

Iraq: Refugees Speak of Escape from Hell

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Refugees Speak of Escape from Hell

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DAMASCUS, Apr 11 (IPS) – Refugees from Iraq scattered around Damascus describe hellish conditions in the country they managed to leave behind.

 “I used to work with the Americans near Kut (in the south),” Sa’ad Hussein, a 34-year-old electrical engineer told IPS. “I worked for Kellogg, Brown & Root in construction of an Iraqi base there, until I returned to Baghdad and found a death threat written on a paper which was slipped under my door. I had to flee.”

Hussein, who left three months back, described Baghdad as a “city of ghosts” where black banners of death announcements can be seen hanging on most streets. The city, he said, lives on an hour of electricity a day, and there are no jobs to be had.

“I was an ex-captain in the Iraqi Army, and I think that’s why I was threatened,” he said. Asked how many of his former army colleagues had also received death threats, he replied, “All of them.” He said it was not safe for him to go back to the Iraqi Army because it was likely he would be killed.

“Most of the deaths are due to the Iraqi politicians and their militias,” he added.

Security, electricity and potable water supply, healthcare and unemployment are all much worse than during the reign of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, refugees say.

“The Americans are detaining so many people,” Ali Hassan, a 41-year-old man from the Hay Jihad area of Baghdad told IPS. “My brother was killed by Shia militiamen after he refused to give them the keys to empty Sunni houses we were looking after.”

Hassan, a Shia who fled Baghdad just three months ago told IPS, “Now I can’t go back. I am a refugee here, and I still don’t feel secure because I still fear the Mehdi Army.” The Mehdi Army is the militia of Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

“So many Iraqis never leave their homes now because they are too afraid to go out due to the militias,” Abdul Abdulla, a 68-year-old man who fled Baghdad with his family three months ago told IPS.

Abdulla said Shia militia members waited on the outskirts of his neighbourhood to detain

anyone trying to leave.

"We stay in our homes, but even then some people have been pulled out of their own houses," he added. "These death squads arrived after (former U.S. ambassador John) Negroponte arrived. And the Iraqi Government is definitely involved because they depend on them (militias)."

✖ "I was injured because I was near a car bomb which killed my daughter," Eman Abdul Rahid, a 46-year-old mother from Baghdad who fled her home late last year told IPS. "There is killing, and the threat of killing, and explosions daily in Baghdad."

Rahid said the Bush administration was responsible for creating the situation.

"America is the reason why Iraq was invaded, so we would like the American administration to give aid to us refugees," she added. "I would like people to read this and tell Bush to help us."

"Things are getting so much worse in Iraq," Salim Hamad, a refugee in the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus told IPS.

"There is a big difference between those who left four years ago and those who left four days ago," Hamad said. "Everything in Iraq is based on sectarianism now and there is no protection — neither from the Americans nor the Iraqi government."

The U.S. military claimed last week that there had been a 26 percent drop in sectarian bloodshed in the capital in March after the Baghdad Security plan was launched in February.

But, U.S. military spokesperson Maj. Gen. William Caldwell told reporters at a press conference in Baghdad that violence throughout the rest of the country has not reduced.

"When you look overall at the country at large," he said, "you have seen...not a great reduction that we had wanted to see thus far."

More than 600 people were reported killed in sectarian violence across Iraq last week, and car bombings continue to hit the capital.

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