

By God

Six Days in Amman

Nuri Kino



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Cover

It says on the front: *1st Battalion 6th Infantry, Unity is strength, "Regular"*, on the backside: *Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003*, and a map of Iraq. Two rifles cross each other at the bottom, below the map, with the words: *By God*.

"The Medal" is the only thing Alice's widower has that proves that she worked for the American troops doing the laundry. When he asked the Americans to write a certificate to prove she worked for them they refused and told him it was for his own good.

Prologue

It is time for governments all over the world to know what happened to the Assyrians in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The Assyrians experienced persecution on ethnical grounds during the time of the dictator, but they were allowed to practise their religion freely as long as they changed their names to Arabic or Kurdish names and agreed to be designated only as Christians. A new systematic form of persecution started half a year after the American invasion, its only goal being the obliteration of Iraq's indigenous population. Churches were bombed, priests were brutally killed, nuns were raped, children were kidnapped. And it is still going on. Not one day passes without reports about persecution of Christian Assyrians, who are also called Syriacs and Chaldeans.

Entire areas have now been emptied of Iraq's indigenous population, the Assyrians. The Dora district in Baghdad is one example. It was a "Christian" paradise known for its vibrant culture but has now become a black district. Almost all Christians have either been killed or have fled from it.

Iraqi politicians feel hopeless because of the brain drain of Iraq. Assyrians happen to be the most well educated group in the country. Iraq cannot be rebuilt without individuals with the necessary competence. Many professional groups have almost entirely disappeared from the country. Doctors are one such example, as almost all of them are now to be found in the neighbouring countries of Syria, Jordan and Turkey.

Award winning filmmaker and freelance journalist Nuri Kino offered to travel to Amman, the capital of Jordan, and meet Assyrian families from Iraq. His mission was to penetrate deeper than daily articles and reports in order to hear the refugees' own stories. The report is written as a diary and it contains a lot of relevant facts about the war, the persecution and the political complications. All Iraqi groups have suffered from the war, but the consequences for the indigenous population are devastating and cannot be labelled anything shorter of ethnic cleansing.

To be a non-Muslim means a sure death in many places in today's Iraq.

Dr Samir Afram and Nuri Ayaz
Mor Afrems Foundation

Author's foreword

"We must go there. We must do something! We cannot just sit here and let them suffer", said Sister Hatune Dogan after my lecture in Germany on the 17 March organized by the Mor Afrem foundation.

The newly established Mor Afrem foundation is a relief organization aiming at making a difference for Assyrians (also called Syriacs and Chaldeans) all over the world, and especially in the Middle East.

Two weeks after my lecture I found myself on a plane heading to Jordan along with Sister Hatune. She is studying for her doctor's degree in the field of theology at the Oxford University, running her own relief organization called "Helping hand to the poor" and is in the process of becoming a nun.

I stumbled across four big suitcases filled with medicines, clothes, toys and candy at the Frankfurt airport in Germany – Sister Hatune was prepared. She was determined to make every person she would meet happy during this Easter holiday. I was prevented from doing the same at the airport in Stockholm. My mother and other relatives had filled three big suitcases with clothes and other things for the children in Jordan. But the airline company stopped all that. I only had the right to bring with me 30 kilos of luggage. Sister Hatune did not face the same restrictions because she has a certificate, which proves she is an aid worker. Not much more for me to do other than to accept and help her carry.

Three enthusiastic Assyrians at the airport in Amman greeted us. Gabriel, Isa and Susan Al Tawil had no idea why Sister Hatune and I had travelled to Jordan but they showed us great hospitality and were willing to assist us in whatever we would possibly need during our stay in Amman. I asked them to drive to one of the churches. The priest of this particular Syriac Orthodox Church is a friend of one of my friends. Father Ammanuel Istifan Issa Al Bana was a bit confused when I entered his Church. Sweden's migration minister, Mr Tobias Billström, had visited the church and met with Iraqi refugees just hours before.

I met my friend Hanna Shamoun in the church a few minutes past midnight and two hours from the time we set foot in Jordan. My trip was now certain to be successful. He is the right person to ask about Amman, refugees and aid.

Early next morning we began our six hectic, incredibly interesting, mournful and gratifying days in Amman. Yet another Assyrian, a lawyer named Febroniya Atto from Holland, joined us on Thursday 4th of April. The three of us; one from Sweden, one from Germany and one from Holland, together with our helpful friends in Amman, experienced incredible events.

No one doubts that there are 750 000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan. No one knows how many are of Assyrian origin. Estimations range from 30 000 to 150 000. The organization Christian Solidarity International estimates the number of Assyrians to be 100 000.

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We travelled to Amman without any planned schedule. We wanted fate to decide whom we would meet. It turned out to be the right thing to do. One thing led to the other and it resulted in this report that lets the refugees present their own experiences. We also met with representatives from volunteer organizations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR and Jordanian authorities.

The report you have in your hand gives an alarming description of the Iraq war and its consequences for the indigenous population, but it also offers explanations.

