



# **THEMATIC MEETING**

## **BURJ & KALAH (SINJAR MARKAZ, NINEWA GOVERNORATE)**

24 FEBRUARY 2025

## METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

The Returns Working Group (RWG), in collaboration with the Ninewa Governorate Office, conducted a thematic meeting for Burj & Kalahi to address the challenges and opportunities for rebuilding the community and supporting its residents. This meeting brought together local authorities, representatives of the aid community working in the area, and the community representative. This discussion followed a community dialogue held on November 13, 2024, serving as a follow-up to assess progress on the key issues raised by the community and to further engage local authorities on their ability to respond to these challenges.

During the November community dialogue, the families expressed their intention to return to their area of origin, but they emphasized that such a return is only possible with support from local authorities and humanitarian organizations. Acknowledging the severe conditions in the area, they stressed the importance of immediate assistance to address critical infrastructure needs. Given these ongoing challenges, the thematic meeting was scheduled for February 2025, to further explore the situation and discuss potential solutions. The meeting focused on infrastructure rehabilitation and access to basic services. Additionally, the meeting sought to develop an actionable plan for rubble removal, service restoration, and return facilitation, while also strengthening collaboration between community members, local authorities, and NGOs to enhance coordination efforts in addressing the needs of returnees.



Figure 1 discussions during the session

Name	Position
<b>Government</b>	
Kamal Sharo Hassan	Head of municipality
Muhamad Abdullah Majid	Head of electricity
Maha Hassan	Electricity department
Mahdi Qassim Qambar	Head of Water department
<b>Community Representative</b>	
Majed Elias Elias	Community leader
<b>UN/NGOs</b>	
Karam Eskander	RWG
Sufyan Mandoo	
Astvin Nashwan Hussain	IOM
Khalid Saydo Izer	UNDP
Kawkab Nasir Hussain	UN- HABITAT
Khadil Khalaf Findi	Nadia's Initiative

## BACKGROUND

Burj & Kalahi was a thriving agricultural area with a population of 200 households. It was a diverse community, with Yazidis, Muslims, Christians, and various tribes such as Hababa, Khatony, and Muslawy. However, after the ISIS attacks in 2014, the area experienced significant destruction to around 195 homes and vital infrastructure. Most of the residents were displaced to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), Turkey, and other areas.

Currently, only 50 households have returned to Sinjar, but none have settled in Burj & Kalahi due to the extensive damage. According to the participants of the community dialogue, the key challenges include the absence of a water network, the destruction of electricity infrastructure, a lack of road maintenance, and the urgent need for compensation to rebuild homes. Furthermore, livelihoods have been severely impacted, with local markets and businesses completely destroyed.

