

JUNE 2009

IRAQI REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES: **IN DIRE STRAITS**



THE IRC COMMISSION ON IRAQI REFUGEES

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DELEGATIONS VISITING IRAQI REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES

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A REPORT OF THE IRC COMMISSION ON IRAQI REFUGEES
JUNE 2009

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Front Cover: An Iraqi refugee and her children in front of their home in Atlanta, Georgia.
Photo by Manuel Llaneras.

Back Cover: A young Iraqi refugee at a gathering of refugee families in Phoenix, Arizona.
Photo by Emily Holland.

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IRAQI REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES: **SEEKING A BETTER FUTURE IN DIFFICULT TIMES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2008 a Commission on Iraqi refugees formed by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) visited Jordan and Syria to assess the condition of Iraqi refugees and then issued a comprehensive report on their findings entitled *Five Years Later, A Hidden Crisis*.

At the Commission's request, an IRC staff delegation conducted a follow-up trip to the Middle East this February. And this April, Commission delegations traveled to Atlanta, Georgia, and Phoenix, Arizona, to see firsthand how resettled Iraqis are adjusting to their new life in America.

In both Atlanta and Phoenix the Commission found that while there are positive examples of refugee employment and successful adaptation, most Iraqi refugees who were interviewed painted a picture of despair and frustration. Refugees are finding it difficult to find a job and without secure income some are facing eviction from their homes. Without jobs, refugees cannot support themselves and their families on limited public assistance. Many of the Iraqis are traumatized and need additional support in the form of financial assistance, English lessons, employment counseling and access to health care.

Despite these difficulties, resettlement in the United States remains the only option for thousands of Iraqi refugees who are still in exile in the Middle East, primarily in Jordan and Syria.

As has been the case since its inception, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program continues to provide security, rights and a second chance in life to thousands of refugees annually, including those from Iraq. The program remains an indispensable tool for refugee protection – and a tangible example of the commitment of the United States to provide sanctuary for the world's persecuted. However, to ensure that refugees in the United States are able to integrate into American society quickly, safely and with dignity, the structure of the domestic resettlement program must be improved.

Toward that end, this report makes a number of recommendations. They include **increased federal financial assistance**, a **uniform and generous package of services** available to all refugees admitted to the United States, increased **program flexibility** to provide services to refugees with different needs and backgrounds, **better preparation** of refugees prior to their arrival, and better information to ensure that refugees are making a well informed choice to be resettled. The report also calls for a **comprehensive study** of domestic resettlement to see what has worked and what has not.

There are measures that Congress and the U.S. government can and should take immediately. They include urgent supplemental funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services and the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration; reprogramming of any available federal government funds to address current needs such as emergency rent payments; and flexibility in repayment of travel and other loans to refugees.

“Diplomacy and assistance is also required to help the millions of displaced Iraqis. These men, women and children are a living consequence of this war and a challenge to stability in the region, and they must become a part of Iraq’s reconciliation and recovery.

America has a strategic interest – and a moral responsibility – to act. In the coming months, my administration will provide more assistance and take steps to increase international support for countries already hosting refugees; we’ll cooperate with others to resettle Iraqis facing great personal risk;

and we will work with the Iraqi government over time to resettle refugees and displaced Iraqis within Iraq – because there are few more powerful indicators of lasting peace than displaced citizens returning home.

– **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA**

February 27, 2009

INTRODUCTION

One of the severe consequences of the Iraq war has been the displacement of millions of Iraqis, a humanitarian crisis that has left thousands of Iraqis with little or no prospect of a safe return home or integration in their country of asylum. The U.S. government was initially slow to respond to the crisis. But in the past few years, the United States has taken steps to provide greater help to displaced Iraqis, to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) and other UN agencies responding to the crisis, and to the countries in the Middle East that are hosting refugees from Iraq. The United States has also increased the number of Iraqi refugees being resettled in the United States from only 202 in 2006 to approximately 17,000 in fiscal year 2009.

In February 2008, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) formed a Commission on Iraqi Refugees. Its members traveled to Jordan and Syria and met with Iraqi refugees. They also met with officials from the host governments, the United States embassies, and the United Nations as well as staff members of the IRC and other aid agencies. After the trip, the Commission released a report that called for greater aid to the refugees and to the countries hosting them.

Following up on the Commission's report, IRC staff members from Brussels, London and Washington visited the region in February 2009 to check on the status of uprooted Iraqis in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and northern Iraq. Staff findings are included here in Appendix C.

This latest report examines the situation of Iraqi refugees who have been recently resettled in the United States and cites the experience of refugees who met with Commission delegations in Atlanta and Phoenix in April 2009. The delegations comprised IRC board members, overseers, and senior staff members.

The delegations met with Iraqi refugees and local health care providers, employers, educators, state officials, members of the IRC's U.S. Programs staff and the staff of other nonprofit agencies. The delegations also visited refugees in their homes and met with groups of Iraqi professionals and war widows at the IRC offices in order to assess the refugees' progress and examine impediments to their successful integration.

We conclude that the U.S. resettlement program, likely the only safe alternative for thousands of Iraqi refugees, faces major structural challenges in its organization and funding. These challenges are exacerbated by a simultaneous global economic downturn and resettlement of a highly educated refugee population with many special needs. Issues like rising unemployment and homelessness are threatening the well-being not only of Iraqi refugees but also of all recently resettled refugees in America.

Iraqi refugees are particularly at risk as several factors contribute to making their resettlement situation extremely precarious. High levels of trauma, injury, and illness among Iraqis have made integration into America difficult. Moreover, a large number of resettled Iraqis are also widows, most with young children, who arrive here grieving and alone. These widows, including many who have no employment experience, are expected to find a job and support themselves and their families shortly after arrival. Further, many Iraqis are highly educated professionals who were practicing doctors, lawyers, scientists or accountants in

Iraq. These refugees often hope to find work in their professions but any employment is hard to find, even entry-level jobs. By accepting refugees for resettlement, the United States has a responsibility to protect them, but they are being failed by an antiquated and inadequate system of resettlement.

Immediate measures must to be taken to ensure that Iraqis, as well as all other refugees resettled in America, do not fall victim to homelessness and poverty. We also conclude that the domestic resettlement program is in danger of failing to fulfill its mandate of helping refugees rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. In summary, a thorough examination and reform of the U.S. refugee resettlement process is urgently needed.

“... [W]e have no cap. We have no quota.
And we have no limits on the compassion of
the United States to accept refugees.”

– **ELLEN SAUERBREY**

then Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration,
discussing the plight of Iraqis who helped the United States,

March 11, 2007

II BACKGROUND ON THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (USRAP)

Resettlement in the United States is one of the ways the U.S. government protects refugees. It is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy and reflects the best humanitarian principles of the American people to protect the vulnerable and persecuted.

The best outcome for most refugees is to return home and resume their lives in peace and safety. Another option is to be accepted as permanent residents by the country to which they have fled, referred to as the *country of first asylum*. Because these options are not always feasible, resettlement in a new country is considered the third “durable solution” for the most vulnerable refugees.

Arguably the strongest protection mechanism, resettlement gives refugees a second chance in life. It enables them to enjoy the safety, freedom and stability they often lack in exile. Each year, resettlement is offered to about one percent of the world’s refugees. Historically the United States has been a leader in resettlement because of its resonance with core American values, and the country has welcomed more than 2.6 million refugees since 1975.

The Refugee Act of 1980 established the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and regularized the process by which refugees come to United States. The president, in consultation with Congress, determines the number of refugees to be resettled in any given year.

The government office responsible for identifying refugees for resettlement and overseeing the process of their reaching the United States is the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration within the Department of State. Before traveling to the United States, all refugees entering the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program are interviewed by officials of the Department of Homeland Security. Each refugee must meet the legal definition of a refugee under U.S. law and undergo rigorous security screening, which involves the State Department, the FBI and the CIA and can take months and sometimes years.¹ Refugees then undergo medical screening to ensure they do not pose health threats.

The federal government contracts with voluntary resettlement agencies to provide services to resettled refugees. The Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Department of Health and Human Services oversees the services provided to refugees after arrival to facilitate their integration into the United States. State governments also play an important role; in each state, State Refugee Coordinators weave together private and public resources for refugee resettlement and delivery of services to refugees.

In fiscal year 2008, the United States resettled slightly over 60,000 refugees.² According to official projections, as many as 75,000 refugees may be resettled in fiscal year 2009. In addition to Iraqi refugees, Burmese and Bhutanese refugees are currently the primary groups being resettled in the United States.

¹ For more information see Refugee Reports, Vol. 24, Number 4, June 2003, p. 5. Available at http://www.refugees.org/data/refugee_reports/archives/2003/june.pdf

² Of those, 9,209 refugees were resettled by IRC.

