Security, Religion, and Gender in Nineveh Province, Iraq

Conflict Analysis Study

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Almost twelve years have passed since the 2003 invasion of Iraq by US and coalition forces and the toppling of the dictatorial regime of Iraq, but the country still struggles with an unstable security situation, mainly in the Sunni triangle area. Iraqis joined the Arab revolutionary wave of demonstrations that swept the region in 2010. Nineveh province was one of the areas that held several peaceful demonstrations. Starting in April 2011, several anti-government demonstrations were led by protesters from Mosul city and nearby. The protests mainly focused on the Iraqi military’s performance, including political and random detentions, disturbing and degrading checkpoints, centralization in decisions, financial and administrative corruption, in addition, to poverty and demographic change.¹

The recent advancement of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS or Daesh) forces in Mosul and other areas in Iraq is of great concern to peacebuilders and others. Policymakers are scrambling to figure out an appropriate strategy to eradicate ISIS and prevent a further deterioration in security. Amidst this uncertainty, one thing is clear: preventing the further breakdown of the Iraqi state and the growth of violent extremism is a goal of international and regional actors, as well as Iraqi authorities, including the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). But ISIS’ advance in Mosul is not a new phenomenon. ISIS had managed to gain strength in other areas within Syria and Iraq beforehand. Studying patterns in these areas may help in identifying strategies on how to move forward to build a lasting peace in Iraq and in the region.

The following is a summary of a study of the conflict in Nineveh province². The findings may provide insight into recent developments in Iraq, including explanations for the advancement of ISIS. Several key issues contributing to and sustaining conflict were identified through this research, as were points of entry for peacebuilding, which can be capitalized on to reduce tensions. Key themes are outline below.

Political and sectarian tensions: Identity is one of the buzzwords worldwide and, in particular, in Iraq. After the 2003 invasion, it became the essential element that people use for categorizing, labeling, and

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¹ Several interviews in Mosul, Bashiq, Sinjar, Mosul, and Hamdania, Bashiq focus group sessions, and the
² An IAA researcher conducted a total of 30 interviews and 9 focus group sessions (10-13 people in each). Due to ongoing security concerns in Nineveh, participants' identities are confidential. IAA employed a combination of data collection methods, including focus groups, individual interviews, secondary research, and a validation session; and engaged with different stakeholders, including government, civil society, international community, armed groups, religious leaders, women, and youth. Although the focus was mostly on those in Nineveh, The IAA researcher also incorporated opinions from outside actors, including citizens of Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region as well as international political analysts and representatives of the UN and local and international NGOs.
describing themselves and others. When it comes to conflict, identity is the main driving factor for individuals and groups in shaping their attitudes and behaviors.

Data generated in the focus group sessions and the interviews reinforced the idea that part of the conflict in Nineveh is over identity, “political, religion, and sectarian,”\(^3\) and that Iraqi society is divided into different groups based on political sectarian orientations and religious doctrines – Arab Sunni, Kurd, Christian, Shebak, Kakai, Turkomen, Shia’a, and Yazidi. People have opposing orientations and perspectives, resulting in communities that currently cannot live together peacefully or accept others without tensions and conflict.

The political parties in Iraq are usually affiliated with ethnic, sectarian, and religious perspectives. Thus, Nineveh’s societal identity can be classified as Iraqi, multiethnic, and multi-religious. Furthermore, in regards to political Islam, there are two dimensions in which religious leaders and clerics seem to operate. Firstly, the clerics and tribal leader groups affiliated with terrorist groups try to mobilize and provoke communities toward violence. The other group of clerics and tribal leaders work toward peace, encouraging nonviolence in the area, and cooperating with some of the local authorities in Nineveh and the federal government. Unfortunately, it was obvious and confirmed by the collected data that the majority of the community leaders are from the first group. Moreover, some interviews confirmed that this is because some of the religious leaders have been murdered as a result of their positions supporting peace.

