



AREA OF LOW RETURN, BATNAYA VILLAGE, TILKAIF

MAY 2025



METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE:

The Returns Working Group (RWG), in collaboration with the Ninewa Governorate Office and the Tilkaif District Administration, facilitated a thematic meeting to explore the challenges and opportunities surrounding the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of displaced families to Batnaya Village. The meeting convened key stakeholders, including representatives from the municipality, water and sanitation department, agriculture department, and the community police, to jointly assess the current situation and identify priority needs.

The discussion focused on critical issues impeding return, including widespread destruction of housing, the presence of rubble, damaged infrastructure such as the outdated water network, and legal and administrative barriers related to property ownership and absentee landlords.

PARTICIPANT LIST

Local authority	
Stephen Essam Kalia	Mayor Office
Mahdi Haji Alo	Head of Municipality
Janet Awad Youssef	Municipality
Zaid Burhan Muhammad	Tal Keif Head of department of water
Salwa Saleh Salim	Representative of Tilkaif Agriculture Department
Ibrahim Muhammad Ibrahim	Director of Community Police
Sarmed Danoun Younis	Community Police
Ayub Abdel Salam Ibrahim	Community Police
Wamed Laith Ahmed	Municipality
Nabil Hassan Khalaf	Legal representative of Tilkaif Municipality
Osman Mohammed Danoun	Municipality
Community representative	
Atheer Harbi	Mukhtar
David Salim Boutros	Community member
Sherine Qarmzi Dubai	Community member
Habibah shabu Sulaqa	Community member
Raja Kawkab Namou	Community member
Diaa Shamoun Korkis	Community member
UN/NGOs	
Firas Alsalman	RWG
Karam Eskander	
Ayah Hashem Ismail	Local organization



Figure 1 Local authorities and Community members engaged in the Discussion

CURRENT SITUATION

On 12 February 2025, a community dialogue was held in Batnaya village, Tilkaif District, to assess the current situation and barriers to return. According to the authorities, although 230 out of 1,025 families have returned since displacement in 2014, the community continues to face major obstacles. Many houses remain destroyed or filled with rubble, with limited access to removal services, especially for families living abroad. Infrastructure is inadequate: the water network is outdated and unreliable. Livelihoods have been severely impacted; farmers face legal challenges in accessing agricultural support due to unresolved land ownership, while truck drivers are restricted from entering the village due to security measures. Public services such as healthcare and education are insufficient, and mobility is hampered by multiple security checkpoints. Many residents feel neglected by federal authorities, and without immediate improvements, some may consider permanent relocation.

1. DEBRIS AND DAMAGED HOUSING

Mr. Mahdi, the Director of Tilkaif Municipality, confirmed that Batnaya Village has suffered extensive destruction. He referred to a previous decision by the former Provincial Council which declared Batnaya a disaster-affected village due to the near-total devastation it experienced. While this decision was voted on and passed, it was never implemented.

He added that in any area impacted by armed conflict, displacement inevitably follows, and return rates tend to be low. This is a natural consequence of war.

Regarding the debris within Batnaya, Mr. Mahdi announced that starting Thursday, the municipality will begin removing rubble from destroyed homes, focusing on those whose owners have submitted official requests. The initial budget allocated for debris removal is IQD 180,000,000 (one hundred eighty million Iraqi Dinars). However, to clear all debris from the village, an estimated additional IQD 450 million will be required.

He also noted that if there are houses at risk of collapse that pose a threat to public safety, the municipality can dispatch equipment immediately to remove those structures.

When residents raised the issue of family members currently abroad who cannot file debris removal requests, Mr. Mahdi expressed his willingness to provide all necessary administrative and non-administrative facilitation. He suggested several options:

- A video message sent to the church in Batnaya (with which the municipality maintains direct contact).
- Authorization through a legal proxy.
- A written request signed by the individual abroad along with witness names and signatures.

Though these methods are informal and not strictly legal, the municipality is prepared to accept them to support return efforts.

He stressed that many residents have not submitted requests for rubble removal, often due to hopes for compensation, expectations that the church or NGOs will undertake rehabilitation, or other reasons. Given Batnaya's special status as a Christian village, unauthorized debris removal could spark community backlash or accusations of demographic change. Therefore, he emphasized that debris can be cleared immediately upon request submission.

Residents highlighted a recent incident where a collapsed wall nearly caused serious harm to children. Mr. Mahdi reiterated the urgency of removing all debris to prevent future risks.



Figure 2 Debris and Rubble from Destroyed Home

2. WATER NETWORK CHALLENGES

The Director of the Water Department addressed issues hindering returns, notably the deteriorated water infrastructure. The pipes are very old, severely damaged, and subject to unauthorized connections.

Concerns raised included:

- Broken pipelines.
- Illegal water taps.
- Unbalanced distribution due to uncontrolled valve closures, causing some neighborhoods to receive disproportionately more water than others.

The director committed to deploying a field inspection team to Batnaya starting Sunday. He invited residents to submit requests identifying damaged pipeline areas. All repairs must be completed within two days of inspection. He also called on the village Mukhtar to submit reports identifying points of illegal access to the water network. A coordination meeting with the district administrator (Qa'im Maqam) will be held to establish a committee to address these violations.

Additionally, Mr. Zaid pledged to instruct the technical department to revise the water distribution schedule to ensure equal supply across Batnaya's neighborhoods.

3. COMMUNITY POLICE PERSPECTIVE

The Community Police representative noted that Batnaya, like many areas affected by ISIS, has undergone significant social and economic change. The village experienced violations and aggression by individuals from neighboring villages and some residents of Telkaif who were affiliated with ISIS. This has led to deep fear and mistrust among Batnaya residents.

He stated that the Community Police continue organizing activities that bring together people from all religious and ethnic groups to rebuild trust, social cohesion, and lasting peace in the area.

4. AGRICULTURAL CONCERNS

The Agriculture Department representative reported that approximately 17,000 dunams of agricultural land belong to Batnaya. However, these lands were not included in the current agricultural plan for Ninewa Governorate. As a result, farmers do not receive government support such as seeds, fertilizer, or fuel.

The reason lies in a new requirement that landowners must hold the official title deed (in their name) to apply for inclusion in the agricultural plan.

A resident raised the issue that most lands are still registered under their parents or grandparents, with multiple heirs, including some currently living abroad. This complicates the legal transfer of ownership.

The agriculture representative promised to escalate this issue to the Directorate of Agriculture in Ninewa to explore feasible solutions.

5. SECURITY-RELATED ISSUES

In response to residents' complaints about harassment and obstacles when entering Batnaya, Mr. Mahdi proposed holding a dedicated meeting with the Security Committee chaired by the mayor. This committee includes:

- A representative from the Iraqi Army
- A representative from the Ministry of Interior Intelligence
- A representative from the National Security Agency
- A representative from the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)

The objective of this meeting would be to resolve security access issues and facilitate smoother return and daily access for residents.

Arrangements will be made to coordinate and schedule this follow-up meeting.

NEXT STEPS:

- Begin debris removal on Thursday for homes with approved requests.
- Dispatch Water Department inspection team on Sunday.
- Receive and process community reports on infrastructure issues and water violations.
- Schedule a security coordination meeting with the relevant committee.
- Follow up with the Directorate of Agriculture on landownership and inclusion in the planting plan.

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