III RESETTLEMENT OF IRAQI REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES

Resettlement of Iraqi refugees to the United States is not unprecedented. The first large group of refugees from Iraq was resettled in the United States following the Gulf War in 1991. Thousands of Iraqi refugees, many belonging to the Kurdish ethnic minority and those associated with the U.S. government, were resettled in the United States between 1992 and 1997.

At the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003, some analysts anticipated a massive flow of refugees fleeing war and the use of chemical weapons or other weapons of mass destruction. This massive outflow did not take place and most Iraqis stayed put. Following the February 2006 bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, however, violence and insecurity escalated. Millions of Iraqis fled their homes and today remain displaced inside Iraq or are living as refugees in other Middle Eastern countries and in other parts of the world.

The large-scale resettlement of Iraqi refugees to the United States was neither anticipated nor planned for by the Bush administration. In 2006, as thousands of refugees were streaming across Iraq's borders, only 202 Iraqis were resettled in the United States.

The mechanisms needed for substantial resettlement out of the region were not in place. Those Iraqis who applied to be resettled to the United States discovered that additional background checks, in addition to the established security checks, were required for Iraqi refugees. The protocols for the additional checks had not yet been established. On February 14, 2007, State Department Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky announced that the United States would commit to admit 7,000 Iraqi refugees in fiscal year 2007. By the end of the fiscal year, however, only 1,608 Iraqis had entered United States.

Attention to the issue intensified throughout 2007. In January, Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) chaired the first Congressional hearing on the issue of Iraqi displacement. In February, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice established a senior level Iraqi Task Force. Ambassador James Foley was appointed as a Senior Coordinator for Iraqi Refugee Issues in September. In one of his initial meetings with nongovernmental organizations, Ambassador Foley announced a goal of improving the resettlement process for Iraqi refugees and increasing the number of refugees admitted to the United States.

In an attempt to help Iraqi refugees, Senator Kennedy championed the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act that passed as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. The Act primarily sought to increase the resettlement of Iraqis whose lives were in danger because of their affiliation with the U.S. government or its contractors.

At the same time, the Bush Administration was criticized by many Congressional leaders and nongovernmental organizations for delayed and insufficient response at the onset of the crisis, failing to acknowledge the scale of displacement, and failing to protect and accept for resettlement thousands of Iraqi refugees.

In the past 18 months, however, the U.S. response has improved significantly, both in terms of humanitarian assistance and resettlement. The U.S. government committed to resettle at least 17,000 Iraqi refugees in fiscal year 2009.

Through the first seven months of the fiscal year, 9,581 Iraqis had been resettled. State Department representatives are optimistic that the 17,000 mark will be met and perhaps exceeded.

The large-scale return of refugees to Iraq from neighboring countries has not taken place. The countries neighboring Iraq have allowed Iraqi refugees in, but the resources of these nations are strained. Refugees often have no legal status and are not afforded the legal right to work. Resettlement of Iraqi refugees is one way for the United States and other countries to share the burden of hosting refugees. It is also a means of protecting thousands of those who can neither return home in safety and dignity nor remain in their countries of asylum. Indeed, despite the serious shortcomings of our welcome for refugees in the current economic crisis, which are detailed in this report, resettlement remains a vital – and in some cases the only – solution for tens of thousands of Iraqis.

ATLANTA AND PHOENIX:

IV WELCOMING REFUGEES IN AN ECONOMIC CRISIS

The IRC Atlanta office expects to resettle as many as 925 refugees in fiscal year 2009. Of these, it is estimated that 20 percent will be from Iraq. The IRC Phoenix office expects to resettle approximately 950 refugees this fiscal year, about 25 percent of whom will be from Iraq.

In both Atlanta and Phoenix, refugees, service providers and other stakeholders outlined similar challenges:

- › Many Iraqis have been unable to obtain employment, despite considerable effort on the part of both the refugees and IRC staff. Historically, 80 percent of refugees resettled by IRC have been placed in jobs within their first few months in the United States.
- › Without jobs, many Iraqis have exhausted the resources available from the IRC and other sources and are at risk of becoming homeless.
- › Many refugees have been unable to pay their rent for a number of months and have received eviction notices.
- › As a consequence of the war, high levels of trauma, injury and chronic illness exist among the refugee population.
- › The trauma and stress are compounded by the inability of refugees to meet their basic needs and provide for their children and by the overall uncertainty regarding their futures.

Lack of Employment and Threat of Homelessness

Most refugees in the United States recognize that the freedoms and the legal status they enjoy constitute a tremendous positive change in their lives. Yet despite the best efforts of refugees and voluntary agency staff, many have not been able to build stable lives in the United States. This situation undermines their sense of security and self-esteem and fosters extreme anxiety regarding their future.

The refugees we met in Atlanta and Phoenix are ready and willing to work. They do not wish to be dependent on state assistance and would like to embark on the path to self-sufficiency as soon as possible. Their attitude is typical of refugees coming to the United States; the employment rate among refugees has historically been very high.³

The IRC enjoys good relationships with local employers who have had positive experiences hiring refugees. In Phoenix, a panel of representatives from companies that have existing relationships with the IRC met with the IRC delegation. They outlined the benefits of hiring refugees, citing their strong work ethic and the ongoing casework support provided to the refugees by the IRC.

³ Members of the IRC's U.S. Programs staff report that refugees are typically energetic and highly motivated and point out that many entrepreneurial refugees eventually open successful businesses. A directory of refugee-owned businesses that was published by the IRC in San Diego lists an array of headings: beauty salons, catering, child-care, dry cleaning, house-cleaning, maintenance & constructions, printing & signs, restaurants, and tailoring, among others. Refugee-owned businesses can be found everywhere in the United States that refugees are resettled. Not only do they support their refugee-owners, they contribute to the local economy and become a source of jobs and tax revenue.

In the present economic environment, however, employment opportunities are scarce and competition for jobs is intense. Such a situation is especially detrimental to the U.S. resettlement program because the program is currently premised on refugees being able to obtain employment and become self-supporting shortly after their arrival in the United States.

While almost all refugees receive some state support in the form of cash and medical assistance, these resources are often insufficient to cover the cost of rent and basic necessities. Assistance rates for arriving refugees are established by state governments. The average assistance for a family of four across IRC offices nationwide is \$575 per month, but the actual level can be as low as \$309.

Resettlement agencies such as the IRC receive a grant from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. This Reception and Placement (or R&P) grant totals \$900 per refugee. These grants are intended to cover immediate needs such as rent, security deposits, utilities, food and other expenses that refugees incur during their first 30 days. The R&P grant also funds many services provided by resettlement agencies, including arrangements for housing, reception at the airport, orientation to the community, facilitation of health screening, follow-up on health issues, enrollment of children in school, enrollment for public services, and assistance with employment and English language classes.

Some refugees qualify for the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant program funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services. This program is an alternative to public assistance. It provides up to four months of financial assistance and employment services to support refugees' job search efforts. Refugees who enter the program do not access other forms of state assistance. These funds are supplemented by resources raised by the resettlement agencies. However, funding for the program is limited. Only about 30 percent of resettled refugees benefit from the program.

The severity of the situation for refugees in the United States is illustrated by the stories Commission members heard from the refugees themselves. Many stated that their relatives in Iraq are sending them money to help cover basic needs such as housing. Some say they have considered returning to Iraq.

Most refugees we met during the visits said they are grateful for the support provided by the IRC staff and understand that their case managers are doing their best under difficult circumstances. In Phoenix, the Commissioners visited the home of Saba Al Ganima, who arrived in the United States with his wife and five children – all under the age of thirteen – in May 2008. He considers himself fortunate to have a job at a truck maintenance company that pays enough to cover rent and basic needs for the family. While he and his oldest son struggle with numerous health issues, he thanks the IRC for the help. He says that simply by the virtue of being employed he is far better off than many other Iraqi refugees. To allow the IRC staff more time to help others, he does not visit the IRC's office to ask for assistance.⁴

⁴ As this report was being finalized, Sabah received notice that he will be laid off. His future is uncertain.

From time to time refugees do express their frustration to the staff of resettlement agencies. In the past year, case managers and employment counselors have absorbed a great deal of anger and frustration from refugees struggling to make ends meet. Pressure from refugee clients is on top of the self-imposed pressures felt by IRC staff trying to provide refugees with the welcome they need and deserve.

Kate Reid, resettlement program manager in Phoenix, keeps a list of refugees who have received eviction notices and calls the managers of apartment complexes every day asking for additional time to raise funds to cover refugees' rent. Thus far she has managed to keep all refugees in their homes, but the list is growing and the sense of urgency is mounting. Kate previously worked for the IRC in Darfur, Sudan. She says her current job is far more difficult.

