

Displacement via Hulaylah from Mashirfa & Hawa al Kanisaa, 8 & 9 May

There is an initial mustering point in Hulaylah village (36°23'10.09"N 43°02'43.83"E) where IDPs board ISF trucks to be taken to the main mustering point beside the water project on the Syria Highway. IDPs arrive at this site dehydrated after an arduous journey on foot. Some partners are responding here, but a greater response is necessary while there are still civilians from Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa displacing along this route.

Displacement route via Hulaylah

ISF have cut along the banks of the Tigris and are driving ISIS south through the neighbourhoods of Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa while the ERD are advancing simultaneously from the direction of the Syria Highway. Within the ISF area of operations (Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa) around 12,000 IDPs are reported to have walked a distance of 3-4 km along different pathways to the mustering point in Hulaylah village – also the location of a 9th Div. CCP – from 4-9 May. Civilians will displace along the nearest or safest route, and large numbers from Al Harama and 17 Tammuz are also reported to have fled directly along the Syria Highway towards the main mustering point beside the water project.

Most families take between 1-2 hours to reach the mustering point in Hulaylah from their homes in Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa. They travel on foot carrying luggage along hot, dusty tracks with small children as well as elderly and disabled family members. The ISF sometimes take the most infirm in vehicles, but for many it is an exhausting journey. Water is the greatest need for IDPs on this route. Once at the mustering point, waiting time is dependent on the availability of trucks and the numbers that have gathered, but it does not usually exceed half an hour. Still, dehydration – particularly for the elderly, infants and pregnant women – is a major concern. Very few families were reported to arrive in Hulaylah at night.





IDP families en route to the Hulaylah mustering point.



IDPs boarding trucks at Hulaylah mustering point on the afternoon of 8 May. The building to the left behind the trucks is being used as a 9th Division CCP, mainly for redressing wounds.



IDPs began arriving at the mustering point at 7.30am on 9 May. Only 1 family had reportedly arrived overnight.

There is a TSP run by the Free Burma Rangers situated on the outskirts of Mashirfa, on the main displacement route, where FBR, with help from ISF, hand out water bottles to people passing by. They have also been present at the mustering point in Hulaylah, handing out water during each major outflow of IDPs. However, the volume of IDPs can sometimes be overwhelming and in such cases, many individuals will still not receive any water until they reach the main mustering point on the Syria Highway. FBR are now focusing their response closer to the frontline near the TSP, handing out water just as people are exiting Mashirfa. One other INGO was reported to have distributed water at the Hulaylah mustering point, but it remains a key location for humanitarian partners to respond in.

At the mustering point, families are boarded onto ISF trucks and driven a short distance to a building in Hulaylah which is acting as a screening site. Here the men disembark and line up outside the building to have their IDs checked against a database by the military intelligence. The process only takes around 20 minutes although when there are multiple trucks queuing up the waiting time is extended, reportedly for up to a few hours. Therefore this is another suitable location for the distribution of water – ISF personnel at the site complained of a lack of NGO presence there. Protection partners may also consider positioning themselves at this site. After screening the men rejoin their families on the same vehicles and continue the short journey to the main mustering point on the Syria Highway.



IDPs reboarding ISF trucks having undergone screening.

It should be noted that displacement via Hulaylah is likely to stop once ISF have advanced through Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa, and that all displacement from Mosul to the west is likely to divert south once the ISOF advance has joined up with those of the ERD and 9th Division, creating a safe passage of displacement through the city towards the south.

Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa

The retaken parts of Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa are almost entirely empty of civilians. People are leaving because they are scared – particularly of an ISIS counterattack which could mean the execution of families that stayed behind – and because they have extremely limited supplies of food and water. For most families, bread has been their only form of sustenance for months – unsurprisingly, markets have not been functioning. A major activity for families each day was water collection, whether from the river or boreholes, using whatever containers they had. ISIS reportedly had water trucks for their own use, but would only offer the water to ordinary civilians if they had something to ask for in return. Having arrived in safety, milk for babies is often the first thing IDPs request after water.

Damage caused to buildings is reportedly high in these neighbourhoods due to the use of tanks and BMPs by ISF and VBIEDs by ISIS, causing some families to flee during the fighting. However, most families stay in their homes for safety. We were informed that in Mashirfa, when ISF take a street they tell families hiding in their houses to wait until they are told to come out. This is primarily to protect the civilians from ISIS snipers, which remain the principal threat. Between 4-8 May, the FBR TSP on the outskirts of Mashirfa received 42 wounded and 12 dead civilians, mostly with wounds incurred by sniper bullets. Each night, ISIS reportedly establishes a defensive line and shoots anyone who attempts to escape.

In Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa, we were told that ISIS are not forcing families to go with them as they fall back from the ISF advance. This may be because in these neighbourhoods they do not currently have the capacity to move large numbers of civilians, although we have also heard contrasting information regarding other neighbourhoods nearby. The families of ISIS members are reported to fall back with them (although those injured in battle or in airstrikes often flee to receive medical support in the hope that they will not be identified). The IDP families staying in Mashirfa and other northern neighbourhoods are mainly associated with ISIS.

In Mashirfa, ISIS has smashed holes through the walls of houses connected together so they can move freely without going onto the streets where they would be more vulnerable. ISF reportedly move through these passageways to clear houses and inform families when it is safe to go out onto the streets. They are not given any form of physical screening when they leave, but the IDPs notify ISF personnel if they see anyone they suspect of being with ISIS. It was asserted to us that ISF are not forcing civilians to leave – in fact, we were told they try to encourage families to stay in their homes; even so, the retaken areas of Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa are now almost entirely empty of civilians.



The outskirts of Mashirfa neighbourhood.