Nuri Kino

Wednesday, 3 April

Jordan sees the Iraqis as guests

The day begins with a visit to George Hazo at the Middle East Council of Churches, MECC. The aim of this organization is to strengthen the status of the Christians in the Middle East. To do this they receive help from Lutheran Churches such as the Swedish Church. Catholic and Orthodox churches refuse to give their support to the MECC.

The Jordanian government does not accept the Iraqis as refugees but as guests. They do not want to encourage more people to come. The refugees have thus no refugee status and they are therefore not receiving the help they have a right to. Hazo is dejected and upset. He thinks his government should follow the recommendations given by the international organizations.

- If the Jordanian government followed the recommendations of Human Rights Watch and registered the Iraqis as refugees then the world community would help the government, even the Arabic states would help. But as things are handled now the refugees are non-existent although they are in their hundreds of thousands.

In the report "The Silent Treatment" from November 2005 it is suggested that all Iraqis should at least receive temporary stay permits in Jordan. The spokesman of the government described the conclusions of the report as unrealistic and false. The Jordanian magazine JO did a full report on the problem with the Iraqi refugees in its January issue. The magazine came to the same conclusions as the report of the HRW:

The Jordanian government must reconsider this issue and accept the Iraqis as refugees for the sake of every one.

Hazo says no one benefits from acting as if there is no problem. We ask him if he knows the number of refugees, but he does not know. They could be half a million. But they could also be one million. One million people on the run.

He orders in Arabic "coffee" which is called "Turkish coffee" in Arabic countries while his assistant goes to fetch a Jordanian mobile number for me. His colleague George Malke Afram joins us. Both of them have their origins in Turabdin, an area in the south east of Turkey. That goes also for Sister Hatune and I. They tell us briefly about their background, that they escaped to Jordan from Palestine in 1948, during the biggest refugee catastrophes in the Middle East. They also told us that their parents originally fled from Turkey to escape the Assyrian genocide in 1914. They know what it means to be a refugee because of one's religion.

I naively ask them how come most Iraqi refugees want to come to Sweden. I am told that Sweden is known for its humane asylum policy since the days of the civil war in Lebanon. Hazo tells us that the documents of the UNHCR show where most people want to go. The United Nations has only 17 000 registered Iraqi refugees. He has no idea why the number is so low. But his contacts at the UNHCR tell him that most refugees want to go to Sweden, Australia and New Zealand because they do not send back Iraqis to a burning Baghdad.

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But that is something Jordan has begun to do. Many are deported back to Iraq if they are arrested and lack valid documents. They must have either a Jordanian visa, something most of them lack, or be registered with the UN. The validity of the visas is now shortened from six to one month. After one month Iraqis must pay two dollars a day in order to remain in Jordan. That is something many cannot afford and are therefore repatriated.

George Hazo says the first individuals who returned directly after the American invasion were a small number of rich people who invested big money. The country is experiencing an unbelievable construction boom. Prices have gone up more than 500 percent.

That made me understand why I did not recognize Amman, a town which I love and which I have worked in twice before. Construction work is all over the place. New city districts are built and older ones are being renovated. It is as if I am in a totally new town. Luckily the new houses are built according to the Jordanian model, admitting the town to keep its charm.

There is a seamy side to the construction boom and the new beautiful houses. Jordanians from the middle class are leaving their apartments and moving into the new modern houses. The apartments are then rented out to Iraqi refugees for exorbitant rents. Hazo tells one story after the other about lack of food and health care.

According to him one of the greatest problems is the lack of coordination among the aid organizations. In their desperation to help they have no idea what the other is doing. If the organizations were to cooperate it would make life easier for all who are involved.

One of the reasons of the change in attitude towards the refugees is the bombings of the hotels in November 2005. The persons who took responsibility for the bombings were all Iraqi citizens. Jordan does not want to become yet another Arabic country with ethnic, religious and political clashes. This explains yet another difference I have noticed since last time I was here. You see policemen everywhere; the safety measures are on the maximum in Amman.

What upsets Hazo the most is the fact that not all refugee children go to school. Some children have not attended school for as long as four years. Public schools are free and the refugees have the right to enrol but there are not enough places and reasons are made up in order to keep the refugee children outside. Private schools cost 1000 Dollars per year, something few Iraqis can afford.

What Hazo forgot to mention about the schools, and what I found out later, is that only children with visa are able to enrol. The majority of refugees lack valid visas.

Public health care is free but the standard is low. Caritas or other aid organizations are paying for private health care as much as their funds allow.

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- The international community must open up its eyes and help Jordan, says Hazo.

Sister Hatune wonders whether churches are open for the refugee children. We are told that some church facilities are used as schools. JO Magazine writes that the authorities have closed most of them although the teachers were Iraqi refugees working volunteers. Another reason is said to be that the authorities suspected the churches were trying to spread Christianity among Muslim children.

