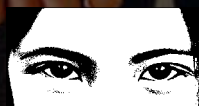


Terre des hommes Magazine

# Courage



*Iraq*  
**Education  
cannot wait**





“I want to ensure that the children can once again look towards their future.”

**Bashar Sultan** Child protection project manager

## Finding hope to rebuild our country

I remember the busy streets of Mosul, where I grew up. Children’s laughter echoed in the parks. It was a city full of hope. I had just graduated and had a three-year career plan. The following year, the Islamic State arrived and wreaked havoc. All my plans fell through. This instability taught me one thing: in Iraq, you can’t plan anything. I want to ensure that the children can once again look towards their future.

The situation in Iraq has stabilised a bit. When people ask me if I feel safe, I say yes, thinking of what we experienced before. But if you look at the literal definition of the word, it’s still very insecure. Children still hear the sound of drones on their way to school and see explosions. The north-west of Iraq has been badly affected by the war. Several communities live here, most of them Yezidi and Arab. The families who had to flee are gradually returning, but they are not returning to their former lives. Houses and schools have been destroyed and villages are in ruins. These images bear witness to the shattered dreams of thousands of children.

We are here to empower these children. Those reaching school age or older ones who have fallen behind. The “Education cannot wait” project couldn’t have a better name: there’s no more time to lose. Schools lack material and human resources, there are critical gaps in children’s education, classes are overcrowded with 40 to 50 pupils... Can you imagine how difficult it is to teach “normally”?

However, these unfavourable circumstances do not stop children from dreaming. In the following pages, you will discover the story of Zeid, who wants to become a doctor and set up a clinic in his village. To make their dreams come true, the children are counting on the support of Terre des hommes. By making a donation, you are contributing to realise the hopes of these children who will build the Iraq of tomorrow. And it starts now.

Bashar Sultan

## Yes, I want to help

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# Education cannot wait

In north-west Iraq, people displaced by war are facing a difficult return to “normal life”. Among those who have returned home, one child in five has no access to school. We take you on a journey into these communities, where the heartbreaking life stories of parents mingle with the dreams of children in search of an education. And where the optimism of childhood sweeps aside the darkness of memories of war.

*"I want to become a doctor and I'm going to set up a clinic in my village because I want to treat the people who need it."* In the districts of Sinjar and Al-Baaj, located in the Nineveh governorate, this phrase is uttered dozens of times by the children during our visit. Close to the Syrian border, in an area devastated by the passage of the Islamic State (IS), the time is ripe for reconstruction after the war. And behind this reconstruction, behind each new stone laid, hope and optimism are emerging in the isolated villages. The carefree spirit of childhood and the pain inherited from the chaos of years gone by make the younger generation want to look towards the future. To forget. To move forward. To dream, above all. Just as they want to become doctors, Zeid, Rana, Sylvia, Zidan and Nada aspire to rebuild their country. When asked *"What do you want for the future?"*, they all give the same answer, as if they had passed the word: *"to help Iraq, the most beautiful of countries."* For the international community, it's hard to imagine Iraq as a beautiful country. The images of war broadcast over the last thirty years don't help. Fortunately, there are people like Nisith Shrivastawa, Tdh's child protection coordinator who has been working in Iraq for three years, to bring positive messages: *"I see a bright future for this country. The people are really great and so welcoming."*

**Did you know?**  
**2,500**   
 children and teenagers received support from Terre des hommes as part of the **Education Cannot Wait** project

You discover this welcome when you step through the doors of the modest homes of families supported by the "Education Cannot Wait" project run for the past two years by Terre des hommes (Tdh), in consortium with other international and local

organisations. As part of the project, numerous schools are receiving material and human support. For example, Tdh installs sanitary facilities, playgrounds and sports fields to create ideal conditions. At the same time, students in need are provided with school supplies, as well as help in buying clothes and school bags. In the field of education, teachers come to the school to give support classes, as many children have fallen behind due to the forced displacement caused by the war. In total, Tdh has supported over 2,500 children and teenagers in two years, some of whom have welcomed us into their homes with their families.

