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KRG High Committee to Evaluate and Report to International Reports

کۆمیتەی هه‌ڵسه‌نگاندن و وەلامدانەوی راپۆرتە نێوده‌وله‌تییه‌کان

Statement

June 21, 2017

Human Rights Watch (HRW) published its latest report today, June 21st 2017 titled Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Thousands Fleeing Kept Waiting near Frontline. The report highlights that Peshmerga forces keep fleeing people at the checkpoints for long periods of time and deprive them of food and aid and neglect the safety of the fleeing people. In the previous communication from HRW representatives with the KRG High Committee of Response to International it was given only four days (including two days of holiday) to provide clarifications on this latest report. It must be highlighted that information gathering in such short period of time is time-consuming, which HRW tends to deliberately use as an opportunity to exclude KRG's clarifications in their reports. KRG's strategy through HCERIR is to put efforts to share extensive information and clarification based on reliable sources from government counterparts in response to any publication by international entities.

Moreover, KRG HCERIR has previously responded to the same allegations presented in the HRW's latest report which is published with a different title but almost with the same content that our previous responses apply to.

The updated information that the HCERIR received from Ministry of Peshmerga and Asayish indicate that Peshmerga forces assist refugees with food and other humanitarian aid when they enter region's military defense line at the forefront territories but protecting IDPs safety is the sole responsibility of local police and security forces. Hence, there are two screening steps on the arrival of displaced people during the entry to the camps where their names are recorded and forwarded to Asayish Geshti. This process sometimes might take a week or more, later the result of screening and verification including security checking is released.

Below is the KRG HCERIR response (statement) sent out today to the HRW and other international counterparts:

With regards to checkpoints screening processes and security measures at the borderlines of the KRG controlled areas; the HCERIR categorically reiterates KRGs commitment to upholding the international standards with regards to the freedom of internal movement and foreign travel. It is important to comprehend the ground reality when dealing with the IDPs close to within kilometers of conflict areas where Peshmerga on the frontline is in an ongoing battle with IS. For clarification, please find below KRG's security measures in areas close to the war zones.



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- According to Security frontline intelligence, IDPs movement from Tal Afar and Mosul has a high risk probability of IS using the IDP movement to breach the KRG controlled areas for surveillance purposes, hence posing security risks not only to civilians but also to our military forces at the frontline.
- According to Ministry of Peshmerga, restrictions of IDPs across several conflict frontlines are primarily due to strategic and security reasons in an active military conflict zone. Numerous Arab IDPs entering Peshmerga controlled areas, specifically the Hawija residents have not only been screened extensively but also it is not possible to have frontline "entry for IDPs" concurrently while engaged in military battle with IS in the same area. From a military strategic point of view, this poses a huge threat to the KRG forces and allows leverage for IS in breaching our frontlines in the conflict zones. From a potential human losses point of view, IDPs entering into a KRG checkpoint at the active conflict line would pose potential human losses for both IDPs and military forces. Hence, it is incorrect to assume that KRG is restricting IDPs from entering KRG controlled areas or frontline IS recaptured areas in high risk conflict zones. Once KRG forces have recaptured areas from IS and our security forces have provided the right clearances, IDPs are allowed into KRG areas and immediately transitioned into the screening process and through to IDP camps.
- There have been recorded cases by the KRG intelligence and security services where known IS militants had in fact breached the security checkpoints and thereby entering the IDP camps camouflaged as IDPs. Once instance recorded was in Makhmour District between Erbil and Nineveh Governorate in 2016, where 11 IS militants known to our security forces were captured during our security screening process stage at the temporary IDP camps near the Peshmerga frontline.

With reference to IDPs facing difficulty integrating into KRG Governorates, IDP residing in camps are not denied basic services and access to cities. In fact, IDPs are permitted to access the Region governorates with proper documentation and permits. With such permits, IDPs are free to explore opportunities for earning a living within Kurdistan.

With reference to refugees and IDPs entering Kurdistan Region, there are approximately 2 million refugees and IDPs currently residing in Kurdistan Region since 2006. There are total of 11 Syrian refugee camps in Kurdistan Region (Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Duhok Governorates) and as per US State Department report, 60% are currently living outside the refugee camp which contradicts your report when stating that the Syrian refugees are facing difficulty in earning livelihood. On the contrary, Ministry of Interior can confirm that Syrian refugees are in fact provided access to obtaining permits that are renewable without restrictions. In addition, there is ample evidence in the KRG Governorates where Syrian refugees are in fact employed and are able to earn a livelihood in the Kurdistan Region.



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100-200 refugees are fleeing to **Kirkuk** and surrounding areas on a daily basis. The INGOs do not cooperate enough and stop working at 3:00 PM. For a 24 hours monitoring and control of the conditions, the refugees stay in Dibis and later transferred and provided with shelter in Laylan and Yahyawa camps, but some of the refugees use *wasta* for to enter Kirkuk and some are issued fake IDs to enter the city.

According to Colonel Halo Najat, Head of KDP security in Kirkuk, The existing peace in Kirkuk is due to the procedures applied in the checkpoints, as they act as a buffer zone to prevent the ISIS from entering the region.

The procedures implied in the checkpoints for the people who flee Kirkuk from the other governorates are as following:

- People who flee from the governorates that are not controlled by IS, their IDs would be checked through the data and information from the information centers, if they turned out to be innocent, they would be allowed to enter the city.
- The same procedures are implemented for people coming from ISIS-controlled areas. The procedures depend on the information that Asayish and military intelligence provides and the same is implemented for people of areas with diverse tribes.
- People who turned to be innocent in the military intelligence agency from the governorates that controlled by ISIS, after they are proven to be innocent, they are allowed to enter the camps in the city, then their files would be given to Police and Security Force Asayish and the tribal leaders for coordination with Ministry of Migration and Displacement in Iraq.
- People who transfer from North governorates to the Middle and South going though the Checkpoints in Kirkuk, the checkpoints would provide them with tickets and taking g their documents sending them from the checkpoint to the next one for security purpose.
- People who reside in Kurdistan Region with residency card, the checkpoints ensure the accuracy of those residency cards to facilitate their movement in the checkpoints.

Fleeing people who intend to enter to the cities like Erbil or Duhok must have permission from security of Zummar, Talafar or Rabbiha. Then, they will be allowed to enter the cities easily. More than 100 to 200 allowance letters are issued and it takes only half an hour, but for now it is dangerous for security system.

IDPs and Refugees in Kirkuk resided in Laylan and Nzrawa Camps consist of (2000) families, their IDs would be taken especially the families who are doubted from their name and IDs in Nzrawa Camp, which provides residency place for (1500) families, now consist of only (600) families. Those (600) families are free from any movement and they are provided with health centers and those who would not be healed inside the camps they would be transferred to Kirkuk.



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Finally, the village residents and those from the shelters are free of movement depending on the rules provided. Also, humanitarian organizations are facilitated of visiting the places controlled by ISIS and Peshmerga, ICRC provided those who injured by ISIS and we have not prevented them from providing them with medical needs.