George Hazo takes us to the construction place of a new church where they are also planning to build a health care centre, a school and a facility for social activities. He shows us the construction and the blueprints proudly. After showing us the yet unfinished facilities he asked Sister Hatune if she possibly could help them complete the project by collecting money for the remaining work.

Next stop is Caritas Healthcare, one of the many health care centres the aid organization has put up in Amman. It is a modest facility with three rooms; one of them contains a bunk, an intravenous drip, a gynaecologist chair and shelves with medicine giving the impression that it is where patients are treated. For me it looks rather surreal compared to the high quality equipment I am used to from my work as a medical secretary in Sweden's finest hospitals. But they are doing as much as they can and I cannot and must not blame them.

The personnel are very friendly and accommodating. They are proud of their health care centre. But it is closed because of the visit by Sweden's asylum policy minister a few minutes ago.

We have lunch before taking a taxi to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to meet Rana Sweis, one of the persons responsible for press contacts.

Not even one twentieth are registered

Sweis doesn't know how many Iraqi refugees there are in Jordan and she is therefore anticipating the results of the Norwegian volunteer organization Fafo. The Jordanian government has asked Fafo to investigate how many Iraqi refugees there actually are in Jordan.

We are confused; at one point the government says there are no refugees, and then they want to know how many there are. The investigation of Fafo, Study of Iraqis in Jordan, will hopefully respond to the questions. But it is far from certain. Many Iraqis are afraid of being repatriated and will therefore not meet Fafo's personnel. Rana Sweis says the governments own calculations show there are 750 000 Iraqi refugees.

The tasks of the UNHCR are many but the young press secretary seems to handle everything well. She tells us about the work of implementation organizations such as Caritas and why some refugees chose to register and why some do not.

- We have two main tasks. The Iraqis come here first to seek asylum and we register them so they have the right to protection and urgent help. We have a team that helps them with questions of every day life, such as medicine or care, after we have interviewed them. We cooperate with many volunteer organizations that have divided up the responsibility on the ground among them.

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But the number of refugees who have registered themselves at the UNHCR amounts to only around three percent.

Sweis confirms that only 25 000 have been registered. She does not know why this it is so little. But she believes it may be due to the long wait or the fact that the refugees are afraid of being discovered by the authorities if they register at the UNHCR.

One reason for the special situation in Jordan, compared to other countries with Iraqi refugees, is the fact that Jordan has not ratified the UN convention on the right for refugee status from 1951. This means Jordan is not obliged to regard the Iraqis as refugees or give them the rights of refugees. They are guests, and that is it!

They also come with tourist visas. The period of validity of the visas is different. Some are valid for one year, but few have those. Most Iraqis get one or maximum three months and then they become illegal. The UNHCR has no information on how many Iraqis live legally or illegally in the country.

Rana Sweis interrupts me while I am taking notes to point out the positive thing with Jordan and why many Iraqis have come here.

- Why are all Iraqis in Jordan and Syria? Why are they not in other Arabic countries and other countries in the world? That is because Jordan and Syria are guest friendly countries. Jordan is one of the worlds most water poor countries with overcrowded classrooms and a very high unemployment rate since before but it has still accepted the Iraqis with open arms.

It is obvious that Syria and Jordan have problems with the stream of refugees. The burden on the two Arabic countries is very heavy and the world community must give them aid.

The refugees do not belong to a certain class; every one who is able is fleeing the country. Professors, the very rich, middle class, Christians, Shia, Sunni and the very poor, they have fled the war and are now refugees. There has been no antagonism between the groups until now. Most of them have escaped because of the war and they want peace.

The majority of Jordanians are happy to have so many well-educated and rich Iraqis in their country. But there are misunderstandings and prejudice. Most Jordanians believe the majority of the Iraqis are rich, which is far from the truth. Most poor Iraqi refugees live in eastern Amman and never leave their homes because they fear repatriation, something that is also taking place.

A couple of hundred have received quota refugee status by the UNHCR, those are the ones most in need of protection. The number depends on the receiving countries, how many they can accept and how many want to go there.

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2001: 4,143 to nineteen countries
2002: 2,496 to fourteen countries
2003: 1,425 to fifteen countries
2004: 682 to ten countries
2005: 672 to nine countries
2006: 404 to nine countries

Sweis does not want to tell how many of those who are going to a third country have been working for the Americans.

- We cannot tell you how many of them have been working for the Americans. A couple of weeks ago the Americans announced they will accept 7 000 Iraqi refugees. Resettlement will always be for a few. The solution for the majority will be to return to a peaceful Iraq. Of course they cannot return today and we do not recommend that. The situation is severe for all Iraqis but in particular for the minorities.

The only way to solve the situation in Syria and Jordan is for all the neighbouring countries to contribute so Iraq can develop into a stable and peaceful country. Other countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon and Iran have also received Iraqis and they might receive more people further on. There are close to two million internal refugees in Iraq.