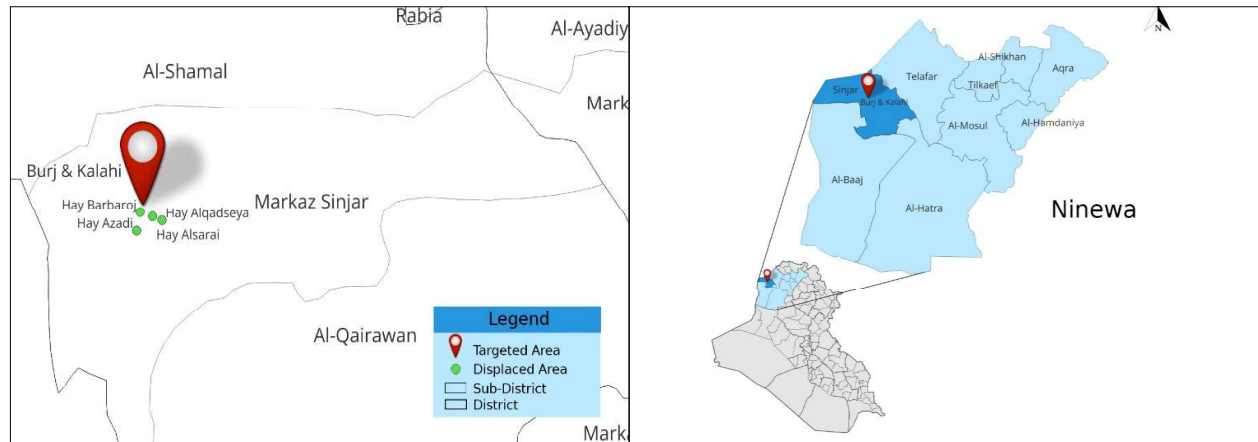


Figure 2 Burj & kalahi Maps

### • Community priorities and Intentions:

Only 50 out of 200 families have returned to their homes in Burj & Kalahi and others 150 IDPs in KRI camps (Chamishko, Kabarto1&2) in formal side Zakho, Sumail, Duhok, Erbil, and in Mosul all are living in rental houses and approximately 5 families immigrated to Turkey, 110 families applied for compensation, but no one has received compensation to date. Families report that 195 houses were destroyed. The owner of the house has to submit an official letter to the municipality for rubble removal, families of Burj & Kalahi families have land certificates of ownership. That is why authorities decide on the lands or switch to something else or keep it as it is destroyed to be an example of ISIS crimes in Sinjar.

The community of Burj & Kalahi is interested in returning to their area of origin, contingent upon tangible support. The priorities for returnees are shelter, electricity, and water.

### • Municipal Services:

Following the Governor of Ninewa's visit to Sinjar, there is increased interest in the reconstruction of Burj & Kalahi but nothing official. However, during a discussion with UNDP engineer Khalid, it was noted that Mahama Khalil, the former Mayor of Sinjar and currently a member of the Iraqi Parliament, expressed the view that Burj & Kalahi should remain as a memorial to the Yazidi Genocide. There are no official decisions made on this matter yet.

### • Access to Electricity:

The Head of Electricity confirmed that if families return, electricity will not be an issue, and he is ready to provide the necessary services.

### • Access to Water:

The Head of the Water Department reported that water and electricity are already available in some parts of Burj & Kalahi. This infrastructure will allow for gradual return and service provision as families return to the area of origin.

### SUPPORT FROM AID ACTORS:

- UNDP does not currently have a budget allocated for Burj & Kalahi but will evaluate the area if it meets the necessary criteria for community return and potential intervention.

- UNDP has previously collaborated on rubble removal projects with the Sinjar municipality, though no such projects are ongoing at present. They can raise the issue for consideration, depending on identified needs.
- UN Habitat is focusing on rehabilitation efforts. They will consider Burj & Kalahi for potential interventions if the area meets their eligibility criteria.
- Nadia's Initiative does not currently have a shelter project planned but is ready to collaborate with NGOs and local authorities on other services as needed.

### **CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION AND RETURN TO BURJ & KALAH: POLITICAL, COMMUNITY, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

- According to local authorities and Mukhtar, the situation in Burj & Kalahi is complex. Some political parties, along with certain groups of families, advocate for preserving the area as a **memorial to the Yazidi Genocide**. On the other hand, some community members are seeking organizational support for shelter but have specific expectations, such as building houses on plots of land ranging from **200 to 400 meters**. This demand does not align with the operational criteria of the organizations, as they typically work with different standards and guidelines for shelter construction.
- The organizations present noted that the **challenges are significant**, given the sensitivity of the area. They indicated that it would be difficult to move forward with projects without first securing the **support and cooperation of the families and local authorities**. After this, they conduct an **assessment** to evaluate the situation and, if no additional concerns are raised related to funding availability or, determine whether they have the capacity to implement potential projects.

## **CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

**The meeting concluded with the following next steps for moving forward:**

### **1. Identify Community Concerns:**

Understand whether the community wishes to return to Burj & Kalahi or if they prefer to keep the area as a memorial site.

### **2. Government's Plan for Burj & Kalahi:**

Follow up with the Sinjar Mayor and Governor of Ninewa regarding their official position and plans for the area.

### **3. UNESCO Consideration:**

Given that Burj & Kalahi is one of the oldest parts of the Sinjar district and was constructed with traditional stones, it may be eligible for consideration by UNESCO for heritage preservation. Further discussions will be needed on this aspect.

### **4. Summary of Discussions**

The meeting focused on the return of displaced families to Burj & Kalahi and the ongoing reconstruction efforts in the area. Various stakeholders, including the Mukhtar, Heads of Municipality, Electricity, and Water Departments, as well as representatives from IOM, UNDP, UN Habitat, and Nadia's Initiative, provided updates on their perspectives and the current status of support for returnees.

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