It is worth referring to the role of politicians in seemingly accelerating and fueling conflicts and extending the conflict circle for their own personal benefit. Thus, part of the political crises in Nineveh is due to a conflict of interests and needs, started between the Hadbaa list and Nineveh al-Ta’akhi list (the Kurdish coalition). This conflict escalated during the election of 2008, when Nineveh al-Ta’akhi withdrew from the political process. Then after 2008, the conflict circle extended and focused more between the al-Mutahedun List, a group with the biggest Sunni political list in Nineveh, the Hadbaa National List\(^4\), and the Shia’a Blocs, associated with the federal government and former Prime Minister-Maliki. The trigger for this conflict between the Baghdad Government on one side and the Kurdistan Regional Government and Mosul governor on the other side was when the Mosul governor decided to refine oil in the disputed areas in cooperation and agreement with the KRG in April 2014\(^5\). However, 

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\(^3\) Several interviews by politicians and a key UN employee.

\(^4\) [http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2368&lang=en](http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2368&lang=en)

several members of political parties in Mosul and the Provincial Council were against the position and policies of Atheel al-Nujaifi\(^6\).

It is also important to refer to the perspective of some politicians and activists from Mosul city regarding the Arab Sunni of Mosul and the idea that they have an interest in their province being governed only by Ba'ath members because the majority of Mosul city people are either Ba'ath members themselves or they former officers in the National Army, and they cannot accept others to rule the city\(^7\).

Concerning the Naqshbandi Army, it was obvious through the collected data that there was some acceptance by portions of Mosul city's population toward the Naqshbandi Army and its existence because they are Iraqis, more moderate in their actions, not involved in kidnapping or killing people, and their office was in public and not hidden\(^8\).

**Census, Article 140, and legal issues:** No real census has been conducted in Iraq for decades and this is a critical issue, especially for Nineveh, because it is within the disputed boundaries areas, which are at the core of the conflict between the federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government. The disputed boundaries areas are themselves considered to be a small Iraq, a community of multi-ethnic and diverse religious groups, reflecting all the diversity of Iraq.

Article 140 of the 2005 constitution of Iraq\(^9\) is another cause of conflict between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal governments, which impacts Nineveh especially because a large part of it is within the disputed internally boundaries area (DIBs).

In addition, the Oil and Gas Law is another long-standing issue between the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government. The previous parliament did not succeed in reaching agreement on legislating the Oil and Gas Law, despite the formation of several committees to foster and facilitate the process. However, as of January 2015, a copy of the Oil and Gas Law exists in the government and it’s currently scheduled to be discussed by legal experts.\(^10\)

Another critical issue concerns property disputes. The Property Claims Commission was established in 2004 to compensate those whose property was confiscated before 2003. But it was clear from the collected data that this commission was not very active in solving property issues.

Moreover, demographic changes are one of the crucial issues for minorities in Nineveh Plain, especially among Christians, because they believe this will lead to the extinction of Christianity in Iraq.

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\(^6\) Interview with the MP, and provincial council members in Mosul. Confirmed by a majority of participants in the validation session.

\(^7\) Female provincial council member representing Kurdish women in Nineveh, activist, and peace expert from Mosul. Confirmed by some participants in the validation session.

\(^8\) Interview with female journalist and confirmed by some participants in the validation session (Muslims and Yazidi).


Security, sense of citizenship, and patriotism: It is crucial that people in situations of armed conflict seek security by identifying with something close to their experience and belonging to something, which they have some control over. Identity could be based on clan, ethnicity, religion, or geographic or regional affiliation. Growing sectarianism in Iraq exacerbated a fragile political and security situation, especially in Nineveh and all the Sunni areas of Iraq. Nineveh is a Sunni Arab majority society consisting of several different tribes, in addition to Kurdish, Christian, Shebak, Kakai, Turkomen, and Yazidi minority groups. The Sunnis have a local sense of citizenship to Nineveh, mainly as a Sunni province and, in general, to the Sunni Triangle of Iraq, rather than a national sense of Iraqi citizenship. This was contributed to the breakdown of centralized authority. Moreover, this has long-term consequences, causing distrust, fear, and a lack of patriotism, which leads to a lack of trust between citizens and government officials on one hand, and similar distrust, on the other hand, between the local authorities and the federal and regional governments, all of which fuel conflict. This also affects the local authorities, local security forces, and the National Army in Nineveh, as “there is no sense of patriotism among the security force, but a weakness of national moral, and lack of experience where the majority have been employed because it is the only easy available source of income in addition to corruption”. Furthermore, there is a lack of trust and political will among a majority of the political parties and the local authorities in Nineveh.