Rana Sweis assesses the situation in Jordan:

- This is not a typical refugee problem; there are no refugee camps in Amman. The refugees are mixed with the Jordanians; they live in an urban area and did not arrive here suddenly. We did not wake up one day to find out there are 700 000 Iraqis here all of a sudden. The world community is luckily starting to understand there is a humanitarian crisis and that more and more are fleeing from their homes in Iraq. No matter what temporary solution we come up with it will be like treating a deep wound with a plaster. The only solution is to have them returning to a secure and peaceful Iraq. In order to heal the wound, which is of political nature, one must find a political solution. We at the UNHCR work with the humanitarian part.

It is close to three a clock. Hanna has come to join our group. We now make a team of three.

Sister Hatune and I ask whether there is time to buy vegetables. We are both hungry for special kinds of vegetables one cannot find in the west or which are treated with so many pesticides that they have no taste left when they reach the stores.

Hanna takes us to one of his friends. We throw ourselves on the vegetables. I eat fresh almond, small cucumbers, mini tomatoes and different herbs. Masoud, the grocery owner, laughs at us while Sister Hatune fills one bag after the other with fruit, berries and vegetables.

I ask him how come he is alone in his store while there is so much cheap manpower in Amman. He smiles and says that the young Assyrian man who works for him is having lunch at home. Wael is nineteen years old and the sole provider for his family. His father was shot dead for working with the Americans.

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Hanna looks at the watch and tells us to hurry. We must get to the other side of Amman if I am to interview Sweden's asylum policy minister, Tobias Billström, who is on a flying visit in Jordan.

We meet the minister at the Iraq office. Sweden is the country which accepts the highest amount of Iraqi refugees, this year alone we expect 30 000. That is the reason why Sweden has not "just" an embassy but also a house called the Iraq office.

The minister and his team were tired. This was the last day of their five days travel through Syria and Jordan to meet refugees, cabinet ministers, religious leaders and volunteer organizations. The minister was very content with his trip. He is the first minister from an EU country to visit the aforementioned states. He now had a lot of first hand information to build on.

The following day my article in Sweden's biggest daily, Metro, was as follows:

Sweden will ask the EU and the world community to support Syria and Jordan, says migration minister Tobias Billström when Metro meets him in Amman. He is the first European migration minister to have travelled to the two neighbours of Iraq in order to see the situation of the Iraqi refugees with his own eyes. He is very content with the visit.

- I feel we are going back home with a lot of first hand information. We have met cabinet ministers UNHCR, volunteer organizations and refugees who left all they own when they fled, people with heart-rending fates.

Sweden alone takes in as many Iraqi refugees as the rest of Europe. The Iraqi refugees Metro has spoken with in Amman say the Swedish migration minister has given the impression he is in Jordan in order to stop more refugees from travelling to Sweden. The minister's answer to them is:

- Sweden is here to support Syria and Jordan as they are in a difficult situation. We want to contribute by finding ways to return to a peaceful and secure Iraq as well.

But he says at the same time that his government will also work to give Iraqis with permanent stay permits in Sweden the option of going back to Iraq.

Metro: How will you do that? Will you abolish their permanent stay permits?

- We will find ways for them to return home. But this is not a question to be solved in one hour or even a year.

Sweden's aid to Jordan and Syria may be increased but the two countries must first propose how they are going to use the money.

*Nuri Kino
Amman*

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We begin our meetings with refugees in the evening. Sister Hatune wants Hanna to take her to meet others that maybe poorer than Iraqis. She has money she wants to give to the most needy as Easter presents.

Example:

A Coptic family. The father suffered cerebral haemorrhage and has become lame, the mother suffers from heart problems and the children, twelve and thirteen, have never been to school. Their one room apartment is very small. The children get tears in their eyes from the presents, the teddy bears, which Sister Hatune has brought with her. The parents start to shake by the happiness they feel when she gives them one hundred and fifty Dinars, circa one hundred and seventy Euros.

Late in the evening we begin to interview Christian Iraqis.

Feel cheated

We begin with an 86-year-old woman who had slipped a disc after a fall. The constant lying in bed is starting to give her bedsores. She is there with her children. But she is happy to have us strangers and she smiles the most when she tells us how bad her situation is.

Her two children, a son and a daughter, have been living in a small apartment since they fled from Baghdad. The son, Sargon, was known in Baghdad for his collection of both Arabic and English music. He ran a famous music store with an office on the second floor.

The Shiite Mehdi militia forbade all music and sent a threatening letter to him. They demanded him to close the store.

The first time he was threatened he did not take it seriously. The second time he was barely able to save his life. They pushed a wheel chair with a bomb towards him; he gave way and understood the same second that it was over and that he had to leave Iraq. He closed the store but continued to sell CDs and videos from his home. He was robbed and assaulted. The next day he applied for a passport, sold all he owned and took the bus to Amman. He even left all his clothes.

- If we would be able to return we would have returned. But we do not have a chance. Maybe one day, but right now we are on the black list of the Islamists.

