

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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June 12, 2018

Mr. Haidar Ukaili
Prime Minister's Advisory Commission
Baghdad, Iraq

Re: Request for Assistance

Dear Mr. Ukaili,

Thank you for your and the Prime Minister's continued assistance and support to Human Rights Watch. We very much appreciate the willingness of his office, and your team in particular, to maintain an open line of communication with Human Rights Watch to discuss human rights challenges in Iraq and recommendations for how to overcome them as well as your willingness to engage with the findings of our human rights investigations and to provide your input and information.

We have a new report planned for release based on interviews we conducted with three individuals from al-Baghdadi, a town in Anbar governorate, 180 kilometers northwest of Baghdad, who fled their homes in October 2014. They currently reside in an internally displaced people (IDP) camp in al-Khalidiya and told researchers that after camp management assisted them in obtaining security clearance from the Anbar Operations Command and the Jazeera Operations Command, on February 18, 18 families boarded Ministry of Transport buses at the camp planning to return home to al-Baghdadi.

They said that when they reached Akaba checkpoint in Anbar at about 9 p.m., the soldiers at the checkpoint, from the 7th division of the army and part of the Jazeera Operations Command, stopped the buses and checked their identity cards, and after holding them there for an hour and a half, said that they were not allowed to

return to their homes and had to return to the camp, where they are currently residing, despite their security clearances.

A sheikh from al-Baghdadi representing the community said he immediately called the other 33 families currently displaced from the town and told them not to try to return, worrying the same thing would happen to them. Despite the families having obtained security clearance from both commands, the sheikh from al-Baghdadi said forces of the Jazeera Operations Command, which controls Akaba checkpoint, chose not to recognize the clearance. The sheikh said that on April 21 the commander of the Jazeera Operations Command assured him that the military had no problem with the families' returning home, but that the local mayor was pressuring him to get his forces to block the returns. The sheikh said that during their meeting the mayor of al-Baghdadi came in and told the commander that the families could not return because they were Islamic State (also known as ISIS) supporters. Neither the mayor nor the commander made any reference to concerns around the security situation in al-Baghdadi.

We kindly request that you please share any information you are able to obtain regarding why this group of families was prevented from returning home, and what measures are currently being taken to facilitate their return. We are happy to include any relevant information you share with us by June 17 in our upcoming report. Please direct your response and any questions to my colleague Belkis Wille via email or phone at [REDACTED]@hrw.org or +[REDACTED]. Thank you in advance for considering this request.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Lama Fakhri
Deputy Director
Middle East and North Africa
Human Rights Watch