

Reporting on the humanitarian crisis in Northern Iraq

Since last week, the world is watching a human tragedy unfolding in Iraq. The sudden advance of IS (Islamic State) contingents in the Ninewa province since August 4 resulted in a mass displacement of about one million Iraqi civilians. While IS took control of towns in the area of Sinjar and on the road from Mosul to Erbil, hundreds of thousands of mainly Yezidi and Christian families fled overnight towards the autonomous Kurdish region. Room to accommodate newly arrived IDPs in the cities of Erbil, Dohuk and at the border-crossing point with Turkey is severely lacking and displaced families have settled camps along streets and in parks. PAX Iraq program team receives daily reports from Iraqi partners, highlighting needs of IDPs and sharing updates on rapidly changing events on the ground. More updates are available on the Facebook page of Kulluna Muwatinun (<https://www.facebook.com/Kulluna.Muwatinin>) and the Nassama blogs of PAX Middle East team (<http://wp.me/p1iYTg-Dq>).



Refugees in front of a church in Erbil.



Many Yezidis are still stranded in the area of Sinjar

While humanitarian aid was air-dropped on August 8 on Sinjar mountains, relieving the suffering of hundreds of Yezidis who had fled attacks of IS on their villages earlier and were trapped in the mountains for four days, armed forces were able to facilitate rescue through opening a corridor. However, thousands of Yezidis are still under the threat of IS; some still trapped in the mountains while villages located south of the town of Sinjar are currently under full control of IS. Weapons were all confiscated last week by the Islamic State, leaving the Yezidi communities unable to protect themselves. The IS announced a deadline to convert to Islam before Sunday or be killed. After negotiations conducted by local clan leaders who persuaded IS that they needed more time to convince Yezidis to convert, an extension of the deadline was obtained until Tuesday. PAX partners helped to facilitate contact between villagers, the United Nations and the military forces to seek rescue. So far, villagers are still waiting for help and shared they prefer to commit suicide rather than being killed by the hands of IS.

Yezidis are more scared than ever as they feel unsafe within the Kurdish Region. They felt abandoned by the Kurdish forces who were unable to provide adequate protection leading to the tragedy that occurred in the mountains of Sinjar. Many Yezidi families are considering fleeing to Turkey if US intervention is not able to secure areas. Reports emerged about Yezidi women being kidnapped and sent to Syria to be married off to extremist fighters. PAX has been informed that Badoosh prison near Mosul is one place currently holding 1500 women captives. As PAX partners were able to get in touch with one of the woman held in the prison, we learned that women have started choking each other to death rather than getting married forcedly.

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Local community efforts amid political stalemate



PAX ambassadors hold a banner which reads 'We are all citizens'.

In several locations in Iraq, PAX partners were involved in efforts stressing the need to protect minorities and assist displaced communities. In Erbil, PAX 'ambassadors', a group of Iraqi civil society activists, met in July to discuss steps they need to take and agree on activities and messages they want to promote to address the current crisis. They conducted some visits to IDP families to understand their needs and show support. In Baghdad, ambassadors met the deputy governor of Baghdad to discuss assistance provided to IDPs and organized a demonstration calling for unity and protection of minorities in Northern Iraq. A cultural evening celebrated traditional music of minority groups, recalling that the heritage of Iraq is diverse.

In several governorates of the South of Iraq, from Basra to Kerbala, ambassadors gathered young people to discuss the current crisis and its impact on diverse communities. Recently, a fundraising campaign was launched by the ambassadors to collect donations to support displaced families in Northern Iraq.

Increased tensions between Kurds and Arabs within the Kurdish Region

Within the autonomous Kurdish region, tensions between Kurds and Arabs are on the rise since the IS and the Peshmergas are in direct confrontation and thousands of IDPs, including Arab Iraqis, have flocked to take refuge in Kurdish Regional Government. Following reports that some individuals present in the KRG were showing support to IS operations, Kurds, fearing for the safety and stability of their autonomous region, voiced their

concerns and called for the expulsion of Arab Iraqis from the KRG.

Demonstrations saw hundreds of Kurds in the streets of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymania over the weekend calling out to their government.

PAX was informed it has become more difficult for Arab Iraqis to renew their residency permits while residency given at the border has been decreased from 1 month to 2 weeks. Arabs fear that tensions may worsen as they have nowhere to go.



Graffiti in Iraqi Kurdistan urging Arabs to leave.

Kulluna Muwatunun (We are all Citizens) is a program empowering young people from Iraq and Syria to promote rights of minorities, freedom of religion and citizenship. They engage their communities and political leaders to promote diversity and combat sectarianism. It is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and runs from 2012 to 2015. The extension of the program in Iraq is funded by the European Union and runs from 2013 to 2016. For further information, contact Ms. Benoite Martin, martin@paxforpeace.nl or Sam van Vliet, vanvliet@paxforpeace.nl.

PAX means peace. PAX brings together people who have the courage to stand for peace. Together with people in conflict areas and concerned civilians worldwide, PAX works to build dignified, democratic, and peaceful societies across the globe.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

