

The Tajik authorities assert that the medical examination and treatment of children returned from Iraq continues, and further steps will be taken to implement programs for their return to families. However, the Tajik expert believes that the measures that government takes are not enough.

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On the night of April 30, 84 Tajik children were returned from the Iraqi prisons to Tajikistan. Photo: CABAR.asia

On the night of April 30, 84 Tajik children now placed in the health resort “Harangon” were returned from the Iraqi prisons to Tajikistan. The mothers of most of these children were sentenced for being common-law married to militants of the terrorist group IS, banned in Tajikistan and several CIS countries.

A resident of the Abdurahmoni Jomi district, Asolatmoh Tilloeva, counts minutes before she meets her grandson Abubakr and granddaughter Fatima. These two children, three and six years old, were taken out of Iraqi prison and returned to Tajikistan by the authorities of the

country, along with dozens of other children on April 30.

Asolatmoh said that she lost contact with her daughter Saodatmoh Tilloeva in 2014, when she left Tajikistan. Only six months ago, Asolatmoh received the news that her daughter had been sentenced to life imprisonment in Baghdad, which Asolatmoh did not believe.

“I didn’t know what to do. They only left to work in Russia”, she says.



From the first day, the authorities began examining and treating children and legalizing documents for them. Photo: CABAR.asia

Asolatmoh says that when the authorities told her that they would bring her grandchildren back to homeland, she hurried to the capital and arrived on the morning of April 30.

Talking about the meeting at the airport, she adds that she “did not want to let them go, went to Harangon with them”.

“But they did not allow going inside. I still hope to take them home. Now I appeal to the competent authorities to resolve this situation as soon as possible”, says Asolatmoh Tilloeva. Asolatmoh says she does not know how her 28-year-old daughter ended up in Iraq with her husband and children.

“One thing I know for sure: the son-in-law is to blame for my daughter’s misfortune and my grandchildren’s suffering”, the woman said.

Today, Harangon health resort, located in Varzob district, has become a place of residence for dozens of Tajik children returned from Iraq to Tajikistan. From the first day, the authorities began examining and treating children and legalizing documents for them.

Deputy Minister Shodihon Jamshed: Children Made Friends with Resort Guests

Officials say that before returning children to families, they should examine the family's living conditions and determine whether it has the capacity to receive and educate children. Shodihon Jamshed, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection of the Population of Tajikistan, says that the examination and treatment of children is still ongoing. He added that now the children's health is a priority and only later, they will take steps to implement programs for their return to families.

"Our goal is to examine children's health as soon as possible and to allocate them. Children of pre-school age will be accommodated in boarding schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. School-age children will also be placed in specialized boarding schools of the Ministry of Education and Science", said Deputy Minister.

Shodihon Jamshed added that now all the children have already made friends with the resort guests; they behave like their peers, play, and have fun.

"To make children feel less uncomfortable away from their mothers, brothers and sisters are placed in the same room. Some children are almost 18, and they are replacing parents for their younger brothers and sisters", says Shodihon Jamshed.

According to him, the Ministry of Justice is involved for determining the identity of some children and legalizing their documents.

"First, we need to determine children's identity, their names and last names, since some children under four years old were born in Iraq already. This issue should be resolved, and only after that other issues should be considered", the Deputy Minister clarified.

Shodihon Jamshed says that after the end of children's health examination, they will be transferred to orphanages and boarding schools according to a certain program.



Practically all departments of the country are obliged to deal with issues of care, supervision and upbringing of this group of children. Photo: CABAR.asia

According to officials, practically all departments of the country are obliged to deal with issues of care, supervision and upbringing of this group of children. Children's Ombudsman Rajabmoh Habibullozoda notes that the authorities are striving first to create conditions for the children's adaptation to the new environment and "the state has created all the conditions for this".

Rajabmoh Habibullozoda is confident that with the help of psychologists, doctors and social workers, these children will be able to start a new life in their homeland.

"Children are provided with everything [necessary]: clothing, toys, hygiene items, medicines and food. Nutritionists are involved for the proper nutrition of children", says Habibullozoda.

