

Press Release

Announcement of the agreed Peaceful Coexistence Principles between the tribes of Southwest Kirkuk

Kirkuk, Iraq, 15th January 2017

Today, over 50 leading actors from southwest Kirkuk announced their commitment to a Peaceful Coexistence Principles pact that aims to prevent further conflict in the area once fully liberated from the so-called Islamic State (also known as ISIS). The leaders, with the support of the Governor of Kirkuk, committed to upholding and adopting the principles, which include, among other things, renouncing religious and political extremism, support for the rule-of-law, condemning acts of terrorism, and adhering to international human rights regulations and principles.

“This agreement, which aims to reduce the risk of violent conflict among and between the communities in Southwest Kirkuk, provides a foundation that lowers the risk of violence in the stabilization process once it begins, and a framework to resolve disputes going forward,” described Osama Gharizi, the Regional Program Manager for the Middle East at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

The agreement, signed by all conference attendees, is the result of an initiative led and implemented by Sanad for Peacebuilding (Sanad), a non-governmental, non-profit organization promoting peace and non-violence. The initiative, supported by USIP, involved facilitated dialogues and consultations with tribal leaders and local government officials from Kirkuk and Southwest Kirkuk to have a better understanding for the main challenges and opportunities to achieving peaceful coexistence after liberating the region from the Islamic State extremist group. The dialogues were run by Sanad’s strategic partner, the Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF).

Mohammed Al-Jubouri, a member of NIF and lead facilitator of the process, explained, “For Southwest Kirkuk it is vital for us to work on programmes that will prevent tensions and therefore further conflict in the region.”

The process saw 51 of the key actors in the region, including tribal sheikhs and government officials, agree to principles that would prevent further conflict in the region. “This programme has been able to bring together all sides of the community, with all working together to serve Southwest Kirkuk after liberation,” said Rakan Al-Jubouri, the Vice-Governor of Kirkuk Governorate. Similarly, the Mayor of the District of Hawija echoed similar sentiments, “This process was successful as it has been able to focus on the cooperation between the differing tribes and the local government to achieve the general principles for peace.”

Hawija and other parts of Southwest Kirkuk has been occupied by ISIS since August 2014, a fact which has uprooted the area's social dynamic. Furthermore, tensions have existed in the area well before the extremist group between communities and local authorities. The Peaceful Coexistence Principles, agreed upon today, have brought together the differing tribes, with full support of the government, in a plan to maintain peace in the region.

““This programme has highlighted the role of tribes in achieving security and peace amongst the Iraqi community,” explained Sheikh Sufyan Al-Nu’aimi, Emir of Al-Nu’aim Tribe, one of leading tribes in the region,

Attendees included, the Vice-governor of Kirkuk governorate, the Mayor of Hawija, the Director of Kirkuk Tribal Affairs, Director of Hawija Council, provisional council members and various tribal leaders.

Background

Since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, Southwest Kirkuk, particularly Hawija, has been a hotspot for ongoing violence and conflict. Sunni insurgents frequently attacked US and Iraqi forces during the years of occupation making it one of the most dangerous areas in the region.

As of 2012 census, the population of Hawija is 275,559. The region has a rapidly expanding population, with the growth rate of Hawija's population estimated as being 7.7 per cent between 1997 and 2008 compared to only 3 percent for the rest of Iraq. Soon after the 2003 Iraq War, Hawija came into media focus on 19 April 2013, when an unprecedented amount of violence erupted. In the 2013 Hawija clashes between Sunni protesters and Iraqi Army, some 53 people were killed. Further associated violence brought the total death toll by April 27, to 215.

Under ISIS occupation, Hawija's residents suffer from a severe shortage of critical supplies, including food, water, and medicines. The Kurdistan Regional Government estimates that 18,000 people fled Hawija in August 2016; they say that approximately 400-450 families arrive at Peshmerga checkpoints from Hawija each week. Hawija has a complex demographic with a predominantly Sunni Arab population.

Press Contacts

Zainab Qassim, Zainab.qassim@sanad-iq.org +9647800709126