

#### **400 Internally Displaced Families Return Home to Tikrit City – Salahaddin Province in Iraq**

On June 15, 2015, 400 internally displaced families returned to the city of Tikrit City, Salahaddin Province, after coordinated efforts by the Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF) and Sanad for Peacebuilding. Even though the city was retaken from the self-styled Islamic State (also known as Daesh, ISIS or ISIL), people were unable to return due to fear of reprisal, in addition to strict security measures.

The families were particularly afraid of revenge by the Popular Mobilization Forces (also known as Shia Militias), some of whom are relatives of the victims of the Camp Speicher Massacre, which took place in June 2014 near Tikrit where about 1,700 air-force cadets and soldiers (mostly Shia) were massacred by Daesh.

Amid the fallout from the massacre, and supported by the U.S. Institute of Peace, Sanad and the NIF have led a dialogue process between Sunni and Shia tribes to prevent an escalation of tensions and revenge killings. Positive outcomes have already materialized from the intervention. Tribal Sheikhs from Salahaddin and Southern provinces agreed on a set of action items, some of which have already been implemented. For example, tribal leaders from Albu Ajeel and Albu Nassir tribes publically affirmed their non-involvement in the massacre, and committed to help bring to justice any of their tribesmen who may have taken part. The tribal leaders also expressed urgent demands to facilitate the return of internally displaced families to Tikrit after its liberation from Daesh, as many families have been displaced for over a year.

A working group, which consisted of Mr. Abdul Aziz Al Jarba and Mr. Ra'id Khutab, the facilitators who lead the Speicher Massacre intervention, and key tribal leaders, investigated the main obstacles that were keeping the displaced families from returning back to Tikrit. The group came to the conclusion that the primary issue holding back the families' return was indeed the fear of reprisal against them. Many were apprehensive that during the post-liberation period, members of the Popular Mobilization Forces in Tikrit would not welcome the return of displaced families. The Salahaddin tribal sheikhs in the working group held a conference in Al Alam township gathering tribal leaders of Tikrit outskirts region, in which the families' concerns about returning to Tikrit City were echoed by the leaders.

The working group, including tribal leaders from southern Iraq, communicated the concerns of the displaced families to the National Security Adviser and Head of Popular Mobilization Body, Mr. Falih al-Fayadh. Mr. al-Fayadh showed his support for the cause, and the tribal leaders of Salahaddin subsequently provided him with the names and information of approximately 400 families who needed to return home. The families' records were checked by security forces, and all have been cleared of any charges pertaining to the Speicher massacre. Thus, these names were delivered to the Tikrit District Office, and eventually all of the families were able to return to their homes.

Despite the concerns of many, the Popular Mobilization Forces prepared feasts welcoming the returning families, and were pleased as the families arrived in the city. This was considered an accomplishment of the Speicher intervention team, and contributes to preventing potential tensions that might have resulted due to the return of the displaced families during the tenuous post-liberation period. Of particular note was the fact that some members of the PMF, who are related to Camp Speicher victims, welcomed the arriving families to Tikrit.