Psychologist: Most Children Suffered Psychological Trauma

Now, four psychologists from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education are working with children. Authorized officials say that not every child needs the psychologist's help, since some are still too young and do not even understand where they came from and what they had to go through.

After a week of working with children, psychologists have concluded that children returned to their homeland from battlefields can get used to living in a safe society without constant threats, fear and violence.

Makhmadullo Davlatov, a psychologist who works with this group of children, notes that most of them, having lived in the conditions of the war horrors, received psychological trauma that cannot be healed in a short time.

Having met with this group of children, he found out that all of them witnessed the murders and bombings that remained in their memory. According to him, some children still have dreams about those horrors.

“We worked intensively with children over 6 years old, about 50 kids. They all suffered psychological trauma. The issue is that they all were in prisons and subjected to psychological and physical torture. This group of children really was brought up under hard pressure, but they can still be brought back to a peaceful life. There is an opportunity to change their world perception in order to bring up the personalities that society requires”. According to the psychologist, children’s return from Iraq and even separation from mothers has become a useful measure in terms of personal development.

“It is better if they are here and get used to the new atmosphere and new values”, Davlatov states.

The psychologist is confident that with the help of specialists, these children will be able to forget the horrors of war in the long term. According to him, some children do not know the Tajik language and translators from Arabic and Uzbek are involved in working with them.



Rajabmoh Habibullozoda is confident that with the help of psychologists, doctors and social workers, these children will be able to start a new life in their homeland. Photo: CABAR.asia

The youngest of the children is one year old, the oldest is 18. According to the security authorities, 44 children are under four. According to Shodihon Jamshed, the return of these children to their homeland attracted the childless families' attention.

According to him, over the past week, the number of requests from such families for adoption has increased.

The mothers of most children, 43 in total, are sentenced to long or life sentences in Baghdad prisons. By one of the joint programs of the Government of Tajikistan, Iraq and UNICEF, children of IS militants (terrorist organization banned in Tajikistan and several CIS countries - Ed.) were returned to Tajikistan with permission from their mothers.

Authorities note that there are still 11 Tajik children in Iraq. Earlier, the Ambassador of Tajikistan in Kuwait and Iraq reported that the mothers of these children did not give permission to send their children home. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan also notes that after signing an agreement on the prisoners' extradition, it will be possible to send both these children and their mothers to Tajikistan as well.

Psychologist Davlatov: Measures That Government Takes for the Rehabilitation of Children Are Not Enough

Tajik psychologist Mahmadullo Davlatov says that the measures taken by the government for children's rehabilitation are not enough. In his opinion, the government should implement cultural, secular educational programs for the new values formation in them.

"The return of children to their homeland is only the beginning of the process. When children are allocated, it will be necessary to engage them in lengthy programs. In this case, all these efforts will be able to give positive results. It is about educating these children and shaping new values in them".

Sociologists note that in order to protect children from psychological and physical violence from peers, teachers and officials in the future, it is better to bring them up in the family environment.

Zumrad Bobishoeva, a sociologist who has experience working with orphans, told us in an interview that insulting these children for their parents' actions should never be allowed.

"There are many people who suffer from infertility and it will be better if, taking into account social and economic conditions, these children will be adopted by them", said Bobishoeva.

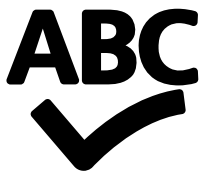
According to her, in case these kids will be brought up in specialized schools and "even under the state supervision", there may be "narrow-minded people" who in one way or another will insult and humiliate the returned children, injuring them.

On the other hand, Mrs. Bobishoeva sees the necessity for the legislative protection of children.

"We need a special norm of law, which should reserve punishment for those who insult or humiliate these children on the basis of negative events they experienced, which did not

depend on them. Thus, the regulations of the boarding schools should also have a special rule so that no one knows about the fate of these children and it would only be known that they were transferred there from another district after their parents' death", concluded Bobishoeva.

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