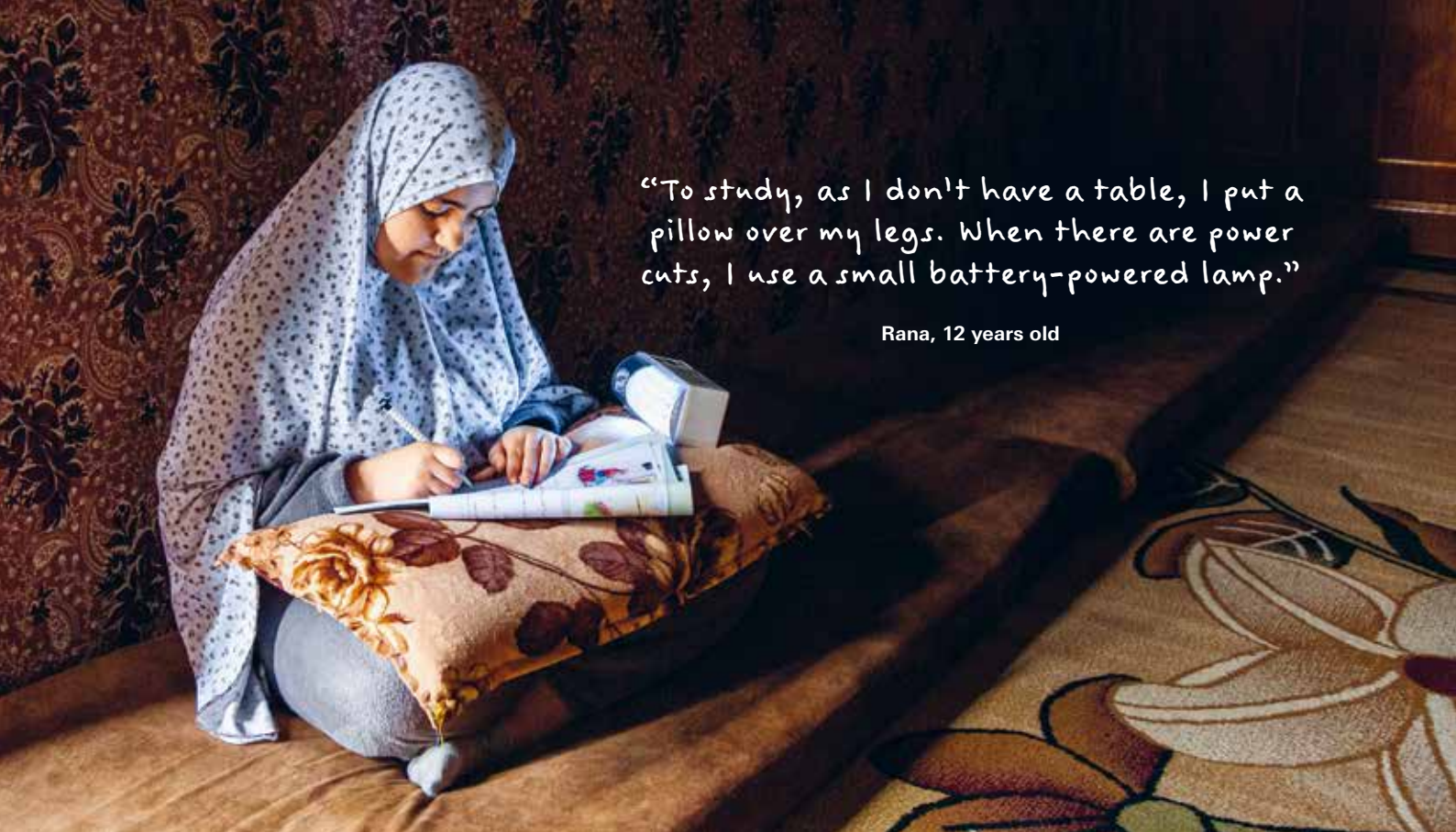


*"We were displaced for four years, during which Zeid missed school. Four years can destroy a child's life."*

**Mahmoud**, Zeid's father

Interviews are conducted in the privacy of the family home, seated on traditional, patterned sofas. A gas heater in the living room helps to beat the winter chill. Rugs and cushions make the atmosphere even warmer. In the homes, you can feel the relief of seeing children finally benefit from a decent education after the chaos, as Mahmoud, father of 12-year-old Zeid, reveals.