Delayed employment also increases the workload of each IRC caseworker and employment specialist. For example, each employment specialist is currently trying to help more than 200 refugees find work.

While it is taking longer for refugees to find jobs, many succeed eventually. In Phoenix, the Commission delegation met Sabah Fahad, who arrived in the United States in September 2008 with his wife and 2-year old son. He was a journalist in Iraq and worked with the U.S. Army. Sabah has a job at the airport, which provides sufficient income to cover rent and his family's basic needs. He proudly showed his medals, certificates, and pictures with the U.S. soldiers from Baghdad. He has received considerable help from an American friend, a U.S. soldier, including the gift of a car so he can travel to his job. Sabah's greatest expectations are for his son: he hopes his son will have the same opportunities as any other child in America.

The Expectations of Educated Iraqi Refugees

Many resettled Iraqis hold advanced university degrees and had been established in their professions in Iraq prior to the war. The Commissioners met with refugees who were engineers, teachers, lawyers, computer scientists, pilots, physicians, and accountants in Iraq. They all hoped – and many expected – to find employment in their professional field of work. A number of refugees expressed disappointment that the information they received prior to departure for the United States regarding the job-placement services and support they would be given was different from the reality they encountered upon arrival.

The minimal or incorrect information given to refugees prior to their arrival left them unprepared for the challenge of resettlement in the United States and the search for employment. As refugees begin to grasp the reality of the job market and the cost of living in America, they realize they need to accept any job as soon as possible, even if it does not make full use of their professional background. Many Iraqis pointed out that their potential is being wasted and that they could make greater contributions to American society if they were given sufficient time and resources to recertify in their professions.

Although the expectations of adult refugees were not being met, they were hopeful about prospects for their children. We were pleased to see the programs for refugee children attending the DeKalb International Student Center in Atlanta and the Montebello Elementary School in Phoenix. We especially enjoyed meeting Ahmmed Ahmmed, a 21-year-old refugee from Iraq who was resettled in May 2006 and is a senior at Washington High School in Phoenix. After acquiring additional academic credits from night courses and through enrollment in a community college program, Ahmmed was scheduled to graduate in

May 2009. He speaks perfect English and is applying to go to a four-year university. Ahmmed, like many others, is happy to be in the United States and to pursue his dreams.

Iraqi Widows

Many of the women widowed by the war in Iraq have young children. Without male relatives, these women are especially at risk in Iraq and in its neighboring countries and are considered among the most vulnerable of refugees. In Phoenix, the IRC delegation met with six refugee women from Iraq whose husbands were killed. The situation for those who are here alone with young children is especially precarious. Like other refugees, they must secure a job soon after arrival in the United States. Many have been separated from sons, brothers or other family members because of the delays from the additional security checks that Iraqi men are subjected to before the United States will grant them admission.

In Atlanta Commission members met Shayma Sadeq, a single mother with three children who recently obtained a job working the night shift cooking for inmates at a detention facility in Atlanta. It is a job she is not likely to continue to hold for long. The support she receives from the state pays only for certified day care providers, and such providers do not operate at night. Unable to afford nighttime childcare for her three minor children, she has arranged for a neighbor to watch the children at night, but the arrangement is not sustainable. At the same time, the financial support the IRC is able to provide to her has run out. Without a job she and her children will soon face eviction.

Inaya Al Basha, a widow from Iraq living alone in Phoenix, has received multiple eviction notices. She jokes that if she is evicted she will come to sleep at the IRC office. Like other refugees with eviction notices, she has nowhere else to go. The homeless shelters in Phoenix are at capacity and the waiting list for subsidized housing is up to two years long.

Physical and Mental Health

Compared to other refugee groups, Iraqis arrive in the United States with higher degrees of emotional trauma and in poorer shape overall. Doctors in Atlanta and Phoenix spoke of the prevalence of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. The doctors also cited poor general health and war-related physical trauma.

Unstable living situations and uncertainty about the future cause the highly traumatized Iraqi refugees to experience additional psychological trauma. In Atlanta, we met with a group of survivors of torture. While appreciative of the safety they now enjoy, some questioned their decision to come to America. A counselor from the Center for Torture and Trauma Survivors in Atlanta said that many of the clients he sees prefer to discuss how they will make their next rent payment rather than receive counseling for the torture they experienced in Iraq.

Refugees can qualify to receive one of two kinds of medical assistance. They can access Medicaid if they qualify under the individual eligibility guidelines of the state in which they reside. Or they can receive federally funded Refugee Medical Assistance for a maximum of eight months; after that, refugees need to secure employment with health benefits in order to have coverage. The eight-month eligibility period puts pressure on doctors to treat their refugee patients – even those with chronic conditions that normally require ongoing care – in a relatively short amount of time.

V RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the preceding, the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees makes the following recommendations:

Increased Federal Assistance

Congress should appropriate more funds for the refugee resettlement program and extend the time frame during which refugees are eligible for services. Refugees need greater amounts of cash and medical assistance and increased support from the resettlement agencies to secure employment and restart their lives.

For a federal government program, the resettlement program is dangerously under-funded. It would not function without private funds raised by the voluntary resettlement agencies that implement the program. While the public-private nature of the program has been its strength, the program as it is currently structured is not able to provide sufficient support to refugees in the present economic climate. Refugees should have the support they need to avoid homelessness and poverty. This principle should be followed even when a refugee arrives with special needs or when there is a surge in arrivals or when there are other unanticipated events like an economic downturn.

Avoiding the “Resettlement Lottery”

Refugees should receive a uniform and realistic package of services no matter where they are resettled in the United States. Currently, refugees resettled by the IRC's offices in California and Florida are in a better situation than those resettled by the IRC's other offices because these states have more generous levels of public assistance. Regardless of the state in which they reside, all refugees need assistance that is sufficient to cover at least basic needs such as housing while they search for work, learn English and address medical issues.

Flexibility

The “one size fits all” approach of insisting on early employment is not necessarily the best policy for many refugees, the resettlement program, or American society. The current economic downturn has exposed the extreme dependency of the program on early employment in order for the refugees to thrive. As outlined in this report, many Iraqi refugees arrive with high levels of educational and professional experience. To make best use of the talents and skills they possess, funds need to be spent on recertification programs to ensure that refugees can enter the workforce as professionals. This is in the best interest of both the refugees and the communities that welcome them.

Other Iraqi refugees, especially those with high degrees of trauma and widows with young children, need greater support for an extended period of time. For such vulnerable populations rapid employment is unrealistic.

Preparation for Resettlement

The information given to displaced persons applying for admission to the United States through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program must be thorough and comprehensive. They must be fully briefed about both the benefits and the challenges of resettlement so that they fully understand the life-altering decision they are about to make.

Refugees selected for resettlement in the United States should be given formal English language training as well as effective vocational and cultural orientation to better prepare them for their new lives in the United States. Better information and preparation of refugees for life in the United States will facilitate their adjustment after arrival.

Study

The program for domestic resettlement and assistance to refugees in the United States has not been thoroughly examined since its formal creation in 1980. A comprehensive study is needed to examine the entire program and determine what works and what does not work. Such a study should take into consideration the needs of different refugee populations. Some refugees arrive with university degrees, while others are illiterate in their own language. Many suffer from trauma and need specialized and longer-term assistance. Immediate economic self-sufficiency for all refugees is an understandable goal, but not always the most appropriate or effective approach to sustainable integration. The U.S. resettlement program has tried to achieve that goal in a reactive manner that lacks strategy, flexibility and compassion.

“We used to have most of our people employed within three to five months of arriving in the U.S. Now even our highly educated refugees who are fluent in English can’t find a job.”

– **LESLYE MOORE, IRC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BOISE, IDAHO**

May 2, 2009

CHECKLIST OF SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding

- › Congress should provide \$97 million in fiscal year 2009 supplemental funds for the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to cover emergency rent payments for refugees at risk of eviction, coverage of additional refugees under the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant program, and cash assistance for all refugees for four additional months.
- › Congress should provide \$19 million to the State Department in fiscal year 2009 supplemental funds in order to increase the Reception and Placement Grant to \$1,100 per refugee from the current \$900.
- › Starting in fiscal year 2010, the State Department should increase the Reception and Placement grant to \$1,800. The grant was \$500 in 1975 and is currently \$900 per refugee, an amount that has proven to be insufficient to sustain refugees as they struggle to start their lives in the United States.
- › The Office of Refugee Resettlement in HHS should move quickly to reprogram any unobligated monies toward immediate needs such as housing assistance.
- › The Office of Refugee Resettlement in HHS will need at least \$949 million to better serve its clients in fiscal year 2010. This will require a sizable increase over the \$741 million requested by the President.
- › Funds for the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program should be increased to enable the program to serve all refugees who are eligible and could benefit from its services. It is currently funded at \$60 million, which serves only around 30 percent of all eligible refugees.
- › Currently, the cash assistance provided to refugees does not cover basic needs almost anywhere in the United States. The U.S. resettlement program ought to provide uniform and adequate levels of support to refugees both through the State Department's reception and placement system and through programs funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement in HHS until refugees are able to become self-sufficient.
- › More investment is needed in employment and recertification services targeted to the needs of highly educated professionals.
- › More investment is needed in culturally acceptable psychosocial services, such as art therapy programs, for newly arrived refugees.

