

Reclaiming My Home: Umm Rehab's Journey



Umm Rehab cooking in her family home

“I thought I would never see this house again from the inside.”

Umm Rehab, a 44-year-old mother to six children and the head of her household, has had her life uprooted many times over the last few years, from being forced to travel from her small town in Iraq to Syria against her will, relocating to an Iraqi displacement camp, and finally returning to her village only to find her house occupied. Now, with Nonviolent Peaceforce's support, she's finally been able to reclaim her home.

From living in Syria to a displacement camp in Iraq

A few years ago, Umm Rehab's husband joined ISIS and forced her to travel to Syria against her will.

“Living in Syria was tough,” remembers Rehab. Thousands of women were put into similar situations.

Following ISIS's decline in 2017, Umm Rehab returned to Iraq with her children and found shelter in a displacement camp near Mosul.

During the war, 6 million Iraqis fled their homes to escape from violence. Four years later, an estimated 1.2 million people are still displaced in Iraq—while about 5 million people have returned to their areas of origin.

The camp became their home for more than two years. However, in the final few months of 2020, Iraq's government announced the closure of multiple Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Umm Rehab lived in one of the camps that closed.

“We had a decent life there, but suddenly, after two years, it was taken away from us,” she shared.

You support the return home and fighting stigmas

In November 2020, when the government announced the camp's closure, the majority of IDPs traveled back to their areas of origins. Like many other families, Umm Rehab and her children feared for their basic safety and security after leaving the camp. And, when she returned to her original home, she found that a stranger had occupied it in her family's absence.



Umm Rehab's daughter drawing in her family home



“You do not know how it feels to be homeless, scared, and thinking constantly how you will provide for your family,” Umm Rehab said, reflecting on her fears at the time.

Public treatment of women like Umm Rehab further complicated her path to reclaiming her original home for her and her six children. Even though Umm Rehab’s husband joined ISIS and forced her to travel to Syria against her will, Umm Rehab still carries the stigma of being terror-affiliated. As a result of the stigma, Umm Rehab is more vulnerable to security threats and faces barriers to accessing even basic services.

Finding Nonviolent Peaceforce and finding a fresh start

In Umm Rehab’s town, NP works to mitigate violent conflict and to enhance protection of civilians. When the NP team heard Umm Rehab’s story, it began working with a local mediator to negotiate with the man occupying the house. At the end of the negotiation, the man agreed to return ownership of the home to Umm Rehab and left the house. After several years, Umm Rehab and her children finally returned home.

Of this experience, Umm Rehab said to the

local mediator and the NP team: “Without your support, I do not know how I would have survived with my children. You saved us. May God bless you! I was waiting for a miracle to happen. You made it happen.”

“Often, when I am sitting by myself at night when the children are asleep, having my tea, I look at the walls and I am thankful. I thought I would never see this house again from the inside. Or have it back. ... Having four walls around my family is the biggest safety and security I could ask for.”

Step-by-step, Umm Rehab is rebuilding her life, far from the hardship that her family endured.

“Though it was against her will that her husband joined ISIS ... Umm Rehab still carries the stigma ...”

Thanks to generous supporters like you, NP is addressing protection and security concerns in communities around the world and helping women like Umm Rehab.

“I hope NP keeps supporting everyone, especially women. My wish for this year is that women will feel even more empowered with your support,” Umm Rehab said. 🐟

Message from Myanmar

Thank you to those who have reached out with thoughts of the NP team regarding the news coming out of Myanmar. The NP team and partners are safe. We look forward to providing an update in the future.

Volunteer Spotlight: Aurora Adams

Veteran, queer-minded activist, community organizer, nursing student ... and now, an NP volunteer equipped to keep her neighbors safe.

When Aurora Adams was 17, she enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard, believing it to be the best way she could help people.

“I was a Chaplain Assistant with the Guard. Although I was never deployed, I saw my peers dealing with internal conflicts: intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and suicide,” Aurora shared.

“I was honorably discharged in 2010, but the need to help others never left me.”

Aurora’s value of helping and hospitality has since translated to a deep respect for mutual aid and direct action for her community in the Twin Cities, MN.

She had already been involved with various direct action groups when the protests following George Floyd’s murder broke out. “Violence has been affecting my neighbors, but, after the murder of George Floyd last May, it seems like, *finally*, something is happening in my backyard and there is the possibility of doing something about these deep-rooted issues.”

In the days following George Floyd’s murder, the demonstrations were turning more and more heated. Aurora headed



Starting early in her service, Aurora was questioning the militarized mindset.

out to a demonstration with some medical supplies and her limited medical training from her time in the National Guard, ready to work with community activists. “I wish all those who have been unjustly murdered were here to see what they helped inspire.”

From her work as an organizer last summer, connecting the medical volunteer sites to each other throughout the Twin Cities, Aurora found out about NP. She joined the group of 250 individuals who volunteered to deescalate issues and ensure people could vote without threat of violence.

“Seeing the community come together is so transformative ... it gives me energy and hope.”

And now, Aurora is a part of the group of 60+ volunteers that NP is activating to provide unarmed civilian protection in neighborhoods and at demonstrations.

“The work that Nonviolent Peaceforce is doing is not only needed and helpful, but volunteering with NP also gives me a place where I am able to create community, which is incredibly important.”



NP volunteers on election day, November 2020

See full-length story on our website

You can support peace every month of the year!

From protests in Minneapolis to displacement camps in Iraq, your monthly contribution will mean more people are trained and ready to deescalate violence, accompany people to safety and promote resolution of conflict without weapons. Make your gift monthly and increase the presence of peacekeepers in the U.S. and abroad.

The Impact of Your Gift

\$5

per month ensures representation at protests on the streets of Minneapolis

\$9.30

per month means peacekeeper presence at an IDP camp

\$41.67

per month can cover the expenses for the formation of a Women’s Protection Team



For more information on ways to give, go to www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org or contact our office at 612-871-0005.