Another crucial reason for the lack of a sense of patriotism among the security forces and the National Army is that they are not from Nineveh. They are Shia’a from the rest of Iraq, mainly from the south. In the words of one participant: “the security situation in Mosul… was not stable and continued to worsen because the National Army, the security forces, and the majority of the federal police were not from Mosul and Nineveh. All came from the south of Iraq. Serving in the national military in Nineveh province was a kind of punishment for the Shia’a soldiers.” The policy of the Shia’a government of Baghdad was not welcomed or accepted by Nineveh society, as government policies relied on sectarian discrimination against the Arab Sunni of Nineveh.

According to one participant, “Nineveh is a rich province and this is one of the main reasons for the lack of trust among all parties and groups in Nineveh, such as Kurds and Arabs. In addition to all the religious and ethnic minorities, the Arab and Kurds are trying to pull the minorities to their side. This was reflecting back directly on the instability of the security situation.”

Interview with MP from national coalition bloc from Mosul “A well-known pilot from the former Baath National Army in Mosul city, who was with his daughter, was killed at one of the checkpoints by mistake. But who believes in this story, that he was be killed by mistake? People in Mosul were sure that they meant to kill him because he was a former pilot in the Baath party National Army and he was a very respected man with high social capital in Mosul”

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12 In several Interviews in Mosul, Bashiqa ,Hamdaniya and Sinjar and focus group sessions of Mosul, Bashiqa, and Sinjar. Confirmed in the validation session.
13 Many Interviews and FG session and interview from Mosul, Bashiqa, Hamdaniya and with MP from national coalition and confirmed by many of the validation session participants.
According to the collected data, the Mosul community before June 2014 had several different perspectives toward al-Qaida and ISIS. Some were involved in and supported their activities voluntarily. Some only sympathized with them, considering them to be real fighters, consisting of former Baath and National Army members in addition to the indigenous people of Mosul (Muslawi). And others, due to threats, were forced to support them, such as rich individuals and families and business owners.\textsuperscript{14}

It also important to refer to Nineveh society’s position toward the Kurdistan Regional Government’s authority. The KRG was not welcomed by the majority of Arabs from Nineveh, especially in Mosul city and western Nineveh. And, according to opinions from those areas, the KRG shares with the federal government the responsibility for the unstable security situation and conflict in Mosul city, especially, and in Nineveh, generally. KRG representatives are accused of dominating power structures and practicing sectarianism against Arabs.

Nineveh province is a diverse society, not only in terms of ethnicities and religions, but also in regards to security status, political perspective, experiences, and culture. For instance, Telafar, Sinjar, Zumar, and Mosul city were among the most dangerous places due to sectarian and religious conflicts. While Nineveh Plain was less risky, allowing the international community to reach it regularly. However, “in Telafar, all the prisons become centers for torturing Sunni youth. All were accused of terrorism under Article 4, the anti-terrorism law, of the Iraqi constitution”\textsuperscript{15}.

Security incidents increased in Nineveh after 2007. A series of bombings targeted religious and ethnic minority groups who had not received adequate official protection and justice from the government and who suffered from discrimination\textsuperscript{16}.

**Understanding others and their positions and interests:** The lack of any culture of dialogue among different ethnic and religious groups in Iraq is a critical issue. Not only is this the case for Nineveh, but it is also a general concern on different levels – Micro, Meso, and Macro. This non-dialogue culture is the result of decades of dictatorial rule in Iraq. As a consequence, relations among different ethnic, religious, and gender groups in society were destroyed.

It was obvious through the data collected that there is a demand for local participation in peace talks and processes. This would ensure the feeling of ownership and partnership for Nineveh communities, as well as for the federal government and the local authorities; this is indeed a crucial condition for Nineveh society.

