

They wish to see their loved ones safe and sound. CABAR.asia video report on the lives of families whose members went to Iraq succumbed to the terrorist groups' propaganda.

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The village community "20-solagii Istikloliyat" ("20 years of Independence") jamoat is located in Qabodiyon district, Southern Tajikistan, near the border with Afghanistan.

Jamoat's residents make living by agriculture and labor migration, where mainly the male population leaves.

At first glance, this is a peaceful village, but it causes concern for law enforcement agencies and therefore is under constant monitoring. This is caused by the fact that some residents engaged in prohibited groups and movements.

Many young people from this region who worked in Russia and transferred money to their families, left for Syria. It placed a heavy psychological burden on their relatives left at home.

Navbahor Toshmatova was 16 when her brother took their entire family to Moscow, and then to Syria.

She says that in 2016 she got to IS (a terrorist organization banned in Tajikistan and other countries), and when she reached legal age, she was married. There, in the city of Idlib, she gave birth to a child of her husband, ethnic Kyrgyz.

Navbahor does not like to talk about what happened in Idlib. She constantly feared, especially after she was shot in the arm with a shrapnel that hit the house where they lived. After that, they decided to return to Tajikistan. They crossed the border with her husband in early 2018. Her husband was sentenced to 10 years in Kyrgyzstan. Tajik authorities granted amnesty to her. She lives with her father's family now and seems happy about it.

Navbahor Toshmatova:

"I live with my father's family on the money my sister sends. My son still cannot speak well,

but says “dad, dad”. Life goes on... I am often asked why I left for Syria. I do not want to talk about this. It really upsets me, of course, that people blame us... Especially the neighbors ask me often; I do not like it.”

Navbahor told law enforcement authorities about her trip to Syria and about what she saw there. However, the neighbors’ questions about her husband put Navbahor in an embarrassing position.

“I Do Not Know What to Tell My Grandchildren”...

He tries to spend all his time with his grandchildren who returned from Syria. He is glad that his daughter and daughter-in-law with five children have returned, but the unknown fate of his eldest son, who disappeared in Syria, makes him suffer.

This man says that his grandchildren ask him about their father, but he does not know how to answer.

Abdurahon Toshmatov:

“This morning my grandchildren asked me when their dad would return. I tell them that their father will return, while they keep asking about him. After my daughter-in-law, son and daughter left for Syria, life became complicated. Authorities often call us; a few days ago, we were fingerprinted. I am unable to go to interrogations anymore, so I said that I do not have money and cannot come anymore. We live off my son, who works in migration; my daughter is not official registered with her Kyrgyz husband, so she cannot go to him to Kyrgyzstan, her husband is in prison. She is upset about this.”

Gulchehra Salimova from Navbahor village, together with other family members reads her daughter’s letter delivered from Iraq by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) this summer.

“Hello, dear mother and father. Are you fine? How are brothers and daughters-in-law? This is Oisha, your daughter. I am doing well. Do not worry. Thanks God, everything is fine with us, my children as well.”

Oisha Sherbekova, this woman’s daughter, in October 2015, with her husband and four children went to Russia and from there to Syria where they joined the IS. For four years there was no news, Oisha’s husband disappeared, and she is in prison in Baghdad.

Gulchehra Salimova:

“For four years, every day, I looked at the gate and waited for news. I thought whether my daughter and grandchildren were alive or not. These thoughts did not leave me for a minute. Now it is easier for me, I know that she is alive.”

Oisha gave birth to a fifth child in Iraq; all her children returned to Tajikistan in April. This woman says she can visit her grandchildren, but misses her daughter and suffers because of her fate.

Gulchehra Salimova:

“When I think of my daughter, I can neither eat nor drink. I feel her absence all the time. I never forget her. This is very hard for mothers...”

Azimjon Alimardonov is experienced teacher from Kizil Nishon village of the same jamoat. This teacher says that when his children dropped out from the university and went to work in Moscow, they made his life a hell.

Azimjon Alimardonov:

“Their mother is suffering. We honestly worked all our lives, helped people. My sons, who were students, took this path without telling us anything...”

Alimardonov blames himself that they left for Syria because he did not keep an eye on them. However, he hopes that someday they will return and the sadness will leave their home.

Azimjon Alimardonov:

“If I knew, I would not have let them go to Moscow. They called me as soon as they went there. A few days later, I reported this to the authorities... My boys have changed. They began to read namaz, I was surprised, but at the same time, I was happy. They did everything without telling me.”

Kizil Nishon and Navbahor villages are located in the village jamoat “20-solagii Istikloliyat” (“20 years of Independence”) in Qabodiyon district, one of the sensitive regions of the Khatlon region. The authorities keep these villages under strict control and often carry out various activities so that people do not join various extremist and terrorist organizations and movements.

Local authorities are criticized and controlled by the central government. They are working hard to remedy the situation.

76 residents of Qabodiyon district joined the IS, of which 46 are from Kizil Nishon and Navbahor villages; women and children are also among them. Investigative bodies report that this region's residents left for Syria through Russia.

Those families whose members left for Syria are constantly summoned to the security agencies. Although these actions are carried out due to the investigation, the society is cautious towards them, blames them.

According to official reports, about 500 people from the Khatlon region joined the IS (a terrorist organization banned in Tajikistan and other countries). According to the latest statistics presented by the authorities, 1899 Tajik militants fought for the IS. Among them, there are children and women who are in Iraqi prisons. 84 children were returned from Iraq this spring.

About 80 Tajik citizens returned in different ways from Syria and Iraq and were granted amnesty.

However, dozens of families continue to wait for news from Iraq and Syria about their missing relatives. One of them, Navbahor, who was lucky to return, said that after being released from the IS, she wants to start a new, light life. She wants to live righteously now for the sake of her children. She is waiting for her husband to emerge from jail, and they will be able to live peacefully. She knows that she needs to wait another 10 years for her dream to come true. Nevertheless, she is ready to wait for him. The main thing is that her dream comes true....

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