

Press Release

Signing of the Tal Afar Covenant Agreement and Announcement of General Principles to Support Stability and Rule of Law in Tal Afar

On August 14, 2020, more than 21 tribal, community and governmental leaders from Tal Afar signed a covenant agreement for the Tal Afar District Center that they led with support from Sanad for Peacebuilding (Sanad), a non-governmental and non-profit organization working to promote peace and non-violence in Iraq, supported by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The signing of the covenant agreement is the result of four years of dialogues and facilitated consultations by Sanad's strategic partner, the Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF), with tribal leaders and local government officials. During this time, the main challenges and potential solutions to support peaceful coexistence, the rule of law and stability in the area after its liberation from the extremist Islamic State organization (ISIS) were discussed.

"The initiative is important because it made this event possible. We hope that the agreement will be a document that will bring peace and prosperity to the people of Tal Afar and allow life to return to people who have suffered from war and destruction. I hope that the agreement will be translated into actions on the ground and that all residents of Tal Afar will abide by it." -Qassim Sharif Ali, Qaim'maqam (mayor) of Tal Afar District

Tal Afar is an Iraqi city located in northwestern Iraq, and administratively affiliated to Nineveh Governorate. The district center of Tal Afar is inhabited by more than 250,000 people from both the Shia Muslim Turkmen and Sunni Muslim Turkmen community, who have both relied on agriculture and herding livestock their main source of economic livelihood. The city, which is located 60 km (37 miles) away from the Iraqi-Syrian border and 70 km (40 miles) away from Mosul, was one of the first Iraqi cities to be come under the control of the extremist Islamic State organization (ISIS) on June 16, 2014, which led to the displacement of thousands of families from the city. On August 20, 2017, various Iraqi forces launched a military campaign to recapture the city of Tal Afar, which was one of the last strongholds of ISIS. The Iraqi government was able to completely liberate the city after a battle that lasted seven days, which led to the mass displacement of thousands of Sunni Turkmen families to the Republic of Turkey.

The agreement aims to find common ground through which consensus can be reached on how to address the drivers of tensions and conflicts in the Tal Afar district, the most important of which are: issues of return and reintegration of displaced persons, creating a balanced representation of all local community groups in local administration, and addressing community grievances and concerns on issues of compensation and security.

In addition, the signatories to the document pledged to uphold the rule of law, promote an inclusive identity for all members of the Tal Afar community, and to comply with legal mechanisms during the conflict resolution process. Tal Afar has suffered under the extremist Islamic State since mid-2014 and, starting before that in 2005, struggled with terrorism and divide-and-rule tactics under Al-Qaeda and other extremist actors. In this document, principles, mechanisms and recommendations have been collected and announced by the local community, including women, notables, and tribal sheikhs of Tal Afar district with the support of local authorities, in order to bring peace and comprehensive justice to the region. Please see the appendix to the signed agreement that includes principles, mechanisms and recommendations.

“With regard to compensation, we need to identify the families of the martyrs because they are the reason for our return to Tal Afar. Because of the blood the martyrs sacrificed, we surely need to include them in the compensation discussions.”-Mr. Ibrahim Mohammed, member of the Tal Afar Peace Committee

Signatories of the document

1. Notables and tribal leaders from Tal Afar district center
2. Representatives from the Supreme Religious Authority in Najaf (Al-Marjaiyya)
3. Representatives of the Tal Afar Local Peace Committee
4. Officials from the local Tal Afar government, including the Qaim’maqam (mayor) of Tal Afar Mr. Qasim Sharif Ali
5. A group of women activists from Tal Afar, including women members of in the Tal Afar Local Peace Committee

About Sanad for Peacebuilding

Sanad for Peacebuilding is a non-governmental 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”

Sanad’s Facebook page on: <https://www.facebook.com/Sanadirq/>

Sanad’s Twitter: [@Sanadirq](https://twitter.com/Sanadirq)

Or contact Ali Dawood, the executive director of Sanad for Peacebuilding on: ali.dawood.munem@gmail.com

Tal Afar Covenant Agreement

God Almighty through the text of his holy Quran states (And cooperate in righteousness and piety, do not cooperate in sin and transgression - Surat Al-Ma’ida). Praise be upon God the Almighty, the grateful, and blessings and peace be upon Muhammad, the envoy sent as a mercy to the worlds, may God bless him and his companions, may God be pleased with them all.