The term of *others* has almost no place within the Iraqi dictionary. The collected data referred to the problem of understanding others.

\textsuperscript{14} Interview with a businessman and journalist from Mosul.
\textsuperscript{15} Independent MP from Telafar.
\textsuperscript{16} Annual report on international religious freedom 2010
Role of local civil society organizations: Although civil society organizations are not that active in Nineveh, they had a few significant peace initiatives promoting the human rights situation. These include their March 2011 statement on human rights violations in Nineveh, especially in regards to Article 4 of the Iraqi constitution, the anti-terrorism law. This statement was addressed to the central government in Baghdad.

Civil society organization staff and activists are not safe enough, though, as Nineveh and especially Mosul city witnessed several tragic incidents against activists.

It is also necessary to highlight the role of the Civil Initiative of the NGOs, which consists of 105 NGOs, which, in July 2014, launched the initiative “Toward the Protection of Diversity in Iraq and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage and National Identity.” The main focus of this initiative was the protection of minorities and IDP rights. Furthermore, a number of local NGOs in Mosul and Nineveh province supported Nineveh peacebuilding initiatives and played the role of mediator between the disputing parties including, the Baghdad Government, the Kurdistan Regional Government, local authorities, and tribal and religious leaders. For instance, the al-Tahreer Association for Development Organization played a significant role in opening channels for dialogue and connecting the disputing parties and actors. And despite the current critical situation, local NGOs in Nineveh, on a regular basis, raise calls, in collaboration with international NGOs and the relevant UN agencies, to the international community to consider ISIS crimes against humanity to be classified as genocide against Yazidi and Christian religious minorities, while also citing their crimes against history and civilization in Nineveh Province.

The role of the international community: The international community actors relevant to the Nineveh conflict can be divided into two groups. On one hand are the international NGOs, UN, and the embassies, especially the European and US embassies. On the other hand, are the neighboring countries and their largely negative role in driving the conflict toward violence through financial and logistical support to the armed groups, including al-Qaeda and the ISIS (Daesh). Moreover, “some government officials and tribal leaders in Nineveh province fuel the conflict and fabricate crises.” The neighboring countries can be classified into Sunni supporting countries, which include the two influential forces of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Whereas, according to the opinions of people in Nineveh, Iran is the biggest supporter of the Shia’a government of Baghdad and influences the government’s agenda and policies. Turkey and its

“UNAMI was not very serious in playing the role of mediator for the demonstrations of April 2011 in Mosul. This was because of several reasons. For instance, they wanted to keep good relations with Maliki and also because of the UN bureaucracy, which is an obstacle and challenges their programs, especially in conflict and post-conflict countries.” - Peace expert from Mosul.

17 Al-Tahreer-Typical-Society
18 http://www.yazidigenocide.com
19 Quote from one of the interviews in Mosul city.
destruction role was also a concern of many participants. Turkey could influence local-level decisions, mainly economic and political decisions, through their relations with Mosul governor Atheel al-Nujaifi.

Although the 2003 US invasion and their policies in running the country damaged Iraqi society and was one of the main reasons for the current armed conflict, the US had some successes that need to be highlighted here. According to the opinions of a female Provincial Council member representing Kurdish women in Nineveh and a peace activist from Mosul, the security situation in Nineveh became worse after the withdrawal of US military forces in December 2011. The US had given significant power to Ba’ath members in running the city of Mosul, but when the US military withdrew, the Shia’a government of Baghdad pulled all their authority and this led to the complete collapse of security.

UNAMI, relevant UN agencies and the UN country team’s interventions in the Nineveh crises were limited to the immediate action phase, including humanitarian and material aid. And it seems that there is no clear medium-term or decade-long thinking or planning.

In regards to the political position of UNAMI, they were vocal in calling for national unity. Through their official press releases and publications, they pushed Sunni leaders to come together with the Baghdad Government and start peace talks, but this has not yet resulted in progress. Moreover, the relevant UN agencies offered technical support to the local authorities in Nineveh. But they insisted that the connection has to come from the Mosul Governor and his team, who should seek the UN country team’s advice on needs, gaps, and where services are required. This was one of the causes for dispute between the Mosul governor’s alliances and the rest of the blocs and political parties in the Mosul government and the Provincial Council because there was no appropriate or regular communication between all the actors and parties.

