
IRAQ SCOUTS MAKE COMEBACK IN EX-EXTREMIST BASTION MOSUL

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MOSUL: Scouts are making a symbolic comeback in Mosul after a three-year absence from the city that used to serve as Daeshs capital in Iraq.

With white shirts and neckerchiefs, more than 200 male and female scout leaders from across Iraq recently converged on the city that was devastated by three years of extremists rule and nine months of heavy urban warfare.

It was a message to Iraq and the world: The scouts of Mosul and Iraq are back, Mohammed Ibrahim, head of scout activities in Mosul, told AFP.

The rally took place at Mosuls scout camp set in the heart of a wooded area popular with locals for family outings on Fridays, the weekly day of rest in Iraq.

Iraq was one of the first Arab countries to join the World Organization of the Scout Movement in 1914 when it was still part of the Ottoman Empire.

But in 1999, the world scout body evicted the Iraqi chapter because it was allegedly being used by former dictator Saddam Husseins regime for military training.

But the Iraqi scouts kept operating.

In 2017, they were readmitted into the international scouting world and have since grown to 25,000 members across the country.

Loudspeakers blasted nationalist songs at full volume as children from local schools paraded in traditional Iraqi dress at the Mosul rally.

For Qassima Mohsen, a 42-year-old scout leader in the southern province of Zi Qar, the 800-kilometer (500-mile) trip to Mosul had both symbolic and personal value.

In the early 2000s, she used to come regularly to Mosuls scout camp for gatherings.

More than 15 years later □ after the US-led invasion, the fall of Saddam, years of sectarian violence, the jihadist occupation of nearly a third of the country and its subsequent recapture by Iraqi forces — she is back.

With the ouster of the extremists from Mosul last July, she has returned to the northern city to help

build an activities center for young scouts in the area.

The rally also provided a space for leaders and organizers from across the country to network and discuss future projects.

We will organize camps in Mosul to lend a hand with its reconstruction, said Ali Latif, a 34-year-old scout leader from Kirkuk, a multi-ethnic north.

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