Living in Limbo: Iraqi Refugees and U.S. Resettlement

Available Spokespersons

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AUTHOR OF THE REPORT

Jesse Bernstein

As Senior Associate in the Refugee Protection Program, Jesse Bernstein is responsible for
developing and implementing strategies to advance the rights of refugees and internally
placed people, with a particular focus on Iraqi refugees and displaced persons. Jesse also
works with HRF’s Fighting Discrimination Program to address hate crimes and bias-motivated
violence which targets refugees, displaced persons and migrants.

Prior to joining HRF, Jesse worked as a Protection Officer with the United Nations High
Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bosnia, where he worked to strengthen the support
provided to displaced persons and returnees. He also spent two years in Geneva as a Country
Analyst with the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, where
he developed advocacy and research projects on internal displacement in Africa’s Great Lakes
region. Jesse has worked with local human rights organizations in different capacities in Uganda,
South Africa and Egypt. He has published articles and papers on refugee rights in a number of
contexts.

Jesse graduated from Sarah Lawrence College. He earned a Masters of Science in Human Rights
with distinction from the London School of Economics, where he authored two dissertations on,
respectively, sexual orientation and refugee protection, and the role of national courts in
protecting the rights of displaced persons.

IRAQI REFUGEES

Ms. Sawsan Aldawodi, Iraqi refugee resettled in New Jersey

Ms. Sawsan Aldawodi arrived in New Jersey as a resettled Iraqi refugee in 2008. In 2006, she
and her family fled Iraq to Cairo following threats she had received because of her work with the
U.S. Agency for International Development in Iraq. While in Cairo, struggled to support herself
and her family while awaiting resettlement to the U.S. Ms. Aldawodi also worked as a volunteer
providing assistance to hundreds of Iraqi refugees who were applying for refugee resettlement to
the United States.
Ms. Aldawodi’s family was approved for resettlement in the United States in June 2008. The security checks for her and her daughters took an additional two months. Her husband’s check was not cleared until December, so the family was forced to split up for several months. Since their arrival more than two years ago, Ms. Aldawodi – an engineer by training – has been unable to find permanent employment, leading to stress and hardship for her and her family.

Mr. Mohammed Al-Karkhi, Iraqi journalist resettled in New York

Mr. Al-Karkhi worked for NBC in Iraq and sent his wife and three children to Damascus in 2006, following a dramatic increase in violence inside Iraq. In 2007, Mr. Al-Karkhi was notified that he had been identified as “working with the Americans” by a militia group and would be targeted, so he fled Iraq to join his family in Syria. Following five different interviews with UNHCR, plus the required interviews with the U.S. government, and with the help of a letter of recommendation from Tom Brokaw, the family was finally approved for resettlement in the United States. The total process took one year. They received 10 days’ notice before their departure date – necessitating quick scrambling to prepare to move the family. In June 2008 Mr. Al-Karkhi and his family arrived in New York and were resettled by a local resettlement agency. After several months without employment – during which time he considered returning to Iraq out of sheer desperation - Mr. Al-Karkhi finally found work with a news organization based in Amman.

EXPERTS

Former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker

Ambassador Crocker served in Iraq from 2007 to 2009, capping off a Foreign Service career of more than 37 years. He served as an Ambassador five times: Iraq (2007-2009), Pakistan (2004-2007), Syria (1998-2001), Kuwait (1994-1997), and Lebanon (1990-1993). He was a member of the faculty at the National War College 2003-2004. From May to August 2003, he was in Baghdad as the first Director of Governance for the Coalition Provisional Authority. He served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs from August 2001 to May 2003.

In 2007, Ambassador Crocker sent two key cables from Baghdad to Washington that raised urgent concerns about the U.S. resettlement program for Iraqis – highlighting the serious dangers faced by Iraqi employees at Embassy Baghdad as well as the very long processing times for refugee applicants, particularly the security check process, which he called a “bottleneck.” These cables were leaked to the Washington Post, covered in front-page articles, and were key triggers leading to dramatically increased U.S. efforts to resettle Iraqi refugees, including those with U.S. ties.

Ambassador Crocker is currently the Dean and Executive Professor at the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, where he also holds the Edward and Howard Kruse Endowed Chair.
**Eric Blinderman, International Litigation Counsel, Proskauer Rose LLP**

Eric Blinderman leads the *pro bono* efforts at Proskauer to provide legal representation to hundreds of U.S.-affiliated Iraqis through the List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies. Mr. Blinderman served in Iraq from March 2004 until December 2006, first as an Associate General Counsel of the Coalition Provisional Authority and later as Chief Legal Counsel and Associate Deputy to the Regime Crimes Liaison’s Office. During his time in Iraq, he advised senior members of the United States, Coalition, and Iraqi governments on matters of public international law, commercial law reform, and international criminal law. He worked principally with the Iraqi High Tribunal as it tried members of the former regime (including Saddam Hussein) for atrocities committed against the Iraqi people. In May 2007, the Department of Justice presented Mr. Blinderman a Special Commendation Award for his service in Iraq.

At Proskauer, Mr. Blinderman handles a variety of matters including, but not limited to, Foreign Corrupt Practice Act matters and extradition disputes. He handles matters before the International Criminal Court and other ad-hoc tribunals, complex international commercial arbitrations subject to a variety of arbitral rules, and represents sovereign states before the International Court of Justice and other international bodies.

**Leonard A. Leo, Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)**

Under the chairmanship of Mr. Leo, USCIRF has undertaken multiple initiatives on Iraq. Iraq remains a country of particular concern to USCIRF, and they continue to report on the ongoing persecution of religious minorities in Iraq.

USCIRF is an independent, bi-partisan U.S. federal government commission. Its Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.