According to the collected data, the UN Political Mission to Iraq has had no reaction to the Baghdad government’s discriminatory acts and practices against the Arab Sunni’s.

Rule of Law, structural violence, and social justice: The collected data referred to and reflected numerous instances of structural violence. These included corruption, lack of services and infrastructure, lack of proper education, especially in the rural areas of Nineveh, where education is almost non-existent. In support of this view, Unemployment among youth and women, poverty due to corruption and unjust wealth inequality, discrimination and oppression of ethnic and religious minorities, random detention and limited freedom of expression – all these are examples of structural violence perpetrated by the federal government, particularly former Prime Minister Maliki, against the citizens of Nineveh, particularly the Arab Sunni of Mosul and western and southern Nineveh.
Social injustice and conflicts of power – regarding both position and finances – among the political parties in Baghdad, Nineveh, and Kurdistan Region is another critical issue that fuels conflict.

Rule of law is an essential concern for many in Nineveh society. Activating and promoting the rule of law by strengthening executive power can be a solution for the current problems of Nineveh, according to the opinions of many research participants. However, participants in a Mosul focus group and the validation session expressed some disagreement with the idea of the rule of law as a tool for solving the Nineveh conflict. They argued that Nineveh is a tribal society and the only way to solve problems is through negotiations between tribal elders and families who are involved in this conflict because they are already bonded through different relations, including marriage and business. But if negotiations failed, then the last option could be through applying law and security forces.

A critical point raised in some interviews concerns the structural violence embedded in some of Iraq’s laws, specifically the anti-terrorism law, as well as former Prime Minister Maliki’s biased use of the law against Sunni groups. For example, many Sunni men and youth in Telafar district were arrested on charges of terrorism, despite the fact that the majority of them were not involved with terrorist groups, as confirmed by a parliament member (Arab Coalition in Iraq Bloc). Also the youth of Mosul were suffering from the application of the anti-terrorism law against them with no reasonable justification.

Economic and political factors are crosscutting issues that can be negatively driven, especially in a corrupt country, such as Iraq. The economic situation cannot develop sustainably due to insecurity, which leads to more corruption. For example, since there is no transparency in the construction bidding process by the local authorities of Nineveh, the process ends up favoring the powerful tribal leaders and elites who are allied with the Mosul governor.

Religious leaders and religious tensions: One of the drivers of conflict is the cultural, ideological, and religious issue, including the tensions among religious leaders in Iraq. Religious identities have been politicized. In Nineveh, the political blocs are influenced by sectarian concerns and views, mainly Shia’a

and Sunni, which cause extreme tensions due to differences in their interests, benefits, perspectives, norms, and habits.

Research participants referenced two opposing opinions and perspectives among Nineveh’s society. The first group sees Nineveh’s religious leaders and clerics as a moderate group that supports the peace process. In this view, the religious leaders can act as connectors, working jointly with tribal leaders, to seek peace and try to rebuild broken communal relations. While the other group of Nineveh society views the majority of religious and tribal leaders as dividers, actors who fuel the conflict because they are influenced by terrorist groups, including ISIS, al-Qaida, and the Naqshbandi Army. In this perspective, their destructive statements affect Nineveh youth and men primarily, provoking them and further inflaming the conflict. This second view believes these religious leaders support al-Qaida and ISIS, including their aim to fight for Wahhabism and that their goal is to apply Sharia based on Wahhabism to all of Iraq. This Wahhabi perspective sees such policies as the only way to live in peace and argues that Shia’a are unbelievers.

However, the Naqshbandi Army believes in Sufism. It is a Sufi Islamic organization led by Saddam’s former deputy Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri. Baathism and Iraqi nationalism are key parts of this organization, which includes important members of the former Iraqi regime. They are also accounted as more moderate than ISIS and al-Qaida. However, all three groups, al-Qaida, ISIS, and the Naqshbandi Army, share the goal of trying to force foreign troops out of Iraq, a goal also shared with Baath party members, who are trying to regain power.