Program and Administrative Adjustments

- The U.S. government should increase efforts to maintain the integrity of family units in refugee processing and admissions, in particular ensuring that adult males travel with unaccompanied female relatives. Family unity and support are especially crucial to this vulnerable population and to widows arriving with minor children.
- Resettlement agencies should be given fuller access to the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System or WRAPS, a database system that tracks refugee processing. Greater access would ensure the best possible preparation in communities receiving refugees, in particular those refugees arriving with medical needs.
- Refugees coming to the United States need an expanded orientation, both prior to their application for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and after their cases have been approved. A stronger orientation is needed to ensure that the decision to pursue resettlement is an informed one and that those coming to America are apprised of both the benefits of resettlement and the challenges they may face upon arrival.
- The U.S. government's policies and guidelines pertaining to choosing the final destination for refugees in the United States should be more flexible. Flexibility would ensure that refugees are resettled in communities that are able to assist them and where they will have good chances to succeed.
- The U.S. resettlement program suffers from insufficient targeted programming to meet the needs of the most vulnerable – women, children, the elderly and those suffering from trauma, illness or injury.
- Payment requirements for refugee travel loans should be temporarily suspended.
- There should be a suspension of the practice of reporting to credit bureaus delinquencies in the repayment of refugee travel loans. Negative reports may further compromise the ability of refugees to obtain jobs.
- Temporary relaxation of housing guidelines and requirements will allow resettlement agencies to place refugees in more affordable houses and apartments.

“If we were to design
the resettlement program today,
we would never imagine it functioning
the way it does.”

– **KATHLEEN NEWLAND**

Co-founder of the Migration Policy Institute,
Overseer of the International Rescue Committee
April 29, 2009

VI CONCLUSION

The U.S. government worked with the UN refugee agency to establish a set of criteria to ensure that the most vulnerable Iraqis, as well as those targeted because of their affiliation with Americans, benefit from resettlement on an urgent basis. Refugees who meet these criteria include people with medical needs, the elderly and vulnerable widows, as well as ethnic and religious minorities. The IRC strongly supports such an approach, as it is based on non-discriminatory humanitarian considerations. However, we have determined that the resettlement program in the United States fails individuals with high levels of vulnerability, especially during difficult economic times.

While we found a few notable and positive examples of refugee employment and successful adaptation, most who were interviewed painted a picture of despair and frustration. At the same time, the refugees were deeply appreciative of the opportunity that has been provided to them. They are grateful for the physical security that they and their children now enjoy. When asked, most indicated that even if they had known in advance about the challenges of resettling in the United States, they would still have elected to do it.

The United States has a responsibility to protect Iraqi refugees. Thousands remain in need of resettlement. We have an obligation to seek durable solutions for all of these refugees.

At the same time, we must not fail those who have already come to United States. We must help them integrate into American society and realize their full potential in safety and dignity. The Commission's focus was on Iraqi refugees but most of the challenges outlined in this report apply to all refugees in the United States, not just those from Iraq. The U.S. resettlement program has a proud history of saving millions of lives. It should continue to give a second chance in life to those who cannot return to their homelands and to other truly vulnerable people.

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APPENDIX A

U.S. MEETINGS HELD BY THE DELEGATIONS OF THE IRC COMMISSION ON IRAQI REFUGEES

April 14, 2009

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

- › Meeting at the IRC's Atlanta office with Iraqi refugees newly arrived to Georgia to discuss their immediate resettlement experiences and concerns. Georgia State Refugee Coordinator Michael Singleton was in attendance for this and several of the other meetings held by the delegation.
- › Panel Discussion on Iraqi refugee employment with IRC job developers Masooda Omar, Albert Mbanfu, Rachel Gast, David Oliver and Naima Abdullahi.
- › Meeting with highly skilled Iraqi refugees in the Atlanta area, including a journalist, an accountant, a professional interpreter, two physicians and a pilot.
- › Home visits with Iraqi refugee families.

April 15, 2009

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

- › Visit to see Iraqi refugees in IRC Atlanta Adult Education programs, including computer literacy, English as Second Language, job readiness training and women's literacy classes.
- › Visit to DeKalb International Student Center, where newly arrived refugee students are tested and receive English language instruction, and, as needed, remedial academic support. Meeting with Sandra Nunez, English Language Learners Studies director and Angela Powers, counselor.
- › Visit to Doubletree Hotel Northlake, workplace of two Iraqi refugees.
- › Meeting on community integration of Iraqi refugees with Joe Kernan, community relations officer, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Atlanta District; Ghada Muhanna, director, Alif Insitute; and Mike Sabbagh, lay pastor.
- › DeKalb County Board of Health (DBOH), panel on Iraqi health issues with Alawode Oladele M.D., M.P.H., director, DBOH Refugee Program; Bassam Tomeh, M.D.; Jabber Mohammed, M.D.; Mark Greenberg, healthcare specialist, IRC; Eve Calhoun, R.N., DBOH.
- › Center for Torture and Trauma Survivors (CTTS), DeKalb Board of Health, panel on Iraqi mental health with Ibrahim Kira, Ph.D., director CTTS; Yassar Kanawati, M.D., CTTS; Mohammed Erfan, M.D., CTTS, and with 15 Iraqi torture survivors who shared their stories.

April 22, 2009

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

- › Meeting at the IRC's office with Iraqi professionals, including two civil engineers, a media specialist and two physicians.
- › Meeting at the IRC's office with area health providers to discuss Iraqi refugee health issues and services: Luciana da Fonseca, IRC music therapist; Ron Friesen, MC, LPC, CT, Catholic Charities lead counselor; Maha L. Tomas, M.D.; Carrie A. Senseman, Arizona State Refugee Health Coordinator; Renuka Khurana, M.D., M.P.H., Maricopa Department of Public Health; Bonnie Wood, Refugee Medical Assistance Program, Arizona State Refugee Resettlement Program.
- › Meeting with Iraqi refugees and members of the staff of the IRC's Phoenix Resettlement Office.

April 23, 2009

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

- › Education panel at Montebello Elementary School with Dr. Jeff Sprout, principal; Caroline Yeryomenko, instructor; Marie Guest, English Language Learners instructor; two seventh graders representing their fellow Iraqi students attending Montebello Elementary School and a freshman and two seniors representing Iraqi students attending Washington High School.
- › Employment panel at the IRC's office with Azur Priganica, IRC employment coordinator; Elvira Romero, director of housekeeping at the Phoenix Sheraton Hotel; Eric Laubach, human resources director at JBS Packerland; George Ortiz, director of human resources at GCA Services; Kelsey LeBrun, manager of the Refugee Adjustment Program at Catholic Charities; and Tom Rodriguez, manager, Marriot Desert Ridge.
- › Panel discussion with six Iraqi widows about the struggles they are facing in the United States.
- › Meeting with Arizona State Refugee Coordinator Charles Shipman.
- › Home visits with Iraqi refugees at the Willow Springs Apartment Complex and at one private home.

APPENDIX B

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF IRC ADVOCACY MISSION TO JORDAN, SYRIA, LEBANON AND NORTHERN IRAQ

Authors: Shannon Meehan (Brussels), Dan Tyler (London) and Nathaniel Hurd (Washington)
February 2009

KEY FINDINGS

The situation for some vulnerable Iraqis – refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) or those otherwise affected by the conflict in Iraq – has stabilized and improved slightly over the last year. Although their situation is not a humanitarian emergency, there remains a protection crisis. Refugees still do not enjoy legal status recognized by host governments and have few options that would provide a lasting – or durable – solution to their plight. Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries do not have the right to work and are subject to being exploited. IDPs in Iraq do not enjoy full freedom of movement and can be forcibly expelled from their temporary accommodations. Although security inside Iraq has improved, many Iraqis remain exposed to unacceptable levels of violence. Access to basic services remains inadequate in many areas, including in areas contested between the Central Government of Iraq (GoI) and Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).

REFUGEES

Overall

The situation for some Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon is better than it was a year ago for two reasons, especially for those families where at least one member can work: First, it has become clear to refugees that even though they have no legal status that is recognized by the host government, they face little risk of being forced to relocate to Iraq (“refoulement”). Second, more refugees are able to find work as casual laborers, cleaners, handymen, street vendors and other low-paying jobs. The authorities seem to permit this sort of unauthorized employment and business activity. Unfortunately, working or doing business in the underground economy leave the refugees open to exploitation. They usually earn below-market wages, or receive inadequate in-kind payment, and are at risk of physical and verbal abuse. Most refugees do not make enough money to meet all their basic needs. They still depend on charity to pay rent, buy food, heat their apartments, access medical services and send their children to school.