*"We were displaced for four years, during which Zeid missed school. Four years can destroy a child's life."* His son is delighted to be able to return to the classroom, as school provides



*“To study, as I don't have a table, I put a pillow over my legs. When there are power cuts, I use a small battery-powered lamp.”*

Rana, 12 years old

him with a sense of purpose. *“It's my second home, I love going because I know it's going to help me have a bright future and a good life.”* Rana, 12, agrees: *“education is the most important thing in life”*. The young girl and her family live in an unfinished house, but her parents redouble their efforts to make the place more beautiful, hanging large fabrics with floral textures on the walls and pink plastic flowers from the ceiling. *“We don't have a table, so to study and write, I put a pillow over my legs. When there are power cuts, I use a small battery-powered lamp.”*

**Support classes to catch up**  
Whatever the conditions, Rana is committed, because the project has given her a renewed desire to study. Having access to renovated facilities and new school equipment opens up new perspectives. *“Being in a clean, dignified environment with good teachers creates a good atmosphere for learning,”* explains Saleh, father of 11-year-old Sylvia.

Woolen threads hang from the young girl's ears, a traditional practice that prevents them

from closing. Around her neck, a pretty blue necklace protects her from the evil eye. She wants to believe that luck won't run away from her again. During the interview, delicious cooking smells emanate from the kitchen. During our visit, the family is observing a fast in line with Yezidi tradition, but the hosts are keen to serve us orange juice and homemade sweets. Saleh continues: *“Without this*

*support, my children would complain and not go to school with the same motivation. They know that today, their conditions are good, whereas before, I swear, we had nothing. Thanks to the aid, we've been able to buy them coats and shoes.”*

Clothes are at the heart of parents' concerns, as Mahmoud explains. *“I wouldn't send Zeid to school in worn-out clothes while*



**Sylvia, 11 years old, walks to school every day. She passes ruined buildings that bear witness to the conflict of the past.**

### Children without identity

Providing families with identity papers is another of Tdh's missions in Iraq. Many of them have lost everything in their flight, and a long road of crosses awaits them as they embark on administrative procedures.

Children cannot attend school without identity papers.



Tdh, through its lawyers and social workers, is working to provide children and their parents with official documents. For example, Rana, aged 12, was able to benefit from this help and gain access to school. Many children like her can now enrol in school once they have been issued with identity papers.

*his classmates are spotless. He'd be embarrassed and wouldn't reach his full potential like the others.*" For Mahmoud, proudly wearing the abaya and keffiyeh on his head, dress is important. A caring father, he puts a lot of faith in his son's education, as he was unable to realise his own dream of studying. Despite this, the risk of appearing needy puts him in a major honour dilemma between his desire to educate his children and his precarious financial situation. He is not the only one to live with this fear, especially as the lack of work in the region means that money is in short supply. The majority of those interviewed, who returned after the end of the conflict, no longer own their homes. As tenants, the families live at the mercy of dismissal, in fear of tomorrow. *"To be honest, I'm exhausted,"* insists Sylvia's father, *"I don't earn enough money. Life has become so difficult!"*

All is not yet won in the long term, as illustrated by the testimony of the father of 13-year-old Zidan. This member of the Yezidi community has lost his sight and lives in extreme poverty. *"It's important that all my children manage to get their diplomas, but we can't afford to pay for everyone's education. One of my sons had to drop out of high school for this reason."* Zidan is still in elementary school but has benefited from Tdh's remedial classes. This is one of the pillars of "Education Cannot Wait": ensuring that all children can catch up. *"These classes have two aims,"* Nisith

sums up. *"To help children go back to school to follow a conventional curriculum or, for those who are not able to catch up, to train them in a trade so that they have a perspective for the future and can cope with their lives."*

### Sharing trauma to move forward

Despite his disability, Zidan's father closely follows his son's progress, also watched over by older brother, Hassan, who recounts the forced exile of 2014. *"Ten days hiding in the mountains before being evacuated to Iraqi Kurdistan, where we stayed for several years in a camp."* On their return, the family was unable to return to their destroyed home, so they rented a dilapidated building. Zidan's smile never leaves his face. Proud to be photographed, he captivates his audience with his big black eyes. After slipping his heavy rucksack loaded with books onto his back, he leads us out of the house along a dirt track to the school. He proudly shows



↑ Zidan, at home with his father. He proudly shows us his school materials.

us where he studies, escaping the misery of everyday life. He wishes his father could see him. His father says he lost his eyesight because of the old wheat he ate when he was young. *“It was the only food we had: we cleaned it, but we didn't know we were ingesting poison.”*

In the intimacy of the home, the stories told are interspersed with poignant silences. We listen. One story follows another. Often heartbreaking. Like that of Khouny, mother of eleven children and widow since August 3, 2014, when her husband was shot dead by the IS.