Furthermore, in some interviews with activists and journalist from Mosul city and Bashiqa district, participants noted that there is a group in the middle who cannot have a positive role in supporting peace because they fear for their lives. According to a female journalist, many assassinations occurred in Mosul city, especially from 2012-2013. There is also an independent group within Nineveh society who remains silent. Some of them are now IDPs who fled from Nineveh and headed to the Kurdistan Region or to other more secure parts of Iraq. However, according to the collected data, participants confirmed that more than 65% of the Mosul population did not leave the city and still remain in Mosul.

It important to refer to the situation during Saddam’s rule, as there was the potential for sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia’a, but Saddam prevented that and did not feed this conflict through the creation of sectarian militias, as the government is doing now.21

**The armed groups:** The three main armed groups in Nineveh are al-Qaeda, the Islamic States in Iraq and Syria (Daesh), and the Naqshbandi Army. The people of Nineveh, especially in Mosul city and the western part of Nineveh, have diverging views of them, especially toward al-Qaeda and the Naqshbandi Army. There is no clear rejection or acceptance of the presence of al-Qaeda in Nineveh by some people. According to the opinion of an activist, before June 2014, a significant percentage of Nineveh society supported al-Qaeda and Daesh. He added that al-Qaeda changed their hostile policies to gain societal support.

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21 Interviews with activists and peace experts from Nineveh and a politician from Baghdad.
In addition, the Naqshbandi Army, who are more affiliated with Baath party members, is active in Nineveh. Again, the people of Nineveh have diverging views of them. Some see them as protectors, defending civilians against any violation committed by any Shia’a party, including the National Army. The other group, especially intellectual groups, women, and some individuals, neither support nor fight against the Naqshbandi Army. They also do not accuse them of being extremists or terrorists because they are not involved in killing and or kidnapping people. 

The National Army should not be labeled under this category of armed groups, but, unfortunately, for many, it is perceived as an armed group. A majority of people in Nineveh, especially the Arab Sunni in Mosul city and the western part of Nineveh, hold this view. The National Army is seen by Nineveh society as an armed group that is driven by Iran and Shia’a interests, directed by former Prime Minister Maliki against the Arab Sunni. Numerous participants confirmed this perspective, feeling that the National Army is one of the main causes of conflict because they are against the interests and needs of Arab Sunni groups and that the National Army considers Sunni to be the enemy of Shia’a.

**Gender-based violence and women’s rights:** Women’s rights were an important topic in several interviews and focus group sessions, with a focus on the problems of widows, divorce, early age marriage, polygamy, forced and illegal marriage, unequal job opportunities, and women’s limited involvement in the political process, which subsequently causes the marginalization of women’s roles in the community. In the opinion of a majority of participants, the main reason for the limited involvement of women in the political process was the serious risks facing female politicians in Nineveh.

Furthermore, the armed groups have an extremely negative impact on women’s daily lives. They have limited women’s freedom in several aspects, such as forcing the traditional Islamic outfit even on non-Muslim women and girls, and restricting education and work opportunities. Mainly after al-Qaeda extended their influence and operations in Nineveh in 2005-2006. It is also important to refer to the issue of honor killing among populations in Nineveh, mainly among the Yazidis. Women in Mosul city are highly educated, especially those from the indigenous families of Mosul. But, unfortunately, this was not the case for women in rural areas, including the western part of Nineveh. However, there are also a high percentage of educated women in Nineveh Plain as well.

According to the collected data, women in Mosul were not greatly involved in NGOs because this was a new experience and many thought NGOs were Israeli intelligence organizations. However, in 2004-2006, the PKK established 7 NGOs in Mosul, mainly for women, youth, and children. But those groups were forced to close because they were accused of being pro-Israel.

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22 Validation session participants from Mosul city.
23 Interview with a female journalist (DW reporter).
When it comes to media, women in Nineveh are involved, but they pay a high price. Many female journalists from Nineveh have been killed in the last 10 years and they face a serious risk of being killed.