Numbers

Our experience over the last year and the consensus on the ground indicate that there are fewer refugees than estimates given by the host governments. Most implementing agencies rely on UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registration numbers for planning their assistance: As of February 2009, the number of registered Iraqi refugees totaled 305,681, mostly divided among five countries: Syria (225,530), Jordan (52,656), Lebanon (10,208), Egypt (10,182) and Turkey (8,292). The informal estimates that the IRC advocacy team heard in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon added up to a total of between 800,000 and 1 million refugees, but there is currently no way to rigorously check the number. Regrettably, the debate over numbers leads some donors to question the magnitude – or even the existence – of the situation and the need for a large-scale response. Humanitarians on the ground agree that the scale is large, the needs are many, and the vulnerability is deep and widespread.

Trauma and Violence

The after-effects of violence that refugees experienced in Iraq continue to haunt them in their countries of refuge. Refugees also suffer from a sense of hopelessness: no formal legal status acknowledged by the host governments, no prospects for near-term return to Iraq, no chance of local integration and few prospects for resettlement in a third country. The opportunities for specialized psychological support remain very limited. When children begin school, they are often aggressive and violent with each other and their teachers. Violence against women and children, including domestic violence, is increasing and is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Resettlement

Large-scale resettlement of refugees to third countries is still essential to protect the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees and share the burden with host countries. Systems have been in place and working well. The main impediments to greater efficiency and scaling up of resettlement to the United States, especially from Damascus, are limited U.S. government resources for this purpose and issues of political will and bureaucracy in Washington. From February 2007 to December 2008, the U.S. committed to take 19,000 Iraqi refugees and actually took in 14,590 people, 23% less – and 34% of the 42,633 Iraqi refugees who UNHCR asked the United States to resettle. For fiscal year 2009, the United States has so far committed to accepting at least 17,000 Iraqi refugees, 20% of the 85,274 very vulnerable Iraqi refugees whom UNHCR says need to be resettled worldwide now. Several UN staff members cited the need for more resources and better programs to prepare Iraqis for departure to resettlement countries, manage their expectations and receive and integrate them once they arrive in their country of resettlement.

Returns

Refugees are not returning to Iraq in large numbers. In Syria, only 600 people, and in Jordan only 350 people, asked UNHCR for help voluntarily returning between October and December 2008, as part of the UNHCR program set up to help refugees who want to return. In general, many Iraqi refugees told us – as well as our IRC colleagues in the region and UN agencies – that they came from mixed neighborhoods in Iraq and will not return to a neighborhood that has been “cleansed” and is now inhabited by a single, different ethnic or religious group. Those who came from central or southern Iraq say they will not re-locate to the north. Officials from the UN and other aid agencies say that internally displaced people in the north are straining services and that a large-scale relocation of refugees to the north would be overwhelming. UNHCR’s position is that despite improved security in parts of Iraq, the situation on the ground does not justify encouraging or promoting large-scale returns or relocations to Iraq. UNHCR is able to provide only some minimal support to families that decide to return. While UNHCR and others have begun to prepare for return, they do not anticipate massive refugee return movements in 2009. In Syria, some Iraqis regularly travel back and forth across the border. But even this population does not want to return permanently to Iraq at present.

UN and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs): In refugee-hosting countries, UN agencies – especially UNHCR, which has the mandate to serve as the lead agency – are active, although there are some coordination gaps among UN agencies, and between UN agencies and NGOs, in identifying Iraqi refugees and their needs, and in meeting their needs. International NGOs are also active. In Lebanon especially, many local NGOs and community groups are playing a major role in helping the refugees.

APPENDIX B (continued)

Host Governments and the Government of Iraq

The government of Iraq continues to ignore the immediate needs of Iraqi refugees and their host countries, instead simply encouraging refugees to return home and offering them financial incentives. The government then does not provide the promised incentives once the returnees are back in Iraq. The multiple ministries involved with refugees and internally displaced people often do not coordinate well with each other, and the national government as a whole has proven ineffective at consistently delivering promised aid for returnees. Since the Iraqi national budget heavily relies on oil exports, the recent drop in the price of oil makes it less likely that the government will provide sufficient aid to vulnerable Iraqis, especially returnees. Meanwhile, there may be a hopeful development on the part of host governments: they reportedly are open to discussions with UNHCR about recognizing at least some form of temporary legal status for the refugees.

Donors

Finding adequate funding to help Iraqi refugees remains a challenge. The U.S. government continues to provide the large majority of funding. As an example, in 2008 the United States contributed 67% (\$175 million) of the \$271 million requested by UNHCR for Iraqi operations in the region, while European donors contributed 20% (\$53 million).

Syria

To its credit, the Syrian government has allowed some international NGOs to work in Syria, primarily through memorandums of understanding with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), a body that governs NGO activities. The government of Syria, SARC and the international NGOs are still adjusting to the relatively new experience of having international NGOs in Syria. Some U.S. sanctions imposed on Syria have slowed the ability of international NGOs to help the refugees.

IRAQ

Overall

The IRC staff throughout the country reports that there is still an urgent need for assistance to displaced Iraqis. While the wide-scale humanitarian emergency has abated, there are many pockets of needy, hard-to-reach internally displaced people. This includes people living in areas where control is disputed between the government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government. The IRC staff also reports that security improvements are fragile and uneven across the country and often result from mixed neighborhoods becoming homogeneous through violence.

Violence

It is impossible to know the precise number of violent deaths in Iraq. Nonetheless, the consensus among experts and Iraqis is that the daily death toll has decreased but it is still too high. Violence against women and girls remains a problem throughout the country. The areas that are contested by the government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government have been neglected by both sides and will continue to be flashpoints for violence – especially the oil-rich, historically significant city of Kirkuk – until their status is resolved. Mosul remains one of the most dangerous places in Iraq.

The North's Economy

Although internally displaced persons are a challenge for the authorities, social services and infrastructure, the economic situation in the north is better than in the rest of Iraq. The Kurdish Regional Government has built on the relatively strong progress made during the period of economic sanctions (August 1990-May 2003) and is investing in infrastructure and economic development. But parts of the economy remain fragile and there are ongoing political tensions with the central government.

Overall, the need in the north is for development, not humanitarian relief. Areas lacking enough investment include health care, judicial reform and economic development that reaches all levels of society. There are also high rates of honor crimes in the northern governorates.

NGOs

Because of security concerns, the UN and some international NGOs based in Amman, Jordan, or in the north of Iraq exercise "remote control" of local partners and their operations in central and southern Iraq. Recently, some UN agencies and international NGOs have begun returning to Baghdad. The few international NGOs that operate throughout Iraq receive funds from USAID and/or from the U.S. Department of Defense, and some work closely with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The IRC staff believes strongly that NGOs must remain independent from the Defense Department and PRTs or risk being seen as partial, political, and part of the U.S. counter-insurgency strategy.

United Nations

Partially because of uncertainty over security in Iraq after the expected large-scale departure of U.S. troops and other components of the Multi-National Force-Iraq, it is unclear how and to what extent the UN will choose to operate. For its operations through the present day, the UN has chosen to rely on the multi-national force for protection. In northern Iraq, the UN allows its staff minimal freedom of movement, even in places like Erbil where the security situation is safe enough for them to move about freely. UN headquarters has imposed security restrictions that seem overly restrictive, given the current security environment. These restrictions fundamentally undermine UN effectiveness and credibility. Excessive, "one-size fits all" security restrictions have contributed to the UN focusing mostly on helping government ministries to function better and not enough on working with local communities, civic groups, and civilians outside the government. Members of the UN field staff strongly believe – and have told UN headquarters – that they should be allowed more discretion to manage risks based on assessments made locally and security processes that the UN uses in other parts of the world.

Other Issues

The education of Arab IDPs in the north is a concern. Although they have the option of attending Kurdish-language schools, most are spread across a few Arabic-speaking schools. These schools are over-subscribed and running on three-shift system to accommodate large numbers of pupils.

The central government in Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government disagree over control of land, including Kirkuk. Water remains a particular concern, as low amounts of rainfall in 2008 and early 2009 have created significant shortages. In summary, while the Kurdish region is stable, contested areas are not, and there are sub-districts in which investment is lacking and basic services have been neglected.

APPENDIX B (continued)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Donors

Inside Iraq, work together with the Government of Iraq and humanitarian actors to develop comprehensive strategies and funding plans to help vulnerable Iraqi IDPs and others affected by conflict in Iraq; consult with vulnerable Iraqis and local civic groups; and include clear objectives and measurable indicators of success in strategies.

