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WE ARE AGAINST A DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN IRAQ

Jassim Mohammed Al-Jaaf



Jassim Mohammed Al-Jaaf, Iraqi Minister of Migration and Displacement, was born in 1977. He obtained his bachelor's degree from the department of Geography. He studied on the geographical population for his master's degree and on the political geography for PhD degree. He published books and researches. He was elected MP from Sulaymaniyah in the Iraqi Parliamentary Elections on 30 April 2014. In August 2014, he was appointed the Minister of Migration and Displacement in the government established by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi. He still serves as the Minister of Migration and Displacement.

ORSAM: The capture of some territories in Iraq by DAESH in 2014 caused serious humanitarian problems. The greatest of these problems is refugee crisis. The incidents concerning migration, particularly in Salahuddin, Anbar, Diyala and Mosul, reached serious levels. An operation is currently being conducted against the DAESH presence in Mosul. This operation also brings about a humanitarian crisis. What kind of policy do you follow as the ministry in charge of the subject?

Jassim Mohammed Al-Jaaf: As you have said, the immigration issue constitutes a major part of the fight against DAESH. Fight against DAESH brings about not only a military but also a social struggle. The latter is particularly related to immigrants and population problems. We do not regard immigrants as permanent immigrants; that is, a permanent refugee status which is not the case here. We want everyone to return to their homes once the operations are completed; we also endeavour to realize this objective even when the operations are going on. We also oppose the emergence of a demographic change in Iraq. For this reason, our priority as the

Ministry is to make the migrants and their families return to their former places. The basic policy of our Ministry is that no group should experience any damage and we do not resort to discrimination of any group in a humanistic manner, which is why we oppose all kinds of demographic changes.

Currently, the number of immigrants in Iraq affected by DAESH has reached 4 million. More than 1 million 600 people have returned to the regions liberated from DAESH in the wake of the operations against DAESH. If we look at the provinces, 91% of the population of Salahuddin, 55% of Anbar, 43% of Diyala and 7% of Nineveh (Mosul) have already returned. Both as the Ministry and the Government, we are encouraging them to return. Besides, people want to return their homes even if it is problematic. We know there exist lots of problems. However, the fight against DAESH continues. A remarkable operation is being conducted against DAESH in Mosul. That is why it is difficult for Iraq to have a quick recovery. However, let me repeat it: As the Ministry, our main priority is facilitating the return of those who had to leave their own regions to make their way to safe areas. We are making efforts to ensure that the immigration does not become permanent.

You said that the primary goal of your ministry is the return of those who were displaced due to DAESH. Could you give detailed information about the works your ministry carries out upon this topic?

The Ministry carries out its works in two groups. The first is to help Nineveh, and the return of the migrants to their homes. And the second one is the works about those who have immigrated from other regions. We expect a serious wave of immigration as a result of the ongoing operation in the western part of Mosul. More than 220,000 people from Mosul are likely to immigrate in the first place. For this reason, we have set up camps for those who will immigrate from Nineveh. Now, the camps with the capacity of hosting these 220,000 people are ready. We are also in the process of establishing more camps to host more than 200,000 immigrants. Our services concerning emergency aid still continues. In addition to the camps established in the existing order, we also carry out urgent constructions of camps. We try to meet the food requirements of immigrants as well. Furthermore, we work on the provision of vital services. Especially in the field of health, we have joint works with health units that actively work on immig-

rants. Additionally, we cooperate with the Ministry of Oil over the issues of energy and heating in order to meet the needs of immigrants.

We carry out joint works on transportation of the immigrants with the Ministry of Transportation. These works include transportation of those who will return to the areas rescued from DAESH as well as the transportation of migrants to safe zones. Besides, security of immigrants is one of the most significant issues. DAESH and the threat of terror still continue. It is necessary to add other security risks to this point. That is why joint works are being carried out with the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior to ensure security of immigrants, safety of transportation, and security in the areas where immigrants return. On the other hand, our Ministry has also provided financial assistance to the immigrants by means of the budget allocated to us by the Government. However, we are aware of the fact that this assistance is not enough. The financial problem in Iraq is obvious. The fight against DAESH goes on. Despite this, Iraq provided an annual assistance of \$ 400 per family in 2016. In spite of the given financial hardship, the cost of this assistance to the Ministry has exceeded 280 mil-

As the Ministry, it is a priority for us that people who fled their own regions return to the liberated areas.



lion dollars. We want to make more help, too; however, this is what we could do with this budget. We also want our immigrants to have better conditions. We have dialogue and cooperation with not only the Ministries I have mentioned, but also all of the Ministries concerned in the immigration issue such as the Ministry of Education.