About a month ago the Mehdi militia found a picture of him and one of his Kurdish friends. The Kurd was kidnapped because the Islamists thought that he knew where

Sargon was. When they arrested the Kurd they first sealed off the entire street and then went in to his house. In order to release the Kurd they demanded a ransom equivalent of eight thousand Euros or they would have Sargon's head on a plate. That was half a year ago. His Kurdish friend was never found.

Sargon's wife gave birth to a child in Amman a couple months after they had left Baghdad. His sister in Australia sends money so they can pay the rent. Caritas paid for his wife's visits to the hospital. But they have to pay for the medicine themselves.

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They pay 85 Dinars for the apartment, circa 100 Euros. None of them leaves the apartment if it is not very necessary. They are afraid of getting arrested and repatriated. They are illegal refugees.

The UNHCR has given them a "Protection-card" which shows they are registered refugees. But the Jordanian authorities do not care about the cards. Sargon knows many people who have been repatriated despite having the card with them.

He has sought a visa to almost all European countries, without any success. He feels the entire refugee situation is yet another show for the galleries, just as the war, the Iraqi government and the Jordanian refugee policy.

Sister Hatune plays with the children. Sargon interrupts me before I have the chance to ask him how many they are. He wants to tell me how disappointed they are about the Americans who did not protect them but let them become like sitting ducks for the criminal gangs and fundamentalist Islamists.

He has applied several times to some countries. He has applied as much as five times to Australia. The only way to leave Amman seems to be with the help from smugglers. But they do not dare trust the smugglers. Many smugglers take the money and never return. And even if all smugglers were trustworthy they could still not afford it. The money the sister sends them is just enough to pay the rent. The food they get from the churches. They are all mentally exhausted.

Sargon's relative, George, is bitterly angry with the US army. He has worked for them several times.

- We hire Christians because we trust them more, they said. But when we needed them they left us to our fate.

George has applied for a visa at the American embassy once during his three years in Amman, but he has not been given an answer. His parents and siblings are in Detroit,

Michigan. He seems to do well economically. But the more he tells about his situation, about his fear of being found and repatriated, about how disappointed he is at the Christian world, the more upset he becomes. He almost shouts when he says:

- Why doesn't the Christian world care about us? The US went to war with a Christian rhetoric, but they left Iraq's Christians to die. We have at least the rights of humans. The war has developed into a war of religions; everything else is a manipulation of the reality. In the apartment next to ours lives a young Assyrian man whose father was killed in a Hummer along with American soldiers. He has become an orphan because of the Americans but when he applied for a visa to the US he was turned down. He lives on gifts from us others who lack food ourselves. That is America's way of saying thank you.

George knows many who have worked for the American army or for some American Company's in Iraq. The salaries were very high, between one thousand Dollars and two thousand. No one could say no to it. Most have now left the Americans, either because they have been threatened or killed. He shows us recommendations he has received from the American army.

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A man sitting next to Hanna presents himself as Nisha and asks whether we would like to visit a family who lost two daughters. Two young women who were killed because of their cooperation with the Americans. It is almost midnight and I ask if they are still awake. No one from that family has gone to sleep for years, he replies.

It is dark outside when we get out. Each city should be explored during each hour of the day. The sounds, lights and scents change and bring one into a new dimension of the country. Amman is very beautiful at night. There is something delightful and peaceful about the city. We get into the car. We are now four in the team. Sister Hatune and I take the backseat. Our new colleague occupies the seat next to the driver Hanna.

Nisha cannot stop talking. He knows many Christian Iraqis and each family have met a fate as black as the other.

Amman is built on hills. There are unbelievable uphill slopes and Sister Hatune is nervous when Hanna changes gears all the time to make the car mount the hills. Hanna drives through very small allies as we come close to our target. The scents have changed into an almost unbearable stank. Sister Hatune has to cling on to me so she does not fall on all the excrement in front of the door of the family we are about to visit.

Linda and Rita's pictures are all over the shed they live in

It is like in a horror movie. Nisha warns us from the beginning. This family does not even have chairs to sit on. We laugh. Sure we are from Europe, but our origins go back to southeast Turkey and we have also been sitting on mattresses.

The family seems very happy to have visitors. The mother, clothed in black, hugs us and presents the others. There are her son Erkan, daughter Nora and husband Samir. Her oldest son, Samir, sits in the other room. He remains seated. He does not say hello but stays watching TV. Leyla, the mother, starts to speak:

- There were seven people in the car. The two apples of my eye, their four friends and the driver. All were shot dead.

She shows us pictures of her daughters Linda and Rita, born 1981 and 1985. She weeps; Sister Hatune holds her hand and sheds a tear herself. I hold back the tears. The only surviving daughter, Nora, brings in coffee. Exactly what we need. We have been active for nineteen hours.

Their proud father, Samir, says that the girls started to work by washing for the American army, but only after a couple of months they advanced. They were promoted because they were Christians, were reliable and spoke English. One of them got to work at the Supermarket in the Green Zone. The other girl sewed logos on the uniforms. They worked like this for eleven months.