Another critical issue is forced or coerced marriage to al-Qaeda and other terrorist group members. In the case of Nineveh, it seems this phenomena is not as common as it is in Anbar and Diyala provinces. There are few cases of such marriage and it occurs either with the support of the families or when families do not know that the man or his family are involved in terrorism. In both cases, the marriage cannot be legally registered in the courts. As the men are terrorists and on wanted lists, they cannot approach any government institutions. As a consequence, women give birth to illegal children, who will be deprived of all their legitimate rights, while the women are denied their marital rights. The end result benefits terrorist groups, as terrorists easily recruit such disaffected youth, as they have no other economic source or life options.

**The role of youth**: According to participants in the focus groups and validation session, the youth of Nineveh have limited interest in engaging in the political process. There is a “nil rate of youth involved in the political process”\(^{25}\). [They] care more to improve [their] daily lives and career opportunities.” The University of Mosul\(^{26}\) is a place for education only - youth cannot be involved in political movements and processes as the University of Mosul campus is controlled by the National Army. No freedom of speech and expression is allowed among students. The students in Mosul University were not part of the demonstrations of 2011. The few who participated in the demonstrations had been paid and encouraged by some of the opposition parties, while always fearing arrest and torture by the military\(^{27}\). Furthermore, there are not any active and well-organized youth unions that gather students and youth to organize any such movements.

Social media has a significant impact in shaping the daily life of Nineveh youth. But, unfortunately, according to a majority of the validation session participants, social media is largely not used as a tool for developing youth political, social, and cultural networks.

**Men and Dignity**: Numerous scholars have written about the essential role dignity can play in resolving conflicts. This was confirmed through the research, which uncovered many cases of indignity, as we heard stories of men in Nineveh who suffered from the central

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\(^{25}\) Interviews – youth from Mosul University  
\(^{26}\) [http://www.uoanbar.edu.iq/English/](http://www.uoanbar.edu.iq/English/)  
\(^{27}\) Interview with two students from Mosul University.
government’s discriminatory policies against Sunni groups. Manhood and masculinity in eastern society is linked to protection and security. Furthermore, the stories of thousands of former Baath army officers from Nineveh are another critical issue relevant to men’s concept of dignity. Loss of dignity consequently shaped their aggressive behaviors and pushed men to be involved with terrorist groups in order to gain revenge and restore their sense of dignity. Almost all the collected data agreed that women’s honor is another critical subject and that it is the most important issue linked to men’s dignity in Nineveh. Men are ready to fight and kill if their family’s (women’s) honor were threatened.

**Climate change:** is one of the major challenges facing Iraq since 2007. It caused disastrous environmental and economic impacts, particularly in the agricultural sector. This issue was raised in several interviews, including the role of climate change in forcing tribes in western Nineveh to displace to Ba’aj, Talafer, and Sinjar districts and sub-districts. Unfortunately, there is no specific study so far to assess the likely impact of climate change on Iraq, including its effect on demographic changes, which were identified as one of the reasons for conflict in Nineveh. Because of the drought, displaced families left their homes and businesses, relocating to other areas with no source of income. No regular humanitarian aid or support was provided to those displaced families, or programs to resettle them. This made their youth and men easy targets for recruitment by terrorist groups, as they had no other choices.

