. Rutba is not a place to work, and I cannot go to Ramadi because the rent is very high there.". For women, there are no livelihoods sources at all as all participants said. One of the female participants said "Rutba is a very small city, and it is not worth it for me to work in sewing here because people depend on ready-made products."

Access to Assistance:

All the participants mentioned that they did not receive any assistance from the government, MoMD or any NGOs. "We are forgotten people, no one remembers the people of Akashat, and no one pays attention to our suffering", according to a female FGD respondent. The mayor of Qaim who was one of the key informants for this report said that they always request support from MoMD and governor office to send monthly food items, fuel, and NFI for the people of Akashat but the request have been either rejected or ignored.

Health:

The respondents said that there are operating health centers in all areas where the IDPs located, and the health centres provide medical services to people. However, one the male participants pointed out to the lack of doctors and medicine, especially the medicine for the chronic diseases. The nearest hospital is about 8-10 KM in Qaim center, and it also suffers from lack of specialized doctors, mainly surgery, and chronic health medicine. “We need to rent cars with high costs to go to Ramadi just to check if we need a surgery or not, how a big district like Qaim has no specialized doctors in the hospital?” one of the females wondered.

Safety:

All responses in Qaim FGDs show that people feel safe in the areas of displacement. No incidents recorded or happened to the IDPs. “We are treated equally by the security forces”, mentioned one of the male FGD participants. While the participants in the FGDs in Rutba focused more on the situation in Akashat. “We do not know if the area is secure or not, we need the governor to confirm if it is safe or not for us to return” a male participant said. Moreover, a female participant said, “I have relatives affiliated with ISIL and I am afraid from PMF to revenge from me and my family.” The participants show that they need reassurances about the security situation from authorities so they can decide to return. “We need a confirmation that all the surrounding areas are clear of mines as we hear that all Akashat is still contaminated” A young male said.

INTENTIONS

The majority of the participants have the intention to return to Akashat once the area is opened. However, all of them confirmed that all basic services, schools, and security should be provided before they return. “How can we return, and all the schools are destroyed, the government should rebuild everything before we go back home”. While some participants said that many of the houses are destroyed and the families that have their houses destroyed will not be able to return unless their houses are reconstructed. Additionally, few families show their intentions to reintegrate in Qaim. “We are stable here, we bought a house and our children used to the area and all our relatives are here, so we will not return to Akashat” mentioned one of the females.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Akashat is still a blocked area and no IDPs can return now.
- More than 95 % of the IDPs intend to return if the area is open and services are provided.
- Majority of the IDPs live in rented houses and some of them face eviction.
- None of the officials have visited the families and ask about their needs.
- No tangible efforts being exerted to re-open the area.
- Lack of assistance provided from MoMD, NGOs, and INGOs to the IDPs.

ACTION POINTS:

- A thematic meeting to be held in Ramadi with the present of the mayor and community representatives with PMF and government of Anbar to discuss opportunities to re-open the location. This meeting should be coordinated by RWG.
- Coordinate with the mayor of Qaim and Anbar governor office to organize the thematic meeting.
- The mayor to choose community representatives (no more than 4) to participate in the thematic meeting.
- Heads of directorates to prepare reports about the basic services to be used as references by the mayor in the meeting.

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