The mother shows more pictures of her daughters with American soldiers. She says it was impossible not to like her daughters. They were gifted, kind and intelligent.

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When I look at their pictures I suddenly remember that I have written about them. They were among the first Christians to be killed solely for their religion. After their death two different Islamic groups stated publicly that this was the opening shot for the murder of Christians.

The parents and their children continue to talk about how proud they are of Linda and Rita. I cannot stop thinking about the way they live. Six adults in two small rooms with a low roof, humid walls and Muslim neighbours who, according to the son, look at them with threatening eyes.

The older brother is not up to talking. He sits alone in the other room and smokes one cigarette after the other. Every now and then he looks at us cautiously. The reason they are here is that fundamentalists have killed two of their family members. They are totally destitute. Had it not been for the Syriac Orthodox priest they would not even have mattresses, a refrigerator and a stove. They would not have been able to survive. The father points to a document:

To whom it may concern

The Subject: letter of confirmation

Best regards,

We certified that the family of Samir D. have suffered the murder of their daughters Linda Samir D. birth date 1981 and Rita Samir D. birth date 1985. They were killed in Abu Graib. The reason for their murder was that they had been working in the Khalid general construction company. This event took place on Wednesday 19-8-2004. Samir's family is frightened. All other members of the family are also in danger.

With my respect - thanks.

Signed by

The father of the church

Nwazt Butrsw Hana

They have tried to meet the American ambassador four times and they have been thrown out each time.

- The local civil servants did not allow us to meet the Americans. We showed them documents in English but they showed no interest at all to help us. One could almost believe we are criminals. My daughters' only mistake was to work for the Americans. No they do not want to have anything to do with us.

Leyla tells us she is happy for one sole reason. Her other son, who also worked for the Americans and who also used to be in the same car as his sisters, was ill that particular day. He is now somewhere in Greece. The day after his sisters were killed the Islamists began to search for him. Samir sold everything he owned so he could put his son in safety.

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They got money from the Americans for the burial of Linda and Rita. The Chaldean Catholic Patriarch, Emmanuel Dali, gave them money so they could get out of Baghdad.

Leyla now wants to open up and tell us about the day of her daughters' murder. Rita and Linda were picked up at seven o'clock by the driver from the company who employed the girls. They were working for a company that acted as a manpower agency. This is how it works in Iraq. An Iraqi company has a contract and it sends out recruiting personnel. The girls were driven to the Green Zone and started their work at eight. They loved their jobs, earned their own money and had made many friends. That morning was not any different from the other mornings. They finished work at five.

- When the clock ticked seven my heart began to beat hard. They were supposed to be at home at seven. I had received the phone number to some one responsible at the company two weeks earlier so I could contact them if necessary.

She went to the neighbour who has a phone. The neighbour called the owner of the company who said that everything was under control. He told them not to worry. He was sure they would come home soon.

The older brother bites his lips while the mother and the other siblings tell us the story. His eyes are filled with tears. He is still alone in the other room.

Even the owner of the company became nervous when the mother convinced the neighbour to call a second time. He called the Americans who said that they saw them

leave the Green Zone. There was a curfew and the father could not leave the house to search for them. He would be shot directly.

The neighbour continued to call. The fourth time the man who owns the company told them that there was an accident. The neighbour demanded to know what kind of accident. The owner told unwillingly that they were shot and wounded. He also said they were in hospital.

Their parents and the siblings were paralysed by the shock and they wanted to run from one hospital to the other to search for them. But that was not possible. They had to wait until the morning because of the curfew.

Their seventeen-year-old sister Nora sobbed while she served us tea. She remembers that night as if it was yesterday. She does not believe she will ever be able to forget it.

- I did not sleep for one second but wept and prayed to God that they were alive. I felt both of them were not dead. I did not want to become the only girl in the family. They had always taken care of me. I loved, I love them.

It later turned out that Linda had not died until she was brought to the hospital. She had been sitting in the middle and was not hit by as many bullets as Rita, who had been sitting by the car window.

Samir went to the police in the morning. The police chief told him that one of his daughters had died instantly and the other in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

By God
Six Days in Amman

The stories tell different things several times but they concur on one thing: Linda and Rita had become victims of the Islamists bullets.

The eldest brother Wassim, also worked for the Americans during that time. He was a cook at the American base in Saddam Hussein's birth town Tikrit. When he heard the sad news he cursed the day he left his family home to work for the Americans.

He has now started to come close to us. Sister Hatune whispers in German whether there is something wrong with him. I reply that he feels responsible for everything because he is the oldest son. He feels that he should have been there to protect his sisters. Sister Hatune asks how I know that he is the oldest even before we have asked about their age. I tell her that the father, Samir, is called Abu Wassim. That means Wassim's father and at the same time that Wassim is the oldest son. It is an Arabic practise to name the father and the mother after the oldest son. If they do not have a son they will be called after the oldest daughter.

