

Transcript

Station: **RADIO NATIONAL** Date: **14/02/2007**
Program: **BREAKFAST** Time: **08:05 AM**
Compere: **FRAN KELLY** Summary ID: **C00025293492**
Item: **TWO IRAQI REFUGEES TELL WHY THEY LEFT IRAQ.**

**INTERVIEWEES: JAMES CARLETON, ABC REPORTER;
ANONYMOUS IRAQI REFUGEE (NAME WITHHELD AND
TRANSLATED); IBRAHIM, IRAQI REFUGEE (TRANSLATED)**

Demographics:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people	ABs	GBs
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

FRAN KELLY: Earlier in the program, we looked at that tit-for-tat slanging match between John Howard and Kevin Rudd over Iraq and what would take place in Iraq if all the Coalition soldiers withdrew within a year. The Prime Minister warns it would provoke a descent into civil war.

Well, next month marks the fourth anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq. In that time, the country has suffered a humanitarian catastrophe, with estimates that two million Iraqis have fled their homeland and another 1.8 million are internally displaced, as they head for safer territory within Iraq.

Last year, Australia settled about 2500 Iraqi refugees and James Carlton met up with two of them, to get their first-hand account of life in Baghdad these days.

ADELAIDE	BRISBANE	CANBERRA	HOBART	MELBOURNE	PERTH	SYDNEY
08 8362 2323	07 3259 2100	02 6124 5200	03 6224 2000	03 9348 9191	08 9228 5800	02 9318 4000

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REPORTER: I'm at the Australian Centre for Languages, in the western Sydney suburb of Fairfield. It's a classroom, every seat is filled with students learning English full-time. There are teenagers, 70-year-olds and every age in between.

For the Iraqis in the room, behind the grammar and vocabulary, there are harrowing stories of death squads and kidnapping and persecution.

The man I'm with now doesn't want his name used and he needs the help of a translator, but his English is good enough for him to share his proudest achievement, safely bringing his wife and kids to Australia six months ago.

UNIDENTIFIED: Three children, three daughters; 15, and twins 11.

REPORTER: Twins?

UNIDENTIFIED: Yes.

REPORTER: And the rest of your family, brothers, parents, sisters?

UNIDENTIFIED: Iraq.

UNIDENTIFIED [TRANSLATOR]: They are all in Iraq.

REPORTER: Do you want them to come here to Australia?

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UNIDENTIFIED: Yes. I very worried.

REPORTER: And he has good reason to be. He's a member of Iraq's Assyrian community. Assyrians are Christians and, like most Iraqi minorities, they have a very sad story to tell, both before and after the war began.

Today, this is compounded by the perception that as Christians, they're aligned with a US crusade against Iraq.

UNIDENTIFIED [TRANSLATOR]: And now the Christian life in Baghdad, it's a horrible situation for a Christian. They can't live a normal life at all and, for some, they think that Christians are the Americans' friends.

REPORTER: The crusaders?

UNIDENTIFIED [TRANSLATOR]: In the mosques, that's what they're saying. But they are not, they are wrong. We are not crusaders.

REPORTER: Now tell me what happened to your daughter?

UNIDENTIFIED [TRANSLATOR]: Because I was working as an air-conditioning fixer in different places around Baghdad, my daughter was kidnapped in front of our house by Islam party.

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REPORTER: A Shiite militia maybe?

UNIDENTIFIED: I don't know.

REPORTER: And then what happened?

UNIDENTIFIED [TRANSLATOR]: They asked me for 40,000 American dollars. He tried to get some money from his friends, family. He sold his wife's gold. And I collect about 15,000 American dollars. I paid that party, Islamic party, and they gave me my daughter back. She stayed 10 days with them.

REPORTER: And what happened when you were re-united?

UNIDENTIFIED [TRANSLATOR]: I was as though I was reborn again and for my daughter I was very happy.

And another incident happened to me at the same time. He tried to complain to the government but no one helped me. Because they knew that I'd reported to the police and the government, they threatened and they, you know, attacked my house with guns and they threatened me that I have to leave the country. And I thought that this is the best time to leave.

REPORTER: A refugee from Baghdad, who doesn't want his name broadcast.

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Sitting alongside him in the same English class, a 23-year-old, also a Christian from Baghdad. We'll call him Ibrahim. He came to Australia eight months ago, after his life was changed forever the day he met his friends for lunch.

IBRAHIM [TRANSLATOR]: I was walking with my friends and a bomb came, you know, near me, in the street.

REPORTER: You were hit?

IBRAHIM: Yes.

IBRAHIM [TRANSLATOR]: Yes, my both legs, my hands and my stomach and bladder were all injured.

REPORTER: And your friends, did they survive.

IBRAHIM [TRANSLATOR]: Two died and one lived. I was at the hospital for a month. But the hospital was all stolen[sic], it was vacant, so no doctors, no nurses for treatment. So my mother, she took some medicine and she came back to me at the hospital and she gave me all the treatment that I needed, medicine, injection.

REPORTER: She made the injections herself?

IBRAHIM [TRANSLATOR]: Yes, herself. She gave me all the treatment. My mother helps the soldiers as well, the injured soldiers at the hospital as well.

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IBRAHIM: Iraqi.

IBRAHIM [TRANSLATOR]: Iraqi soldiers.

REPORTER: Surviving the indiscriminate bombings in Baghdad is one thing, after Ibrahim recovered, his life was personally threatened as well.

IBRAHIM [TRANSLATOR]: Because he was working with Americans and he was threatened. That's why he left Iraq.

REPORTER: What did you do for the Americans?

IBRAHIM [TRANSLATOR]: A cook.

REPORTER: A cook. Who threatened you?

IBRAHIM: Mujahedeen.

REPORTER: Yeah. What about your family?

IBRAHIM [TRANSLATOR]: The whole family left Iraq. Yeah. His mother and sister, they're in Australia. His brother in Canada, his... and his father, dead.

REPORTER: And once he's finished learning English, Ibrahim plans to continue working as a cook here in Australia.

And the father whose daughter was kidnapped, well, he too says he's extremely hopeful and optimistic.

UNIDENTIFIED [TRANSLATOR]: And now I'm studying at **ACL**, I'm very happy. I'm glad that I'm learning and my wife as well is learning and she's very happy. And my kids are studying in the schools. A beautiful country, multicultural country, everyone is living in freedom. And if there is a great word, then it must be Australia.

FRAN KELLY: That's an unnamed Iraqi Assyrian Christian, now a refugee in this country. He didn't want to be named. He was speaking there with James Carlton.

It is estimated that 40 per cent of all Assyrians have actually fled Iraq since the war began. But they're not the only minority fleeing the war-torn country and tomorrow we'll hear part two of James' report about another Iraqi minority facing a forced exodus from their homeland.

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