Regarding education, it seems to be one of the biggest bottlenecks for immigrants. In addition to the educational problems created by the immigration situation, it is also possible to stress that people are in need of social rehabilitation because of the problems such as discrimination, radicalization, sectarianism and so on. It is possible to say that people need social rehabilitation due to the problems. How are you going to provide

immigrants with social rehabilitation both in the places where they have settled and at their homes after they return there?

The problems of social perception are not solely caused by DAESH or sectarianism. There are many aspects of this subject. However, there exist basically two different problems in this regard. The first problem is human perceptions as a source of evil. All the evils came along with DAESH. Apart from DAESH, it was as if everyone had an evil inside. People used the atmosphere of chaos to get revenge on people they did not like and this situation amplified the already existing chaos. The violence got deeper and DAESH managed to benefit from it; that is, violence and chaos turned into a vicious cycle. The second problem is that DAESH is perceived to be a power coming from outside. We must first turn to ourselves and question our support in these lands before thinking

that DAESH is either supported from outside or placed in these regions by others. Was the mentality forming DAESH not present in Iraq before its emergence? Of course, it was. Today we are talking about DAESH; however, in the past, the DAESH mentality under different names was in Iraq and continued its attempts to disrupt the order and destroy the Iraqi people in Iraq. DAESH did not come from another place; it is consisted of the Iraqi people. Its foundation was laid in Iraq. Those who supported DAESH conducted atrocities against all other peoples living in the country; even some immigrants suffered from DAESH just because they were from the same family and nationality. DAESH supporters used violence against their own families, relatives and people from their nationality. Those who did not accept DAESH were exposed to violence. The people were mentally depressed. Their identities eroded away. Hence, it is not easy to solve the social depression with the steps to be taken in the short-term. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to finish the hatred inside people in a short time. And there will be some people who will use it all the time. Is there no outsider in DAESH? Absolutely, there is. Nonetheless, the peace process is very compelling.

Especially women, children and matters of honour are the toughest subjects to be dealt with. These issues stand out as the most crucial components in the Iraqi social structure, and DAESH caused serious damage at this point. The sectarian matters are not under the charge of the Ministry of Migration and Displacement. It should only be the state which could hold gun in its hands. Otherwise, sectarian conflicts can emerge. That is what Prime Minister Haydar al-Abadi says.

At the beginning of our conversation you mentioned that the number of immigrants in Iraq has reached 4 millions. The economic hardship in Iraq is evident as well. This situation displays the fact that Iraq cannot deal with the immigration problem solely with her own resources. Can you receive international help at this point? Can UNCHR or other international organizations back you up respecting the immigration issue?

According to international law, immigration issue is a part of the international humanitarian problems. In fact, nobody has to help. However, we receive help as it is a humanitarian issue. Although inter-

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national assistance is available, it is not possible to talk about a systematic help; that is, an international aid program has not been established directly through our Ministry. We can talk about serious aids made by the United Nations; nonetheless, since the UN follows an individual method of aid, it transfers aid directly to the immigrants itself. The greatest support reaching immigrants through our Ministry came from the United States.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has also been highly influenced by the immigration issue. In addition to the Iraqi immigrants, Syrian immigrants have also settled in the KRG's territory. Do you have any cooperation or partnership with the KRG on the immigration issue at this point? What kind of policy do you pur-

sue about immigrants in the KRG?

The KRG is fully working all alone with respect to immigrants. We have a dialogue with the Ministry of Immigration of KRG even though there is no concrete works or cooperation. We are responsible for the camps in the KRG. However, the administration and security of the camps are under the control of the KRG.

Turkey has deep experiences regarding refugees and immigration. What has been done concerning the Syrians who migrated to Turkey especially after the incidents started in Syria in 2011 presents an important example for the issue. Is there any possibility for you to be in cooperation with Turkey with respect to refugees? Have you taken or will you take any step in this regard?

As I said before, the refugee issue can turn into an international issue. Although Turkey does not have any obligation to help, everyone has to help in terms of humanity. What Turkey has done for Syrians is quite obvious; there are serious efforts and services. We are ready to be in any kind of cooperation with Turkey; if necessary, we can also visit Turkey. The problems between Turkey and Iraq have begun to come to an end and positive steps are being taken between the two countries. Turkey's ties with several masses in Iraq may be an instrument for her to take positive steps after DAESH. Besides, there exists a serious investment history between Turkey and Iraq in terms of trade. Despite political tensions, there was a huge amount of investment worth \$ 12-13 billion between the two countries, and this figure has fallen after DAESH. However, there is a serious infrastructure and potential for trade between the two countries to reach the said level again. Turkey should take a step; for the steps to be taken by Turkey can be the key for opening of all kinds of doors.

We thank you for sharing your precious opinions with us.

And I wish you success in your work.

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