The mother breaks down and cries hysterically when she brings more pictures of Linda and Rita. Wassim looks at me but remains silent. The two younger siblings, Nora and Erkan, have tears in their eyes. Their bodies are bowed.

Leyla continues the story.

Terrorists had stopped the bus the week before the killings. They had noticed the two girls wore crosses around their necks. They had howled at them to convert, telling them that Saddam Hussein was no longer around to protect unfaithful Christian dogs. The terrorists were unarmed that time. Linda and Rita had been very scared that night. They had several reasons to feel afraid. The owner of the building they lived in had tried to evict them because of their religion already during Saddam Hussein. They were in court two months before the regime fell.

They had sued the landlord because he had tried to evict them because they were Christians. That was something illegal in Iraq at that time. They won the case.

The assistants of the landlord assaulted Samir two months after the fall of the regime.

They told him to leave the house along with his family, or convert to Islam or be prepared for the consequences.

He refused to do any of that. The landlords' niece spread rumours that they worked with the Americans and the son of the landlord boasted he would get them killed. The landlord's son had seen the Americans driving Linda and Rita home twice. He threatened to have the entire family killed three days before the two sisters were killed. Three of the landlord's sons belong now to the feared Shiite Mehdi militia.

"You are spies for the Americans and we will teach you a lesson", yelled several Shiite boys when the corpses of the girls were brought for burial.

By God
Six Days in Amman

The time is 2 am when a third son comes in. He apologizes for being late, changes to his pyjamas and lays down on one of the mattresses. Jouni is nineteen and has many friends. I ask him how he wants to live his life.

- We have no life. We must get away from here or we may just as well die, he says and shrugs his shoulders.

No one in the family has any work. The only one who leaves the house is Jouni. The others are afraid of getting caught and repatriated. I remind them they are registered at the UN. Jouni laughs and says he knows several persons who have been repatriated although they had papers proving they are registered at the UN.

The rent is 100 Dinars, around 110 Euros. They get money for the rent and food as alms from churches in Amman. They see no other future other than going to the US or Australia.

I get in to my hotel room at three a clock. The family who lost two daughters gave me two CDs that I play in my computer. Both CDs are from parties with American soldiers during the first months after the invasion. Happy smiles. Hugs and kisses. The Americans have been welcomed as liberators. I feel sick at heart. Images of Americans who try to dance Assyrian folk dances and Assyrians who try to dance to hip hop music. The slaughter of the Christians began a couple of months afterwards, exactly because they had danced with the Americans. I try to sleep but I cannot.

I hardly get any sleep during the entire trip. If I doze I doze, otherwise it is all work.

We decide to meet with as many families as possible, and without any picking, we let spontaneity decide.

Thursday, April 5

We go early in the morning to get the lawyer Febroniya Atto from the airport. Now we are five in the team. Febroniya has spent several weeks in Syria where she visited three Christian Iraqi families who all wore black clothes because they have lost one or more family members to the weapons of Islamic terrorists. There are more than one million Iraqi refugees in Syria. The Syrian government is Alawite, a Shiite sect, and the Jordanian is Sunni. It is said that Jordan is against Shiites and Syria is against Sunnis. But that was not something we investigated. It is a fact, however, that none of these countries want the kind of sectarian war found in Iraq and perhaps for this reason they are less keen on having several religions gathered in the same place.

On the way back from the airport I get a call from one of the four Iraqis who worked for three years as an adviser at the American embassy after the fall of the regime. He is in Sweden and he needs help with his asylum application. I ask him whether he thinks clashes may erupt between Shiites and Sunnis in Syria and Jordan. He replies that none of the countries will allow that, otherwise it would have happened already. When I mention the Assyrians he tells me the Americans got reports on the persecution of the Christians all the time but they ignored them. He even remembers the dates for attacks against the Christians. The day Linda and Rita were murdered is a day he remembers. It was one of the days which became the beginning of what the English organization Minority Right Group International calls *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's minority communities since 2003*.

We leave Febroniya's suitcases at the hotel and head for the first meeting. It is at one of the two local offices of Caritas. They actually close earlier today because it is Maundy Thursday but Hanna talks them into staying longer.

Several families are denied help each week

We step into a room with two smiling bosses. It is Mary Kiriakos, responsible for the field assistants and Gaby Daw, responsible for all activities at the local office.

The activities are financed by ICMC – International Catholic Migration Commission.

Each Caritas office has its own sponsor. Some are sponsored by the UNHCR, others by the Red Cross and this one by the ICMC.

Eleven persons work at the office: seven handling officers, a secretary, an administrative director plus Mary and Gaby. Their activities cover the entire spectrum. They visit between four and five families each day and assess their situation. The new arrivals are given refrigerators filled with food, mattresses, blankets and everything else one needs in a home. Children are placed in one of the unofficial schools inside the churches. The office has contact with ten such schools. They also offer health care, they have a contract with a health centre and two private hospitals and they pay for health care, medicines and tests – as far as it is possible.