*“I chose to get involved to work with the people who help and support my children. To help all those in need, like us.”*



Khouny, mother of eleven and widow

She tells of her eldest son, who chose suicide when he realised he would not be able to finish his studies for lack of funds, even though he was counting on a degree to support his family. Dressed in a traditional abaya with a scarf covering her hair, she smiles with dignity. She explains how she got back on her feet, now mobilizing her community in the name of Tdh. She doesn't want other families to have to endure the same tragedy because of the narrowness of prospects. She is grateful that her children are now in school.

*“I chose to get involved to work with the people who help and support my children. To help all those in need, like us. I'm respected and listened to here, so I can take action, especially as I've learned a lot from the Tdh training sessions about the importance of positive education and child protection. I'm now ready to lead awareness-raising sessions.”*

### Making Tdh's work sustainable

These sessions aim to prevent dangers as much as to teach good hygiene practices. Fahima, another mother, always looks forward to the meetings. *“You know, I didn't go to school so I come here to learn and then pass it on to my children.”* In this way, the children are taught about the dangers they run when they venture onto a vacant lot or an abandoned house that could be booby-trapped by remnants of explosives or munitions that have not been activated. Nada, aged 11, took part in awareness-raising sessions as well as tutoring. Before, she couldn't read or write. Now, she shines in class and knows *“the importance of cleanliness and hygiene, how to wash my hands before and after*

*meals”*. She has also learned to be wary of people who prowl around schools offering gifts and trying to enlist the youngest children. Many desperate children join militias that promise much before using the most vulnerable in their battles, to the detriment of their health and future. Terre des hommes also relies on sport, setting up soccer, volleyball and basketball pitches as the public authorities lack the means.

### Did you know?



**140** Iraq's world ranking in elementary school enrolment rates

Nada, for example, loves to play basketball, a discipline she discovered. In these wounded territories, the arrival of sports facilities brings smiles and offers new activities, because everyday life is too narrow.

Wheat and barley are the main crops grown in this rural farming region. Lack of work is the main problem. Without prospects, how move forward? Panda



*“If I could, I'd decorate the classroom with flowers to make it prettier.”*

Nada, 11 years old

### When some are still missing

It's a simple drawing, by Nada's sister. And it hits hard with anyone who looks at it. Four women, a girl and two men dressed in black, one armed with a machine gun. The drawing illustrates the kidnapping and captivity of Yazidi women, victims of IS atrocities. Each character evokes one of the conditions experienced by the women taken by force (abduction, confinement, sexual violence, humiliation). The teenager wants to get a message across, a cry from the heart, at a time when there are fears that some may not return, gone forever despite the end of the conflict: *"I have only one wish: the return of those who have been kidnapped."*



Premananda, head of the Tdh delegation in Iraq, wonders: *"Study, but why? What happens afterwards? Children need examples to move forward and grow. Just as parents need to believe in a system. Why should they let their children study when they could already be earning money?"* It's mainly for this reason that the balance is fragile, especially for teenagers, who suffer most from the injustice of being left out of school. Working hand in hand with public authorities with limited resources, organisations like Terre des hommes seek to ensure the

sustainability of their actions. So that parents let their children continue their studies, whatever the cost, in order to quickly become role models for their younger siblings.

*"Study, but why? What happens afterwards? Children need examples to move forward and grow."*

Panda Premananda, Head of Tdh delegation in Iraq

So that all these young dreamers - Zeid, Rana, Sylvia, Zidan, Nada and the others - can pursue to the end their goal of putting on a white coat to help others. To help the Iraqi people, to help their families, but above all to help themselves by believing in their dreams. Helping themselves to restore Iraq's momentum. Because, as Panda says, *"the future lies with the hands of the children"*. More than ever here, where looking to the past is far too painful.