**Recommendations**

**To the governments of Iraq and Kurdistan Region:**

1. Develop the legal framework. Promote the current regulations, laws, and other mechanisms to protect human rights principles. Consider the structural violence embedded in and advanced by current Iraqi laws, including the constitution and criminal code. Other legal aspects that contribute to structural violence including the Freedom of Expression, Association and Peaceful Assembly Law, the Anti-terrorism Law, and the Law of Political Parties. Clarification on Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is also required.
2. Develop an urgent and clear end-violence scenario with the active involvement of all parties,
3. Promote economic development programs in cooperation with private sector actors, such as the Nineveh Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the major local and international companies, in order to create job opportunities for youth and women
4. Increase security at the borders and enhance the existing internal security system. Address the lack of public security in Nineveh and the Sunni provinces. Also, Nineveh male youth should be seriously considered in the composition of the National Army, local security, and the border security forces.
5. Establish rehabilitation programs for victims of the conflict and violence, with a focus on women, children, and youth..
6. Government should partner with relevant local NGOs and community leaders to build trust.
7. The Iraqi government and the KRG should seek the UN country team’s technical support and advice on needs and gaps, including information on where services are needed.
8. The de-Ba’athification problem has to be solved by the government, in cooperation with relevant parties.
9. All militias must be dissolved by the government and in coordination with the relevant parties.
10. The Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Council of Representatives, and the relevant entities should implement a national plan to implement and support Security Council Resolution 1325, the recommendation of the CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) committee, and they should allocate the required human and financial resources.

To Iraqi NGOs & civil society:
1. Build capacity to support research and studies on conflict analysis/assessment and conflict prevention in order to promote responses and advise all stakeholders on best practices for peace interventions and programs.
2. Encourage and support the Iraqi and the KRG in starting transitional justice processes. Ensure the meaningful and safe participation of all parties in transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth and reconciliation commissions.
3. Build and strengthen relationships with tribal leaders and clerics by finding a mechanism for cooperation and engaging with them in peace interventions, activities, and programs. Share with them conflict analysis outcomes that highlight the importance of stopping conflict and working toward peace.
4. Build the capacity of civil society organizations in monitoring, evaluation, and documentation in order to catalyze their role in monitoring government performance on all levels and reduce opportunities for administrative and financial corruption.
5. Follow-up the letter of solidarity, “Toward the Protection of Diversity in Iraq and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage and National Identity,” that was addressed to the Iraqi Council of Representative by the Civil Initiatives of the NGOs in November 2014.
6. Build the capacity of the local media, especially in subjects related to peace journalism and support local independent media in advancing their role in addressing community concerns, needs, and challenges to the relevant parties independently.
7. Support youth in Nineveh in establishing specific platforms, such as unions, to address their needs, organize young workers, and to foster young leadership skills.

To the international community:
1. The international community should work together with the government and civil society organizations to ensure effective rule of law in Nineveh and activate reporting procedures and accountability mechanisms with the involvement of the local NGOs in Nineveh.
2. Stop excluding any party from participating in peace dialogues. Engage all groups, including extremist clerics and Ba’ath party members.
3. The UN Country Team and the Iraq political mission should commit their ongoing support to actively monitoring and reporting any future violations against civilians in Nineveh. The current humanitarian and material aid programs should be continued, while integrating development into the existing programs in order to ensure sustainability and constructive social changes.
4. The UN should develop transparency and accountability mechanisms that meet the exceptional circumstances of corruption and conflict in Iraq.
5. For a period of time, stop-enforcing distinctions against Ba’ath Party members, extremist clerics, and tribal leaders affiliated with al-Qaida, instead include them in peace talks and allowing them to be part of the process.

To the local authorities in Nineveh:
1. Initiate capacity building programs to improve communication, dialogue, and conflict transformation/management skills for local authority officials in the provincial and local councils, as well as other foundations and groups involved in previous peace initiatives.
2. Raise awareness among grassroots groups in cooperation with tribal and religious leaders, with a focus on educational institutions, such as schools, the Directorate of Education, and Mosul University.
3. Local authority officials have to work and act more as an independent party to serve community interests and needs without discrimination.

To the Nineveh community leaders:
1. Promote individual responsibilities. Nineveh tribal and religious leaders should increase their efforts in developing a sense of citizenship and patriotism among Nineveh society through their statements and speeches.
2. Urge all the armed groups, political parties, and the National Army to refrain from attacking schools, infrastructure, healthcare centers, and households.
3. Moderate tribal leaders and clerics have to call on extremists to start a dialogue for peace and they should work as mediators between the conflict groups, the government, the international community, LNGOs, on one hand, and extremist groups on the other hand.
4. Cooperate with the government to dissolve all militias.
5. Clarify religious leader statements and speeches, especially during Friday prayers, to avoid misunderstanding and misreading by other religious groups.

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