

Mahmoudiya: Cornerstone for Peace and National Accord

Tribal sheikhs of Mahmoudiya met at the Al Rasheed Hotel in Baghdad from October 16 through 18 to consider the present situation of the many tribes who are represented among the population of the Qada'a, to project objectives for Mahmoudiya over the next three years and to suggest courses of action that will enable the tribes to help the Qada'a move forward, to the benefit of all its people.

The Current Situation. Mahmoudiya has suffered insecurity, violence and chaos in the years since 2003. Its people are frightened, its infrastructure is destroyed and its economy is blocked. Terrorism, criminal gangs and sectarian violence have forced people from their homes, damaged the social fabric and weakened the tribes, which traditionally have played an important role among Mahmoudiya's people.

Recent months have seen some improvement. Tribal leaders of Mahmoudiya wish to take advantage of this moment to ensure more progress by supporting efforts to improve security, governance, the rule of law, the economy and society, in cooperation with the local government and security authorities.

Governance

Looking forward to future free and transparent provincial and local elections, the tribal leaders will form committees to

- Evaluate candidates according to objective standards;
- Cooperate with civil society, the judicial system and leaders of the community in supervising and monitoring the elections;
- Submit recommendations for a regional list system in future elections.

Seeking to activate the governing role of the Mahmoudiya Qada'a, the tribal leaders will

- Request the Baghdad provincial council and the governor to provide a share of funds and projects to improve Mahmoudiya's social well being proportional to its population;
- Cooperate with the Mahmoudiya Qada'a council in sending representatives to attend Baghdad provincial council meetings and ensure implementation of the legal division of responsibilities of the two councils.

Rule of Law

The police in Mahmoudiya need new stations and equipment, especially arms and vehicles. The local and provincial courts need to be independent from political, tribal or other influence. The tribal leaders will

- Help the Mahmoudiya Qada'a council to seek additional police, as well as a criminal court for Mahmoudiya and civil courts in each Nahia;

- Nominate qualified tribal members independent of political parties for positions in the police;
- Assist the police in protecting citizens and society, including by emphasizing the importance of the security forces and by encouraging members of their tribes to provide information on criminal activity;
- Pledge not to interfere with the work of the courts through personal connections and influence.

Economy

Mahmoudiya, once an important agricultural producer and market center, needs to reactivate its economy, including agriculture, industry and commerce.

In agriculture, the tribal leaders will seek support, in cooperation with the appropriate organizations, to

- Provide agricultural supplies and rehabilitate irrigation projects;
- Obtain financial assistance through low interest loans, cancellation of farmers' debts and elimination of irrigation fees as well as agricultural land taxes;
- Provide agricultural and marketing advice;
- Expand the road network from the countryside to the city to facilitate transportation of harvests;
- Find outlets to market their products inside and outside Iraq;
- Identify low-cost supplies of seeds and potato bulbs.

Mahmoudiya's large factories are idle. The bicycle, metal pipes and clothing factories need to be rehabilitated, efforts that will require resources from the Baghdad provincial council. New projects like recycling of trash are possible and should be pursued.

Corruption is a major hindrance to commerce and investment. The tribal leaders are prepared to

- Establish with others an integrity committee to root out administrative and financial corruption;
- Join others in encouraging Iraqi and foreign investors, especially in establishing commercial markets and services projects on the Baghdad-Babylon road.
- Encourage the Iraqi government and the Coalition forces to compensate shop owners who suffered losses as the result of terrorist acts or military action.

Rationed commodities have not reached Mahmoudiya for five months. The tribal leaders ask that the Qada'a council press the Baghdad provincial council and the Ministry of Trade to fulfill the ration commitment.

Social Well Being

The rights of displaced people are a top priority for Mahmoudiya. They need to be protected and compensated in a fair and objective way. Tribal leaders and the Mahmoudiya government have a responsibility for their security. Protecting the rights of internally displaced people will need to be regulated by a law passed in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Measures should include

- Land grants, similar to those being made in cities, under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance;
- Increased security in the countryside, in order to enable returns;
- A database of IDPs and the damage they have suffered, developed in collaboration with the tribal sheikhs.

Mahmoudiya needs to develop infrastructure for water, electricity and sewage as well as build hospitals and medical centers and maintain bridges and roads.

To this end, the tribal leaders urge

- The PRT and Mahmoudiya council to build water stations and rehabilitate the main water system as well as provide medical services in each Nahia, including ambulance, health and veterinary services in the countryside;
- The PRT and coalition forces to assist in sewer system maintenance as well as building new sewage systems.

Mahmoudiya needs more primary and secondary schools, as well as colleges and institutes in the city center and teacher institutes in each Nahia. It also needs more modern equipment (computers and laboratories). Tribal leaders can help by providing personnel to

- Help rehabilitate the existing schools;
- Create an education department independent from the Karkh directorate;
- Reopen illiteracy centers for the elderly;
- Check on construction projects;
- Recommend qualified youths for employment in the educational system.

The Baghdad city council needs to ensure proper distribution of gasoline and heating oil.

Security

All of Iraq needs capable and honest national security forces armed with adequate technology. Only security forces authorized by the national government should bear arms. Within Mahmoudiya, the tribal leaders will

- Petition the Iraqi government and U.S. authorities to release those who have been detained without charges as well as any detained women, who are a source of great concern;
- Ensure that the authorized forces of Concerned Citizens known as "Sahwa" operate only in the rural villages for which they were established and do not interfere in other areas, according to the schedule already decided.
- Recognizing the need of the government to deal with armed groups with a view to returning to more normal conditions, help to ensure that the military and police have sole responsibility for security within Mahmoudiya.
- Allow tribal youth join the police and army, with additional units established in order to accommodate them.
- Support the work of the security forces to ensure security on the roads between cities as well as the city limits, limiting movement of militias.

In addition, the tribal leaders will act to assist the independence of the security forces and recommend citizens for the security forces, in particular those not affiliated with political parties or religious movements.

The tribal sheikhs will meet regularly with participation of security commanders in the field to exchange information and review the security situation.

Conclusion

Appreciating the opportunity to meet and discuss issues of common interest in a frank and open way, the tribal leaders plan to

- Hold a conference soon for all Mahmoudiya tribes to sign a pledge and swear a religious oath to stop the bloodshed of the Iraqi people;
- Promote public awareness of the need for peace and peaceful coexistence among all the members of all the tribes;
- Form committees, including the sheiks as well as the Mahmoudiya government and council and the security authorities, to follow up on preventing violence, establishing the rule of law and solving the problems of displaced people and terrorism;
- Continue to advise and support the Qada'a and national authorities on ways to continue progress in Mahmoudiya.