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**Iraqi Forces Retake Villages to Facilitate Advance on Mosul**

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Baghdad, Oct 18 (Prensa Latina) Kurdish troops and Iraq's national army continue their offensive to liberate Mosul from the Islamic State (ISIS) from the vicinity of the Christian villages of Qaraqosh and Bartalla, while surveillance has intensified in the capital against possible attacks.

The Rudaw TV channel interviewed officers of the Peshmerga fighters and showed footage of the deployment of the Kurd combatants around the two aforementioned villages.

To reach the outskirts of Qaraqosh and Bartalla, captured by Daesh in August 2014, the Peshmerga had to fight fierce battles in several neighboring villages, clearing the way for them to approach Mosul, Iraq's second most important city.

According to military sources, the operations are being backed by the air forces of the US-led international coalition.

The 'Takfirists' (Sunni Islamic terrorists), are estimated to have between three thousand and 4,500 men in Mosul and are presenting, for the moment, strong resistance to government troops, according to official data reported on the Al-Iraqia channel.

The prime minister and commander-in-chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces, Haider Al-Abadi, officially declared the start of military operations on Monday to drive out ISIS from the capital of the northern province of Nineveh, with the support of Shiite and Sunni militia.

Al-Abadi said that only the army and federal police forces would enter the center of Mosul, once all pro-government troops reach the outskirts of the territory.