Donors

Outside Iraq, continue to provide assistance to vulnerable Iraqis wherever they are, as long as is necessary, in the context of comprehensive strategies. Include funding for building and supporting strong families, access to basic services, outreach by the UN, NGOs and local civic organizations, local governance and strengthening governmental capabilities. Continue to aid countries hosting Iraqi refugees and continue discussions with host governments about how to most accurately assess the needs and estimate the numbers of Iraqi refugees. Help for refugees and host countries should be part of comprehensive strategies.

Government Of Iraq And Kurdish Regional Government

For investment and social services, prioritize vulnerable people in rural areas in south, central, and northern governorates and contested areas, people who are often unreached by either government.

Third Countries Of Resettlement

Increase admissions of the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees. The United States should admit 50% of Iraqi refugees whom UNHCR identifies as being in immediate need of resettlement. Ensure that UNHCR, NGOs and others have the resources to identify and refer the most vulnerable Iraqis for resettlement. Provide adequate resources for refugees once they arrive in their third country of resettlement, and fully fund relevant government agencies and NGOs helping the refugees resettle.

Donors, Refugee-Hosting Countries, Government Of Iraq, United Nations And NGOs

Help create conditions in Iraq that will allow for eventual return of refugees and internally displaced people. Do not encourage returns to Iraq until returns can be truly safe, voluntary and sustainable. Do not encourage or force returning refugees to relocate within Iraq, and do not force them to move to northern Iraq if they are not originally from northern Iraq. Base return policies on consultations with displaced Iraqis themselves.

United Nations

Base UN security and staffing decisions on the actual security situation and risk assessments made in the field. In addition to helping to strengthen governmental entities, prioritize working with civic and local community groups.

NGOs

Engage with the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Treasury Department to develop regulations for U.S. NGOs working in Syria that better reflect the work and challenges of the NGOs. The financial volume of the transactions of international NGOs is minimal when compared to private companies.

APPENDIX C

UNHCR STATISTICAL REPORT: SUBMISSIONS OF IRAQI NATIONALS BY COUNTRY OF RESETTLEMENT

Middle East Region (including Turkey & Iran), Iraqi Resettlement Program, April 24, 2009

January 01- April 24, 2009

Total Submission	15,534	
to US	11,800	% total 76
to non-US	3,734	24
Germany	1,453	9
Canada	767	5
Australia	513	2
United Kingdom	364	3
Sweden	366	2
Netherlands	114	1
France	4	0
Others*	153	1

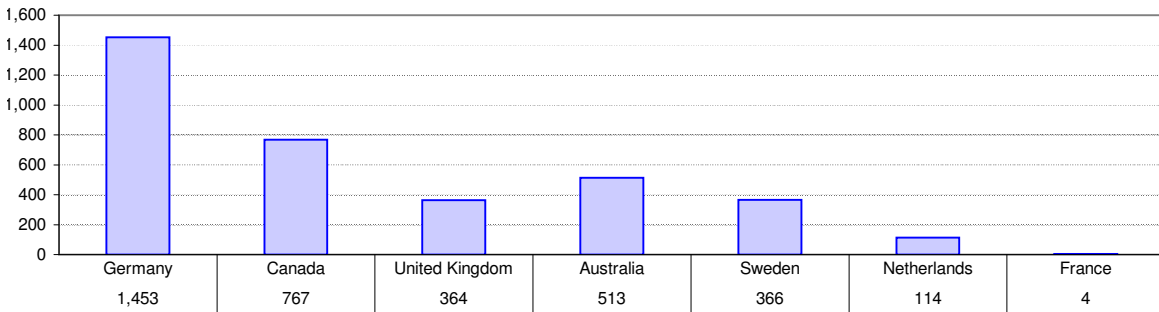
*Others: Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Belgium

From 2007** to April 24, 2009

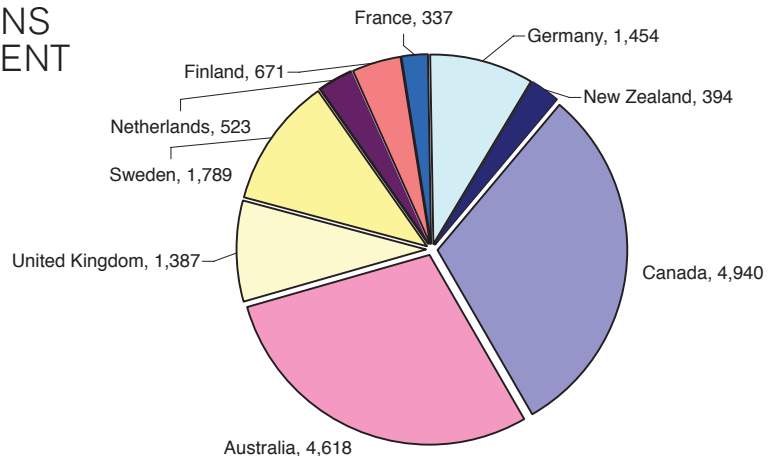
Total Submission	69,562	
to US	52,560	% total 76
to non-US	17,002	24
Canada	4,940	7
Australia	4,618	7
United Kingdom	1,387	2
Sweden	1,789	3
Germany	1,454	2
Finland	671	1
Others***	2,143	3

**From Feb/Mar 2007

2009 SUBMISSION BY COUNTRY OF RESETTLEMENT (other than US)



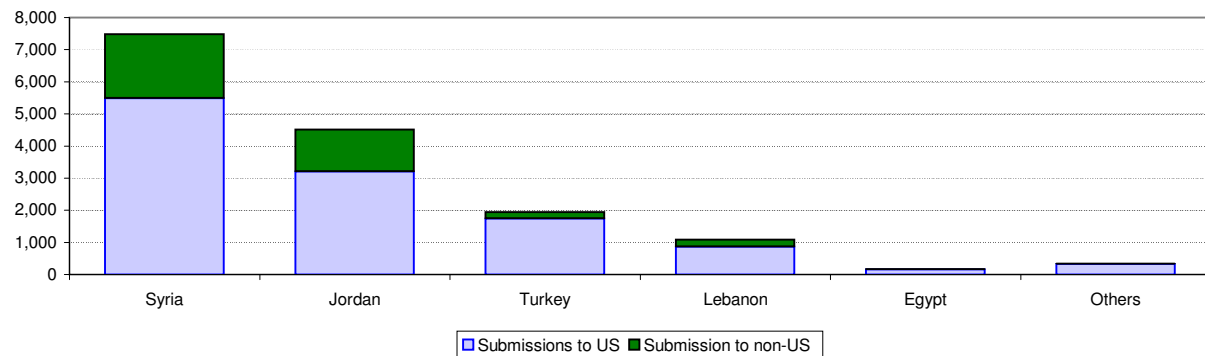
2007-YTD 2009 SUBMISSIONS BY COUNTRY OF RESETTLEMENT



APPENDIX C (continued)

UNHCR SUBMISSIONS BY COUNTRY OF ASYLUM

January 01–April 24, 2009



Country of Asylum	Submissions to U.S.	Submissions to Non-U.S.	Total
Syria	5,489	1,994	7,483
Jordan	3,209	1,309	4,518
Turkey	1,747	197	1,944
Lebanon	867	222	1,089
Egypt	164	2	166
Others*	324	10	334
Total	11,800	3,734	15,534

*Others = IRN, YEM, MOR, UAE

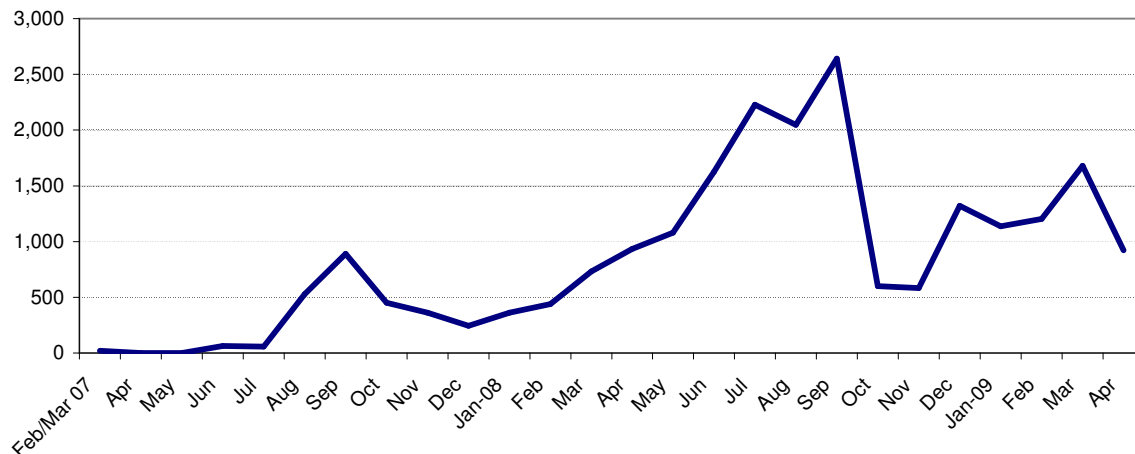
DEPARTURES TO THE US 2007- APRIL 24, 2009

