

Mosul-Kirkuk Road Reception Centre, 8 January

This reception centre is located outside a 9th Division ISF base (N 36°15.505' E 043°14.769) on the Mosul-Kirkuk road (Highway 80) around 6 km from the outskirts of Sumer district in the south of Mosul. There is a small concrete building beside the road around 200m north of the base which acts as a checkpoint for IDPs arriving from Mosul.



The reception centre receives around 75 families per day on average, although the number varies depending on the intensity of military operations in the south of Mosul. On the night of 7 January around 700-1,000 people arrived because of an ISF advance as far as the Mazari district in south-west Mosul, close to the river, and ongoing clashes in southern districts. Most of the IDPs came from Sumer district.

No IDPs were present when we were at the reception centre in the early afternoon. This was because they mostly arrive in the evening and throughout the night and depart early in the morning each day.

Getting to the reception centre

IDPs travel from their homes in Mosul on foot. Those escaping from the west side of the city often swim across the river. No one drives as their vehicles would easily be spotted by ISIS and they would also run a high risk of being mistaken for suicide bombers by the ISF and coalition aircraft. To further avoid detection, they only come at night or when there are heavy airstrikes and ISIS members are forced to seek shelter. In some cases corrupt ISIS members will escort IDPs to the frontlines in exchange for money.



The ISF 9th Division base from the north.

The screening process

IDPs leaving Mosul follow the road until they reach the checkpoint mentioned above, where they are searched for weapons and explosives. They are then sent on to the 9th Division base. At the base their IDs are checked and information is crosschecked with that given by informants. It was reported that a large number of ISIS suspects had been identified and arrested at this reception centre, but it was not possible to obtain an approximate figure.

At the reception centre

As IDPs mostly arrive in the evening or at night, they almost invariably stay the night at the reception centre. There are 5 MOMD tents and two larger tents available for accommodation. Priority is given to women and children to stay in the tents. When there are too many women and children to be accommodated, the people of Maula, a very small hamlet located next to the ISF base, offer their houses to the IDPs. (Incidentally, this hamlet is reportedly fully populated). The men sleep outside in the open. There are several black markings on the ground which indicate where they have burned tyres for warmth.

The cold is the worst thing the IDPs have to suffer. There are no blankets and there is very little fuel for a limited number of heaters. Some IDPs have also swum across the Tigris to escape from the city and are therefore wearing wet clothes. Blankets are the priority need at the reception centre.



MOMD tents with burn marks outside.

The ISF at the base has a stock of MOMD food boxes which are given to the families upon their arrival. These boxes contain six small bottles of water. Extra water comes from a tank which is filled from a borehole. Although the water is dirty, people still drink it. There are also five kerosene heaters but fuel is very limited. There are also some second-hand clothes for those who need them.

The food boxes are supplied by the ISF and it was not known when the stocks will be replenished. On 8 January there were enough supplies for around 2 more days.

There are no toilets or hygiene facilities at the reception centre. People go to the toilet in the open with the darkness for privacy. There are no medics or medical facilities at the ISF base. IDPs sometimes come under attack from ISIS while they are fleeing and a number of people arrive with injuries. Emergency cases are taken immediately by the ISF to Hamdaniyah for treatment.



Water tank at the reception centre.

Going from the reception centre

At around 7am each morning, taxis from nearby villages arrive to take IDPs to the camps or towns they wish to go to. There are no restrictions imposed by the ISF on where people are allowed to travel to, although the ISF does not provide any transport. When IDPs do not have any money, taxi drivers sometimes allow them to travel for free. ISF personnel also sometimes pay for taxis out of their own pocket. Friends and relatives are free to come to the reception centre to collect people.



An asphalt plant is located beside the road, next to the reception centre.

Access and security

The reception centre is easy to access from Hamdaniyah or areas to the south. There is a PMF checkpoint (Badr Brigade) at the Hamdaniyah junction on the Mosul-Kirkuk road, about 7 km south of the reception centre. They were helpful and friendly when we encountered them and they offered to escort us to the reception centre. There is also an NPU checkpoint and another PMF checkpoint on the road from Hamdaniyah – we had no problems in passing them.



A berm across the road in the distance, indicating the frontline.



The checkpoint building a short distance up the road from the ISF base, unmanned during the day.

The ISF at the 9th Division base welcomed us warmly and were helpful. There were also a few young men without uniforms carrying weapons at the reception centre. These are local volunteers from the hamlet of Maula who are guarding their village due its close proximity to ISIS territory. The closest village under ISIS control is Shamsiat, which is visible from the checkpoint a short distance beyond the ISF base. The checkpoint is only manned at night because IDPs mostly arrive at night and because of the possible risk of ISIS snipers positioned nearby during the day. A berm of earth stretches across the road about 100m beyond the checkpoint: this is the frontline. Vehicles should not be taken beyond the ISF base as they could be targeted by airstrikes or the ISF on the ground. Despite the closeness of the frontline, the atmosphere of the place is relaxed, and no recent attacks by ISIS in this area were reported.

Needs

Blankets are the priority need at this reception centre. Further needs include fuel for heaters, water treatment or more bottled water, food boxes, heaters, tents, latrines, and a mobile clinic.