



Live broadcast prevents Kurdish population migration

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DONATE

October 2017, the Iraqi army is on its way to Kirkuk to reclaim power from Kurdish fighters. Many inhabitants are extremely worried. Fed by Kurdish media, accusing the Iraqi armed forces of looting and killing, tens of thousands of Kurdish inhabitants decide to flee.

They have no faith in the protection of the Iraqi authorities and rather leave everything behind than to still be in Kirkuk when an army run by Bagdad enters their city. But if the media is affiliated with one of the conflicting parties, how reliable is their reporting in fact?

The instant the editorial team of the online news platform [KirkukNow](#) sees the people around them taking such rigorous decisions based on incomplete or biased information, the journalists take action.

Police promises protection

"The Kurdish and Iraqi media were heavily divided along ethnic lines, there was a lot of misinformation about the situation in Kirkuk," says Salam Omer, editor in chief of KirkukNow. "We decided to organise a [live broadcast](#), together with Kirkuk's emergency police. They were the only Iraqi forces in the province that had not gotten involved in the dispute between Kurdish forces and the returning Iraqi forces. During this live broadcast we followed local police officers who urged the residents not to leave and promised to protect them."

The broadcast was transmitted live via the KirkukNow Facebook page. Tens of thousands of viewers saw the police declare themselves to be a professional force that will protect all residents of the area, "whatever their background," the police emphasized. The video has now been viewed more than 81,000 times and has been shared hundreds of times. Omer: "The reactions during filming were varied. At that time people were afraid, did not know what they should do. But many inhabitants also reacted positively to the police and said they would come back if nothing happened."

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In the weeks after the developments in October, most refugees indeed return home. Omer: "At that time, we were the only professional and independent media agency that stayed in Kirkuk, and we were able to provide tens of thousands of people with reliable first-hand information."

KirkukNow was founded in 2011 by Independent Media Center Kurdistan; a partner of Free Press Unlimited. Initially the organisation only reported news for and about the Kirkuk region. With the support of Free Press Unlimited, it now gives all inhabitants of the conflict areas access to reliable information. With an new website and a social media strategy, the organisation is better able to tell stories from the conflict areas. The number of KirkukNow followers on Facebook rose in 2017 from 35,000 to almost 140,000. Free Press Unlimited also is working to strengthen KirkukNow as an organisation with a business plan, and with professional reporters trained in safety and gender awareness.

KirkukNow reports daily in English and in the three main languages of the region; Arabic, Kurdish and Turkmen. Omer: "We want KirkukNow to be an example of how to carry out journalism in an environment where people from different backgrounds, different cultures and different religions live. We show how media can survive and serve the local community during conflicts."

Kirkuk lies just outside the Kurdish autonomous region. Three years ago, Kurdish troops took the area to prevent it from falling into IS hands. The Iraqi army fled. After IS fell, Baghdad wanted to take the region back under its rule.

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