

Press Release

The successful return of 1000 families to Al-Ayadhiya, Tal Afar following reconciliation efforts by Sanad for Peacebuilding.

Sanad for Peacebuilding (Sanad), an independent Iraqi NGO, is pleased to announce that 1000 displaced families, both internally and internationally, have successfully returned to their homes in Al-Ayadhiya, a sub-district of Tal Afar. Many of these families have come from Turkey or from camps across Iraq, including Kirkuk and Mosul. Tal Afar, a city west of Mosul, has struggled with sectarian violence since 2003, with approximately

Sanad has undertaken a peacebuilding project in Tal Afar, working on reconciling conflicting communities and tribal leaders, culminating in the announcement of a peaceful coexistence agreement on August 9th 2018. Over the last 18 months Sanad has adopted an inclusive, outcome orientated dialogue model in Tal Afar to encourage local key actors to both transparently discuss their needs for sustainable peace, as well as identifying practical solutions to achieve this. With crucial support from United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Higher Commission for Communal Peace and Coexistence and their significant role with engaging various security actors. The process successfully resulted in the announcement of agreed peaceful coexistence principles for the sub-district of Al-Ayadhiya, following weeks of individual cross-sectarian key actor interviews, succeeded by a joint dialogue process with 35 key actors, representing the various communities of Al-Ayadhiya. Participants included, lawyers, tribal and religious leaders, militia commanders, as well as local and central governmental actors.

Nasha't Sadiq Mohamed, the Head of Al-Ayadhiya sub-district Council, states, *"after the success of Al-Ayadhiya Conference for Peaceful Coexistence and the declaration of the community agreement by the Tribes on August 9, 2018...several constructive steps have been taken to repatriate 1000 displaced families to Al-Ayadhiya sub-district."*

The community leaders, along with members of the local and central government, committed to upholding an 11-point peaceful coexistence principles agreement (annexed), included pledges to maintain rule of law, prevention of revenge acts of violence and supporting Iraqi security forces in identifying former Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) members. Following the announcement of the agreement on August 9th 2018, improved security conditions have successfully allowed for over 1000 families to return to their homes in Al-Ayadhiya. The work achieved by Sanad, proves the importance of such reconciliation initiatives, especially as Al-Ayadhiya was identified as a "disaster zone" by the Iraqi Parliament, in achieving sustainable peace and security.

The outcome orientated dialogue model implemented by Sanad, was able to successfully bring together conflicting communities, maintaining peace and security for displaced families

to return to their homes. To ensure lasting peace, it is essential to continue monitoring indicators for violence and any rises in tension, should any intervention be required to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Haider Ibrahim, executive director of Sanad stated, “it been more than 18 months since we first started the dialogue process in Tal Afar with the aim of addressing the barriers to safe, and voluntary return of IDPs as well as the barriers to long-standing peace in the area. Sanad, with the support of USIP and with coordination with the Higher Permanent Commission for Communal Peace and Coexistence, we were able to bring the community together to agree on key priorities and principles that would address the issues preventing the IDPs from Return.”

Ibrahim continues, “to sustain this outcome, and encourage the rest of the families to return to their homes, the community needs service provision, rehabilitation of infrastructure and economic opportunities for youth, women and vulnerable groups.”

Background

Al-Ayadhiya is a sub-district of Tal Afar and is 11km northwest of Tal Afar’s city center. Tal Afar is a city located in western Nineveh, with close proximity to the Syrian border. It is a predominantly Turkmen community and the population is approximately equally divided between Sunni and Shia. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein, Tal Afar was one of the first cities to fall to extremist groups, with frequent attacks on Baghdad originating from Tal Afar. The city was made a base for many and Ayman Al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda in Iraq made Tal Afar the headquarters for their terrorist network.

In the years following 2003, sectarianism divided Tal Afar’s mixed population, with frequent bombings targeting Shia districts from 2005 onwards, resulting in a mistrust by the Shia community of the Sunnis. The sectarianism worsened through years of perceived pro-Shia, sectarian policies by a predominantly Shia government in Baghdad, causing further disenfranchisement of the Turkmen Sunni community. The distrust resulted in the Shia community creating Shia only districts with districts, requiring specific ID badges to facilitate entrance.

Tal Afar fell to ISIS in June 2014, with many of the commanders of ISIS locating in Tal Afar, conducting operations in Mosul from the distance. ISIS was liberated by Iraqi forces and the PMF on August 31st 2017. Al-Ayadhiya has been found to have numerous mass graves since the fall of ISIS and it has been estimated that up to 2000 ISIS fighters were located in and around the town prior to its liberation.

About Sanad for Peacebuilding

Sanad for Peacebuilding is an independent non-government organization, established in 2013 with support from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

Sanad works to build and strengthen peace, democracy and human rights in Iraq by providing support and technical expertise to civil society networks. Sanad is particularly supporting the Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF), and the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities (AIM).

These networks were developed by USIP and have primarily transitioned to be supported by Sanad. Sanad is governed by an independent board of directors, comprised of eight members

with professional backgrounds in peacebuilding, civil society, rule of law, human rights, media, academia, and government. They also reflect the diversity of the Iraqi communities.

For further information on Sanad please visit www.sanad-iq.org

Al-Ayadiya Peaceful Coexistence Principles

1. To disavow ISIS and all criminal terrorist organizations and their members and affiliates who committed murder, displacement, kidnapping, incitement and threats and the looting of money from citizens and all crimes against the law.
2. To keep the state's laws as priority and recognize that the laws of the state are above the tribal laws and to reject any individual or collective action to take revenge without reference to the judicial authority and the tribal laws adopted by the tribes in the area in accordance to the rule of law.
3. Solidarity with families of victims of terrorism and those affected by the crimes of terrorist organizations and to call for their rights and to reveal the fate of prisoners and abductees.
4. To support and strengthen the rule of law and enable the judicial authorities to achieve justice and practice punishment on criminals belonging to terrorist organizations. To reveal criminals, and should any unrevealing occur, to ensure that they shall shoulder the legal consequences and tribal norms followed in those areas in accordance with the rule of law.
5. The Peace Committee in Tal Afar and the local community activist committees to adopt a solution to the problems behind wisdom and dialogue between individuals and groups for the post-ISIS era.
6. The head of each tribe and sub-tribe shall provide information about ISIS affiliates, all those who cooperate with them and suspicious persons to the security authorities. Agreed regulations shall be considered on eliminating extreme Takfiri ideology and punishing the perpetrators.
7. Priority shall be given to national identity over other identities, emphasize coexistence and social peace, renounce all forms of violence and extremism, support and strengthen state institutions, commitment to moderate discourse and acceptance of the other.
8. To prevent the return of any person who has been implicated in terrorist acts and his family members of the first degree, unless declaring their innocence before the courts provided that they are not supporters of terrorist organizations.
9. To address the malicious and false allegations or those who use the security institutions to practice revenge against innocent people by accusing them of ISIS affiliation without the provision of evidence. They shall be held accountable by the security and tribal rule, and their names shall be published publicly.
10. To renounce the extremist religious, political and media discourse that engenders violence; counter seditious media, rumors and subversive propaganda; monitor the performance of mosque preachers and Imams; emphasize moderate discourse; establish a committee of moderate and well-known clerics, local administrations and tribal sheikhs to select mosque preachers and abandon extremists in coordination with the security institutions - with the need to rehabilitate those who stood against extremism and provide them with educational and guidance courses to counter the response to suspicions and extremist thought.

11. Work shall be done between the sons of Al-Ayadiyah and the sons of their surrounding tribes under the articles of this document taking into consideration their observations for their development.

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