Marc Nouaux

## With your donation, we can, for example



### 200.- USD

provide equipment for classes to organise sports activities and games

### 100.- USD

help a girl continue her school education

### 50.- USD

provide school supplies for five students

By making a donation, you will contribute to our children's aid projects worldwide, with one of the options described on page 2.



# Word to

## Adnan Daham, *Headmaster in Iraq*

Headmaster of the Umudiban school supported by Terre des hommes in a rural village, Adnan Daham is also a versatile teacher. He teaches Arabic, mathematics, history-geography and Islamic education, and speaks enthusiastically about the transformation of the children in his village thanks to the “Education cannot wait” project. He talks about the challenges he faces, particularly that of getting girls into school, a subject that is close to his heart and to which he is passionately committed. But convincing families in an isolated and conservative area is no easy task...



“One of the arguments put forward for not sending girls to school is that there are no women to teach. So I turn the problem on its head and say to them: ‘how can there be any female teachers in the future if you stop your own daughters from studying?’”

### What are the main challenges you face?

Here, many families live below the poverty line and we are fighting so that every child can go to school, especially girls, who have less access to schooling than boys. We live in a society governed by customs and traditions where girls have no place at school. Most members of the community fear women's education and their interaction with other pupils. The fact that there are no separate toilets, for example, can be problematic for families. Keeping girls out of education is a major obstacle to development. We address this by explaining that girls have a key role to play in society and that they have as much right to education as boys.

### How do you convince families to send girls to school?

Because I live in this village, I can communicate directly with the families because I'm one of them. We talk face to face and honestly. One of the arguments for not sending girls to school is that there are no women to teach. So I turn the problem on its head and say to them, “How can there be female teachers in the future if you're stopping your own daughters from studying?” Similarly, there are shortages of women in the health sector, so I ask them: “If your daughter falls ill, wouldn't you want a woman to look after her? Let your daughter study and become the one who can look after other women.”

### What impact do your arguments have?

Although at first it's hard to argue with someone who's very conservative, I know that my arguments will resonate, especially as I use examples from everyday life. It's concrete. In the end, a reluctant father will be rather proud to imagine his daughter being able to look after people or teach in the future. For example, one father who had forbidden his 10-year-old daughter to go to school even though she was intelligent changed his mind after a long discussion. She was able to start studying again and I'm very happy and proud of that.

### Are there any other obstacles you face?

Lack of staff! In rural areas, there aren't enough teachers to fill the vacancies. For example, I find it hard to fulfil my duties as headmaster because I also have to teach, which leaves me less time for administrative tasks. This is a major obstacle: what's the point of having classrooms and pupils if we don't have enough teachers?

### What does the “Education cannot wait” project do for you on a day-to-day basis?

Terre des hommes is one of the few organisations to have helped us, because our region is isolated and we have been forgotten by others. The project has enabled us to organise support classes for pupils in

difficulty, recreational and psychological activities, language courses, life skills training, kindergartens for 3-5 year olds and training for teachers. In terms of equipment, the toilets have been renovated, and we have received desks for disabled children, stationery and school supplies for the pupils and the school administration. We were also able to purchase a photocopier and a water fountain.

#### **How do these contributions meet the needs of children and families?**

We live in rural communities, most of the difficulties are financial and it's difficult for parents to buy clothes or school bags for their children. Pupils need these basic things to be comfortable, to ensure their dignity and to encourage them to study. They also need constant attention. Iraq has been through wars and crises, so the students needed psychological support. Terre des hommes carried out this important work and since then, the mental health of the pupils has improved significantly.

#### **What motivates you on a daily basis to take action for children?**

Teaching is a mission, a humanitarian vocation. The basic knowledge that we pass on then gives rise to vocations in children. For example, what I teach them can make them want to go into health, business, engineering and so on. I'm proud to be sowing small seeds so that the pupils can then pursue their ambitions and achieve their goals. The school is understaffed, but we have achieved a 100% pass rate in the departmental exams. That's a great source of pride, because it means that our school is doing great things, and we have to keep going.





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**Every child in the world has the right to a childhood. It's that simple.**

We aspire to a world where children's rights, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are always respected. A world where children can grow up safe from harm, and become the agents of change they wish to see in their lives.

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