



Quarrels among families are common everywhere. However, in certain contexts, family disputes can escalate and involve entire communities. This is why when one such quarrel turned violent in Ba'aj District, in northern Iraq, NP's role in deescalating the situation was crucial.

On February 14th, 2022, NP's protection officers were conducting a patrol in Raad Village, near Ba'aj Town, when a man approached them – as often occurs during patrolling activities – and shared an alarming story about a family quarrel among his relatives that had turned violent.



Patrol in Ba'aj District, May 2022.

A man who works as a shepherd and was away for months at a time left his wife and children at home. Fearing for her reputation and safety of her family without the husband's presence, the wife asked her family to take her and their children back to her father's house in Ba'aj until her husband returned – which according to her, is not a uncommon practice. When the woman's brother came with his 10-year-old nephew, the husband's family – whose house is adjacent to the one of the family in question – intervened to stop them, as they believed it was an offense for the woman not to feel safe with other relatives of her husband living next door. A physical fight followed, leaving the woman's brother with a broken arm and injuring his nephew. The brother was only allowed to take his sister and her infant child to their parents' house. The women's other four children stayed with their paternal grandparents.

The incident had taken place over six weeks prior to NP's involvement. Several attempts at tribal mediation had been made without success. The wife's family was asking for the husband's relatives to be banned from Ba'aj as a result of the fight, preventing them from circulating in public spaces like the market in fear of breaking tribal custom. The husband's family also believed the wife's family was carrying weapons and would attack them if they went to Ba'aj.

There was a high risk of escalation and both parties were growing impatient with the lack of resolution, but renewed hope of reaching an agreement with NP's support. Adopting a balanced approach by engaging with all parties involved in the conflict and serving as an intermediary between them, NP began shuttle negotiations to de-escalate the conflict and reduce tensions, avoiding the use of violence. Following the principle of primacy of local actors, NP staff made sure to involve the tribal mediators who had previously attempted to reach a solution for the conflict. This time, after NP's involvement, the families were more willing to negotiate. NP thereby made sure to involve local capacities and leadership, and was able to rely on the influence and respect the mediators hold in the community to support the parties in reaching a solution.

“You [NP] protected us and helped us feel safer. You prevented a bloodshed between relatives and, most of all, you brought our views closer” said the husband's father.

(Ba'aj, March 3rd, 2022)

The families agreed to a reconciliation meeting, during which the parties were able to reach an understanding in accordance with tribal law, without the use of violence, amending the relationship between the two families.

Through shuttle negotiations, NP mitigated the risk of intra-tribal violence, and managed to create understanding and build confidence in local conflict-transformation mechanisms.