We warmly welcome the ladies and gentlemen in the audience and wish this forum success and achievement of its noble goals, to foster cultural and societal peace and coexistence, and to document strengthened bonds of family-like love between the founding tribes. Dear brothers, the city is ancient and old, and its people and values are known for their authentic and generous tribes. It is a predominantly tribal area, harmonious, united and social, and the patriotic spirit of its people is never compromised. However, unfortunately, the conscience of the good men from our society, while they themselves were unaware, entered into external hands which led to societal disunity and resulted in killing, captivity, and forced displacement of the respected families by ISIS, Al-Qaeda and the terrorist gangs falsely claiming to be representing Islam while Islam is innocent. After the liberation of the city by the heroes from all the armed forces who fought ISIS with the Tal Afar martyrs sacrifices, the families returned home after four years of displacement and alienation, and the vital institutions began to resume work and to hold tribal meetings and conferences in the city. Their decisions were constitutional and with coordination with humanitarian organizations and others such as Sanad and its support organizations.

Today, we are standing on large piles of rubbles, not the rubbles of infrastructure, but the rubble of social structures and social peace, which have been affected by many shocks over the past years and which require the development of rapid and appropriate solutions in order to restore the city and its residents to a be brought back to a normal state through the emergence of an agreement that guarantees joint living in this ancient city, which It can be summarized as follows:

The parties to the agreement pledge to abide by the following principles:

General:

- I. To reject terrorism and extremism in all of its forms.
- II. To reject sectarian discrimination and to promote an inclusive identity in Tal Afar.
- III. To uphold the rule of law and seek the resolution of problems in Tal Afar through formal legal mechanisms.
- IV. To cooperate with the federal and provincial government authorities and civil society organizations to support peaceful coexistence in the district on the specific issues of:
 - a. The compensation process;
 - b. Reconstruction of the district and development of local economic opportunities.
 - c. Housing, land, and property disputes, including those involving internally and externally displaced persons.
- V. Cooperate with the Local Peace Committee in Tal Afar in the monitoring and implementation of this agreement and on any challenges that arise in the district.
- VI. Compensation, financial and moral support by the government agencies to the martyr's families

Specifically:

- A. On the safe and voluntary return of displaced persons and those families associated with ISIS relatives:
 - a. Individuals accused of supporting ISIS will have their cases reviewed by security actors responsible for security clearances.
 - i. If those cases are resolved and the individual is not found to be an ISIS supporter or member, then he/she will be welcomed back to the community without restrictions or threat of violence.
 - ii. If an individual is found guilty, he is not welcomed to return, while his family will be allowed to return without restrictions or threat of violence provided that they publicly condemn extremism and pledge to support the legal ruling against their family members proven to be (or have been) ISIS supporters by the legal system.

- b. As the law upholds the principle of “no one can bear the burdens of another,” signatories of the pact pledge to raise the public’s awareness on the necessity of disassociating innocent women and children from the crimes committed by any immediate or distant family member. This campaign should be in coordination with the relevant government authorities, tribal and community leaders, civil society organizations, and local security officials.
 - c. Signatories of the pact agree to encourage those displaced persons deemed innocent to return to Tal Afar after an official security vetting, noting that the people of Tal Afar are united through kinship and history, and to offer them their full protection upon return.
- B. On security and public administration issues, signatories pledge the following:
- a. To fully cooperate with security authorities.
 - b. Cooperation between the tribal and Civil authorities with the security authorities in Tal Afar to provide a list of suspected ISIS supporters for security vetting process.
 - c. Reserve the weapons to the state.
 - d. Denounce any attack on any individual or family in Tal Afar, seeing it as an attack on Tal Afar collectively.
 - e. Agree not to harbor or shield criminals and terrorists.
 - f. Appropriate representation in all government and security services, as possible, and according to constitutional principles. Call for security and public institutions to be representative of its communities and to include more members from all Tal Afar’s communities into their ranks. This should be based on a process of meritocracy, not on sectarian discrimination.
 - g. Support the establishment of strong and effective institutions based on an inclusive national identity that respects diversity.
 - h. Call for the local media, politicians and external parties to stop spreading false accusations that sow sectarian divisions and to promote unity in the district that works towards the interests of the public.
 - i. To support efforts that can aid uncover any information that can help in finding those who have been kidnapped and are missing.
 - j. Cooperating with the community peace and coexistence committee in Tal Afar to review the LPC structure to be more inclusive of women, youth, minorities, and the marginalizes.