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About 40,000 foreigners from 80 countries joined ISIS — and many brought families, while others married and had children in the caliphate. What happens to them next? We can provide you an inside look at Kazakhstan’s program to rehabilitate the wives and children of ISIS fighters that the State Dept and US academics have called a “model for the world.”

Nearly 600 women and children are in the program, and it’s grown significantly — from one national center to 17 rehabilitation centers scattered around the country staffed by a psychiatrist, psychologists, social workers, theologians, lawyers, teachers, and NGOs experienced working with vulnerable children and with religion, according to a US academic who visited the country.

Unlike virtually every Western country and most of the rest of the world, Kazakhstan is trying to rehabilitate them by providing a safe and secure environment. The State Department has called the program “groundbreaking.”

Known as Operation Zhusan, which roughly translated means “smell of the homeland,” the program has become an essential lifeline for the families. Without it, they would still be languishing in a Syrian refugee camp or in prison where “disease and jihadist ideology are rampant.”

The picture is complex: Some are true victims, some are hardened terrorists or nurtured their husband’s radical views, some are a combination of both.

The majority — more than 400 and counting — are children.

And most of them have been exposed to extreme trauma, according to academics who’ve met with them: Islamic State indoctrination, witnessing violence, committing violence; exposure to family, community, criminal violence; war trauma exposure & combat involvement; and family loss and separation.

What we can offer:

- Interviews with key government officials, including:
 - Deputy Foreign Minister Yerzhan Ashikbayev
 - Vice Minister of Information & Social Development Marat Azilkhanov
 - Vice Minister at Ministry of Education and Science Bibigul Asylova
- Interviews with representatives from the two main NGOs involved in the program – Akniyet and Pravo. They have helped with the rehabilitation of children and mothers who returned, providing them with psychological, pedagogical, social and theological support.
- Interview with Sabinella Ayazbayeva, who returned to Kazakhstan through Operation Zhusan
- Contact information for Dr. Stevan Weine, Director of the Center for Global Health at the University of Illinois, who was invited by the State Dept to visit Kazakhstan last year to observe the program and released a report, which we can share. He also wrote about it in an op-ed. He said in his report that the “Government of Kazakhstan (GOK) is to be congratulated in doing what no other country has done, returning 595 citizens including 405 children, and rapidly organizing a program to support these children and mothers.”
- Interview with political scientist Erlan Karin