
IRAQ PM DECLARES OFFENSIVE TO RETAKE FALLUJAH FROM ISIL

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23.05.2016

Aljazeera, 23 May 2016

Iraq's Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi has announced the start of an offensive to retake Fallujah from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which was quickly followed by reports of heavy shelling of the city.

"By the name of God, we are here to announce that the Iraqi flag will soon be flying in the sky of Fallujah," Abadi said.

"Today, we will tear down the black flags of these despicable strangers who abducted this dear city. The time has come to liberate Fallujah and the victory will be ours. ISIL has nowhere to go but to flee the city."

Earlier on Monday, the army had told residents of Fallujah to leave.

Families who could not leave should raise white flags to mark their locations, the army's media unit said on State TV.

Fallujah was the first Iraqi city to fall to ISIL (also known as ISIS) in January 2014, six months before the group swept through large parts of Iraq and neighbouring Syria.

Iraqi army tells Fallujah residents to flee city

The army "is asking the citizens that are still in Fallujah to be prepared to leave the city through secured routes that will be announced later", the broadcast said.

The city on the Euphrates River, 50km west of the capital, had a prewar population of about 300,000.

It is encircled by Iraqi forces and a coalition of Shia Muslim armed groups known as Hashid Shaabi.

Known as the "City of Minarets and Mother of Mosques", Fallujah is a focus for Sunni Muslim faith and identity in Iraq. It was badly damaged in two assaults by the United States army against suspected al-Qaeda members in 2004.

Kaynak/Source: