

- What are the conclusions of your field visit to Nineveh

Province ?

The military defeat of Daesh and the reconquest of Nineveh by the Iraqi Army, together with allied state and non-state actors has produced vastly improved security in Nineveh Province. As fragile as that security may be, the most fundamental pre-condition for reconstruction in a stable environment is now in place. In predominantly Christian Hamdaniya, Keremles and Teleskuf, I have seen displaced families returning to their homes and the beginning of repair and reconstruction, normally with the assistance of church agencies, NGOs and the Hungarian government. But many, perhaps the majority, will not return. A large percentage of the population of these towns is now abroad - in Europe, North America and Australia - and will never return to live as permanent residents. Others will stay in the KRG or in Baghdad. Among those that have returned to their home, it can be expected that some will repair their home for sale, and then leave Iraq in the event they find a way to be resettled in the West. Life will never be the same in these towns as it was before Daesh overran them in 2014. But if there is good reason to have long-term confidence in the security of Nineveh and the broader region, it would be reasonable to expect that a substantial remnant of the Christian populations will remain in the area. And when I speak of security, I do not mean only the absence of violence, I also mean efforts by those with power to effect further demographic change. The presence of so many different armed forces, each with a different political master, in an area that is called "disputed" does not inspire confidence in the longer term prospects for security.

Mosul reminds me of the apocalyptic scenes that I have witnessed in Aleppo, Homs and parts of Damascus. While parts of Mosul are largely intact and functional, the old city is in ruins. It is hard to see that it will ever be restored as were some similarly destroyed German cities after the Second World War. Mosul is at the moment secure. Daesh is gone, but so is a large part of the population, including many Daesh sympathizers. Those who remain are largely traumatized. No serious effort of repair, let alone, reconstruction has yet started in the old city. It is virtually a ghost town, apart from the militias that provide local security and a few people trying to clear their home of rubble. I saw at least half a dozen decaying bodies of Daesh fighters in the ruins of church buildings. That they have been left lying there since the destructive liberation of the old city last summer speaks volumes about where the Iraqi Government and its coalition partners are in the process of normalization. It also speaks volumes about the low priority the authorities give to encouraging the city's displaced Christians to believe that they have a future there. It looks like the ancient Christian community's presence in Mosul may now be at an end. Whether the many displaced Sunnis will be able to return is also uncertain, even if they have a home to go to. The authorities in Baghdad are acutely aware of the warm welcome Daesh received in 2014, and that while Daesh as an organization may be defeated, its ideology still strikes a chord of sympathy with a significant part of the population. Some young men from the city, including an imam, told me that they thought that about 10% of Mosul's population is still carries the Daesh's world view in their hearts and minds. This is a minority, but it represents a large number of people in a city of two million people, and is a potential source of insecurity for the future.

I did not go to Sinjar, but I spoke with Yezidis. I was left with the impression that the situation there is much more difficult than in the predominantly Christian town and villages. A variety of armed forces with different political agendas compete with each other. None of them have Yezidi interests at heart. Few of the displaced Yezidis have returned to their homes. Repair and reconstruction have, I am told, scarcely started. The Yezidi community is

greatly traumatized. It seems that thousands of captured Yezidi woman and children are still missing. Some suspect that a good number of the missing Yezidi children are to be found in camps for the displaced people from Mosul, having been “adopted” and Islamized.

The defeat of Daesh provides a golden opportunity for the inauguration of a new era of stability in which all Iraqis, whatever their religious and cultural identity can live in peace and dignity in their own county. This will only happen if the Iraqi state is strengthened and respects the principles of common, equal citizenship and international norms of human rights. But this alone will not be enough. Foreign powers will have to forego regime change policies and using Iraq as a battle field for proxy wars. Instead they will have to move quickly with substantial investment in reconstruction. If these difficult conditions are met, Nineveh and the rest of the country have a chance. But if not, it is likely that the relative calm that Iraq is experiencing now experiencing will prove to be but a lull before the next storm.

- You have met a number of federal government officials, how you have found their willingness to coordinate with CSI or with other organizations?

I was very courteously received by government officials in Baghdad. We were able to speak frankly and constructively with each other. The main issues on the agenda were related to the situation of minorities. One of them was the issue of a conference to ascertain the views of minorities in Nineveh as part of the central government’s reconciliation program. The conference should have taken place months ago. I departed some of the meetings convinced that senior officials regard such a conference as a vital to the process of national stabilization. But I left some with the impression that working with the minorities to find a common vision for the future was not a very high priority. Hopefully, the Prime Minister will soon be able to give his attention to the issue and make it clear to all in government that addressing minority issues in a constructive and energetic way is not only in the interest of the minorities, but is it the national interest, especially as so many of the minorities life in “disputed” areas.

- How you see the reality of relief programs in general in the world ? and is there a specificity for relief programs in Iraq?

It is not possible to generalize about relief programs. It is clear that some are crucial to saving and improving the quality of lives, and helping states fulfill their basic responsibilities to their citizen. But we all know that aid programs in Iraq and elsewhere in the world are not immune from the corruption and inefficiency that plague all other sectors of government. The weaker the state, the more scope there is for corruption and inefficiency. Since the onset of “Operation Iraqi Freedom”, the Iraqi state has been extremely weak. There are signs that it is strengthening, and we can only hope that this trend gains pace.

- In the context of the previous question, as I know, many of the rights and relief activities carried out by some countries are carried out with political objectives in general. What is your reading of the opportunity required to escape this (political robbery) of humanitarian relief programs?

Most major humanitarian relief efforts are funded by states, or foundations that have common interests with states. It is inevitable they come with a political agenda. Some political agendas are transparent and are in harmony with the aspirations of the recipients of aid. Some are not. In the worst case, states use NGOs as a cover for covert operations. Such practices do a great disservice to NGOs who that are a genuine reflection of civil society, for they result in a general suspicion of NGOs.

- Are you satisfied with the join relationship with HHRO, and what are the priorities required in this regard?

I am very satisfied with CSI's relationship with the HHRO. HHRO is a largely volunteer organization, whose ethos and practices correspond closely to CSI's. All of CSI's activity in Iraq is conducted through the HHRO. CSI has no office and staff permanently based in Iraq. I am impressed by the warm reception that I witness when traveling with HHRO personnel throughout the country, from all segments of the Iraqi population.

- To what extent does it consider the need to involve women in the voluntary relief and rights work , which should be adopted , noting the lack of women's contributions to volunteer work in the field.?

All citizen should have the right to be involved in human rights and humanitarian activities. There is no legal barrier to this in Iraq. But the dearth of women involved in this sector points to the existence of cultural barriers. Hopefully, those barriers will be eroded sooner than later, so that the energy, intelligence and wisdom that is to be found in the female half of Iraqi society will be fully exploited for the benefit of the nation.

- How to read the future of relief work? And what are the requirements of its salvation from corruption, as in relief programs adopted by the United Nation?

I must say that I do not see such salvation on the horizon, especially in weak states that are failing or are completely failed. In such states corruption becomes the *de facto* constitution. It becomes impossible to do much of anything in such

states without either coercion or corruption. Transparency is the best antidote to corruption, but realization of it is extremely difficult in weak states and within donor states that push alien political agendas.