Month	2007	2008*	2009*
January	---	361	1,137
February	19**	438	1,203
March		733	1,679
April	1	933	922 (As of April 22)
May	1	1,078	
June	63	1,625	
July	57	2,228	
August	529	2,046	
September	889	2,642	
October	450	601	
November	362	854	
December	245	1,321	
Total	2,597	14,860	4,941

* UNHCR Referrals

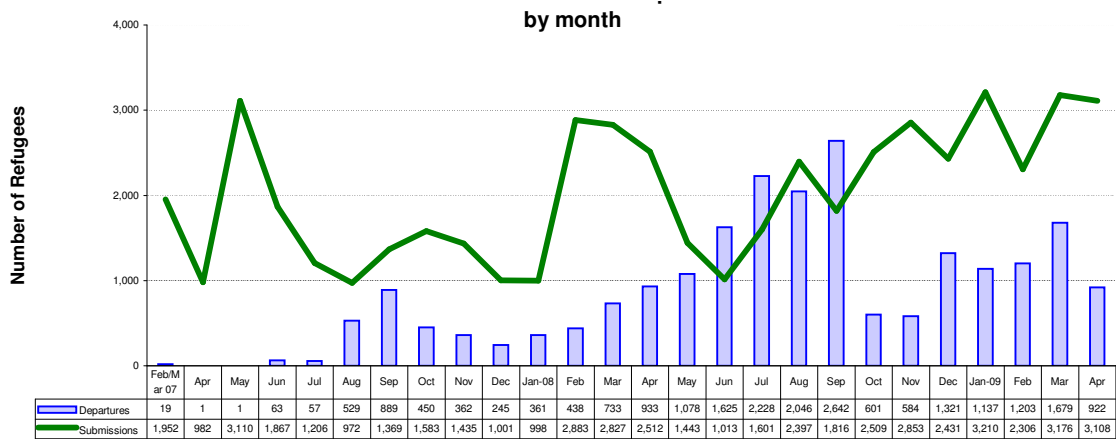
**combined figure from February and March totals

DEPARTURES OF IRAQIS TO US

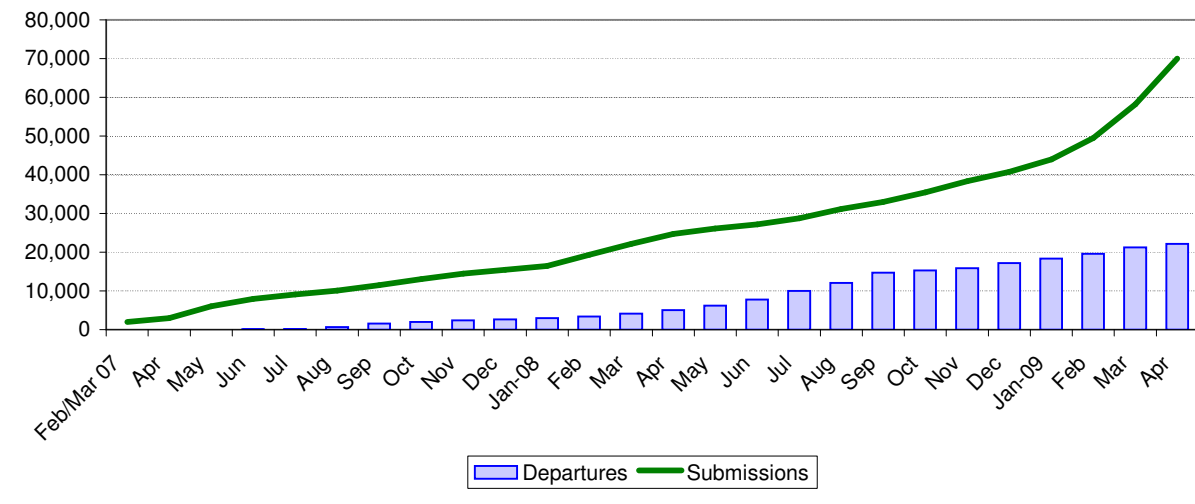


APPENDIX C (continued)

UNHCR SUBMISSIONS VS. ARRIVALS OF IRAQIS TO THE UNITED STATES



CUMULATIVE UNHCR SUBMISSIONS VS. ARRIVALS OF IRAQIS TO THE UNITED STATES



APPENDIX D

REFUGEES STORIES: IN DIRE STRAITS

APRIL 2009

PHOENIX



Hajer is a refugee from Iraq. She is a single mother of three children, ages 16, 12, and 4. She arrived in Phoenix in May 2008 and has been trying to become self-sufficient and provide for her children since her arrival. Hajer does not speak any English, but she has been attending English classes.

Hajer enrolled in the Matching Grant program, which combines cash assistance with employment services to ensure that refugees find a job in four months, and went to several job interviews.

In December 2008, she was accepted as a trainee-volunteer at a local day care center and was permitted to bring her four-year-old to work. She began receiving some small payments but then fell ill and lost her job. She is currently seeking employment and continues to make ends meet on public assistance, which includes food stamps (\$588 monthly), medical coverage and cash

assistance (\$418 monthly, soon to be reduced by 20 percent).

Hajer's monthly rent is \$816, not including utilities. The cash assistance that her family of four receives from the state is enough to cover only 51 percent of her rent. For the past three months, Hajer has been relying on assistance from a state-funded grant that covers the difference between cash assistance and monthly rent. This funding is running out and will cover the family for another three months at most.

While there is subsidized housing in Phoenix, the waiting lists are very long. Hajer, like most refugees, needs to find a job immediately. She has no safety net in the United States.

APPENDIX D (continued)

PHOENIX



Kumar, with his wife, Kamala Devi, came to Phoenix from Nepal in September 2008 with his wife and 15-month-old son. They are Bhutanese refugees. Neither Kumar nor his wife speaks English, but both are attending English language classes three times a week. They also take part in job readiness workshops.

A tailor by training, Kumar has been unable to find a suitable job, despite the efforts of the IRC's employment team and members of the Bhutanese community. He has become quite depressed about his family's prospects in the United States and like many refugees wonders if he made the right decision to come here. Kumar's family is currently living on public assistance, including food stamps (\$463 monthly), medical assistance and cash assistance (\$347 monthly, soon to be reduced by 20 percent).

Rent for the Kumar's apartment is \$632, not including utilities. The state cash assistance for a family of three is enough to cover only 55 percent of the rent. For the past three months, Kumar has been relying on assistance from a state-funded grant that covers the difference between cash assistance and monthly rent. This funding is running out and will likely cover Kumar and his family for only five more months at most. The public cash assistance will cover the family for a total of only eight months.

CHARLOTTESVILLE



Lian Lam Thang, a refugee from Burma, arrived in July 2008 with his pregnant wife and their one-year-old daughter. His baby son was born in September. They were enrolled in the Matching Grant program, which combines cash assistance with employment services to ensure that refugees find a job in four months, but were unable to find a position.

He was finally hired in February, seven months after arrival, by a nursery 45 miles from his home.

The IRC gave him a donated car and paid for his car insurance. He is responsible for driving five fellow refugees to and from work each day.

The IRC has spent a total of \$11,606 on the family, including \$1,125 in locally raised funds, for rent, car insurance, and work clothes. In the past, the IRC found jobs in the Charlottesville area for 100 percent of those enrolled in the government's Matching Grant program and saved private funds for the more vulnerable refugees whose circumstances prevent them from beginning work in such a short period of time. For the IRC, the flexibility to serve clients according to their needs and to supplement their federal assistance has become a thing of the past.

BOISE

Khaled was a truck driver in Baghdad for a U.S. military contractor — a job that made him, his wife and their eight children a target for the militias. Now the family has been residing in Boise for nearly four months. They are living on federal assistance, which includes \$1,100 a month for rent and utilities and \$1,200 a month in food stamps. They are also covered by Medicaid.

Like other refugees, Khaled and his family are eligible for federal assistance for only eight months. Then they have to support themselves. While Khaled is eager to work, he has not yet been able to secure any kind of employment. Because of the recession, jobs in Boise and the surrounding Treasure Valley are difficult to find.

Khaled says he can't sleep at night while facing the possibility that when the money runs out, he might not be able to feed his eight children.

APPENDIX D (continued)

ATLANTA February 2009



The Tha Bae Kaw family arrived in the United States in early September 2008. The family consists of Tha Bae, his wife, Kla, and their five children, ranging in age from two to eleven.

Tha Bae and his wife were farmers in Burma. Both are strong, healthy and eager to work and support their family. Neither of them had access to formal education and they are not literate in their native language, Karen.

The family receives \$444 per month in cash assistance, in addition to food stamps and Medicaid coverage. The monthly rent for their three-bedroom apartment is \$830. The rent alone exceeds their cash income by \$386 per month, so they have no money left to cover utilities, transportation or other non-food expenses. Since November, the family has contributed virtually all of their cash assistance towards their rent. The

IRC has been supplementing this amount with its own funds.

Tha Bae and Kla have been completely cooperative in all aspects of their resettlement. They attend English classes and life skills workshops regularly. They have both gone on job interviews but have not yet received any job offers.

The IRC can no longer assist them with rent and utilities, and if one of the parents does not find employment soon, their financial situation will be critical. Their IRC job developer is hopeful that Kla will receive a job offer shortly, since she has passed the preliminary screening for a job in the kitchen of the county jail. However, considering the size of the family and their expenses, both parents will need to work in order to be self-sufficient.

APPENDIX E

TORTURE'S TOLL ON IRAQI REFUGEES

This summary was prepared by the Center for Torture and Trauma Survivors in Atlanta. It lists the symptoms reported at the Center by torture survivors and their families who were among refugees resettled in the United States in recent years. It shows that, statistically, the Iraqis fared the worst of the four refugee populations that had significant numbers represented among the Center's clients.

	Bhutanese	Burmese	Iraqi	Somali	Others	Total/Average
Number of refugees	33	58	72	12	26	201
Depression	43.3%	31.5%	59.1%	41.6%		
Anxiety	43.3%	31.5%	60%	33.4%		
Somatization	43.3%	31.9%	63.1%	58.3%		
Hearing voices and seeing things other people do not hear or see	51.6%	41.8%	66.7%	83.4%		52.6%
Have enemies follow him/her around	48.4%	40%	62.6%	50%		51.6%
Decreased memory and concentration	61.3%	27.8%	69.7%	25%		48.7%
Suicidal thoughts or actions	63.3%	43.6%	66.7%	75%		55.4%
Felt like taking drugs or smoking	61.3%	40%	70.8%	66.7%		53.4%
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	33.3%	3.8%	54.7%	14.3%		33.9%

APPENDIX F PLANNING THE FUTURE

Dr. Samer Hassan, age 28, arrived in the United States on September 18, 2008, with his mother, father and grandmother. An Iraqi refugee, he was resettled in Phoenix by Catholic Charities and had spent two years in Jordan prior to his arrival. Dr. Hassan has a medical degree and was studying to become a specialist in ophthalmology before leaving Jordan. In April 2009 he prepared this outline showing his employment options in the field of health care, along with the associated costs and licensing requirements. It is reproduced here with his permission.

Exam	Period	Dates	Exam Cost	Study Cost	Requirements
Step 1	6 months	April, 2009	\$695	\$3300 Kaplan	Full-time study 6 days/week 12 hour/day
Step 2 CK	6 months	Sept, 2009	\$695	\$3300 Kaplan	Study
STEP 2 CS	2 months	April, 2010	\$1,255	\$1000 Kaplan	Study
ECFMG	2 months	July, 2010	\$500		Apply Online
NRMP	2 months	Sept, 2010	\$500		
Interviewing	3 months	Nov-Jan 2011	\$3,000 each	At least 3 interviews	Making trips to different states
NRMP Result	2 months	March, 2011			Wait for result
Start Residency	1 month	April, 2011			Prepare for work
TOTAL	2 years	2011		\$20, 245	
US Residency Training	3-8 years	2015			Paying loan bills
STEP 3 US License		2016			US Physician

Profession	Exam	Eligibility Requirements	Program Period
Physician Assistant	PANCE	You must graduate from a program accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) as a Physician Assistant Program or a Surgeon Assistant Program.	27 months, full-time
Registered Nurse	NCLEX-RN	Students must graduate from an approved nursing program	2-3 years
Surgical Technologist	AST	Graduate from an accredited Surgical Technologist program	30 credits
Medical Assistant	AAMA	Graduate from an accredited medical assisting program	10 months

APPENDIX G

SUGGESTED READING:

NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE OF IRAQI REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES

Finally in the land of the free, but where are the jobs?

CNN.com, May 10, 2009 10:30 a.m. EST, U.S., 1372 words, by Joe Sterling

For once-celebrated Iraqi, life in U.S. one of lost hope

The Washington Post, May 10, 2009 Sunday, A-SECTION; Pg. A01, 1370 words, by Brigid Schulte, Staff Writer

Let's not neglect refugees' needs

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (Wisconsin), May 7, 2009 Thursday, Opinion, by Paul Stumme-Diers and Ralston H. Deffenbaugh Jr.

Refugee resettlement requires reform

Providence Journal-Bulletin (Rhode Island), April 30, 2009 Thursday by Ralston H. Deffenbaugh Jr. and Heather L. Feltman, Section: Commentary, Pg. 6

Refugees from Iraq in new war; professionals expecting American dream fight nightmare of recession.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Georgia), April 29, 2009 Wednesday, NEWS; Pg. 1204 words, by Moni Basu, Staff

Safe, but not secure: Iraqi refugees struggle to make it in Bay Area

Contra Costa Times (California), April 23, 2009 Thursday, NEWS, 1061 words, by Ken McLaughlin Mercury News

Refugees are finding fewer job opportunities in central New York

The Syracuse Post-Standard Blog (blog.syracuse), April 20, 2009, by Maureen Sieh

Utah seeks more dollars to help Iraqi refugees

The Salt Lake Tribune, April 4, 2009 Saturday, NEWS; State, 1061 words, by Julia Lyon

Visa for Iraqis, Afghans who worked with U.S. troops offer little to help build a new life

The Kansas City Star (Missouri), March 19, 2009 Thursday, Domestic News, 974 words, by Malcolm Garcia, McClatchy Newspapers

Refugee tangled in bureaucracy

The Cincinnati Enquirer (Ohio), March 15, 2009 Sunday, METRO; Pg. 1B, 2335 words, by Sheila McLaughlin

Iraqis rethink American dream. Many who work with U.S. agencies and media are newly eligible to emigrate. But the sour economy here gives them pause.

Los Angeles Times, March 10, 2009 Tuesday, MAIN NEWS; Foreign Desk; Part A; Pg. 1, 1169 words, by Tina Susman

Refugees in Dallas struggle to find their place as jobs dry up

The Dallas Morning News (Texas), March 1, 2009, By Jessica Meyers.

APPENDIX G (continued)

Refugees are finding it tough to land a job as Houston's economy slows

The Houston Chronicle, February 26, 2009 Thursday, B; Pg. 1, 723 words, by Susan Carroll

Healing wounds: treating refugees' mental health needs

Boise Weekly (Idaho), February 25, 2009 - March 3, 2009, NEWS; Pg. 6, 1506 words, by Sadie Babits

Evicted again

Boise Weekly (Idaho), February 18, 2009 - February 24, 2009, NEWS; Pg. 6, 902 words,
by Nathaniel Hoffman

Inland frustrations: Iraqi refugees learning language, finding jobs; hard task and times; families fleeing violence of war bring hopes for peaceful lives

The Press Enterprise (Riverside, CA.), February 18, 2009, Wednesday, A SECTION; Pg. A01, 1555 words,
by David Olson

For Refugees, recession makes hard times even harder

The New York Times, January 30, 2009, by Erik Ekholm

Impoverished Iraqi refugees must rebuild lives 'from scratch'

The Salt Lake Tribune (Utah), January 5, 2009 Monday, NEWS; State, 1523 words, by Julia Lyon

Once among their nation's elite, some Iraqi refugees have found economic hardship and loneliness in Md.

The Baltimore Sun, December 30, 2008 Tuesday, TELEGRAPH; Pg. 1A, 1779 words,
by Matthew Hay Brown

U.S. slow to meet needs, refugees say

The Baltimore Sun, December 29, 2008 Monday, TELEGRAPH; Pg. 1A, 2028 words,
by Matthew Hay Brown

America provides refuge, but not always prosperity

The Seattle Times, December 9, 2008 Tuesday, News; Pg. A1, 1240 words,
by Lornet Turnbull, staff reporter

Iraqi refugees flowing into U.S.; The numbers admitted have risen sharply. Among them is a family struggling to adjust to life in L.A.

Los Angeles Times, November 29, 2008 Saturday, CALIFORNIA; Metro Desk; Part B; Pg. 1, 1191 words,
by Teresa Watanabe



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