- The burden is heavy and we cannot even meet people anymore. They have to wait several months to meet us because of the long queue. Four to five cases a week are denied help, says Gaby and her smile changes into a sad expression. It is easy to run short of money. Some refugees have cancer or heart diseases; they are impossible to help because the costs are too heavy.

By God Six Days in Amman

Febroniya asks whether they offer psychiatric care because it is obvious that many of the refugees are in psychological distress. Mary answers that she wishes that they could offer it more than they do at the moment. They recommend the refugees to go to another office that specializes in psychiatric care, but the burden is far too heavy even there.

Sister Hatune asks if one can donate money to the office. The answer is no and it surprises us. ICMC is the only donator to this office. Each project and office has one or more special donators and others cannot donate money. We learnt something new.

- We like our job because we see changes. Sometimes we save lives. Our head is always full of thoughts. What has happened to him? Where is this or that person? How are we going to solve their problem? Says Mary with a new smile.

Just like George Hazo, they too long for better cooperation between the volunteer organizations. It would have been better if they were coordinated.

According to Hanna the worlds best Falafel are served in the same house as the Caritas office. We go to eat. There are three tables in the room. Febroniya, the Falafel expert, gives her judgement. She agrees it is the best Falafel she has ever eaten. This is on a little street in the old part of Amman, where most people would not eat. We finish eating and head towards the home of the young man who works at the grocery store. If we are lucky they will be at home.

We knock at the door and a woman opens and presents herself as Hana. She welcomes us. It is a pretty nice basement apartment. It has two rooms, bright with high ceilings, although it only has one small window in a corner. It is clean and neat.

Eighteen year old Wael provides for the family

Hana's husband never returned from work one day. He ran his own electrical appliances shop. The kidnappers called late in the evening. They demanded 50 000 Dollars for his release. She told them it was impossible. She did not have that much money. She managed to collect 6 000 Dollars with the help of relatives, friends and neighbours. The kidnappers told her to go to a graveyard and put the bag with the money in a certain place. Her cousin refused to let her go. If she were killed her children would become orphans. He went instead of her. The kidnappers took the bag.

But it took some days before they called again. They called and said they wanted more money but this time not as a ransom for her husband. They had already shot "the unfaithful Christian dog", they said. They wanted money so they would not shoot her and her children. She managed to persuade them to tell her where the corpse was.

Her son Wael, the one who works at the grocery store, comes in and says hello to us. He sits down and listens while the mother continues.

The corpse was in a hospital with three bullets in the head. Eighteen year old Wael was sixteen when his father was shot. He has two sisters, 13 and 14. He tells us that his father was 48 eight years old, born in 1957 and that he was killed in mid December 2005, without anyone of us asking him.

The mother of his father, Wael's grandmother, died of sorrow a couple of months later. Wael's father was the third one of her three sons to be killed.

By God
Six Days in Amman

Hana went to the police for protection but no one helped them. She moved to her sister and stayed there for seven months, until they had passports issued.

Hana has two brothers living in Amman. They have also fled the war with their families. One of them has lived here for two and a half years, the other for one and a half. Hana lived with one of her brothers a couple of months until she got an “apartment” in a basement. The rent is 85 Dinars. Wael earns 90 Dinars. Hana buys food and other supplies if she receives alms from different churches. Hana’s two brothers would help her if it becomes desperate even if they are themselves living under similar circumstances. One of them works in an office where he serves coffee and tea. The other works also in a grocery store.

Wael is tired. His job is hard and the money is not sufficient. He would love to work with computers. He is afraid of making friends because he lacks a residence permit and could be repatriated. He feels he has responsibility for his mother and sisters and he therefore always comes home directly after work. The only place they can feel safe is in the church, which they visit often.

Caritas has helped them with medicine and glasses for the two girls named Ban and Wafa. Hana’s only wish is for her children to have a tolerable future. Ban goes to school but they could throw her out any second and Wafa does not have the energy to go to school because they always have to be quiet and are afraid of being discovered. Wael smiles when I ask him if he would like to go to school:

- Yes, but who would pay the rent?

The family is registered with the UNHCR and they prefer to go to Australia, where Hana has two brothers. She has many tragedies to talk about. Her brother’s son was also shot dead. Her brother’s wife was running with the child in her arms, the bullet penetrated her hand and in to his heart.

Hanna takes a look at the clock. We have booked several meetings and we have to leave. Sister Hatune gives 150 Dinars to the family, fifty to each child. Hana’s eyes have tears in them.

- When I woke up this morning I asked the Lord to help me find a way to buy new pants for the girls for Easter. The pants they have now have become too small.

There is a picture on the wall of a happy family in beautiful clothes posing in front of a grand house in Baghdad.

My phone beeps when we go out; it’s a text message:

An unidentified Islamic group has been threatening the Christian’s) in the Dora district of Baghdad, a traditionally Assyrian area. The Islamic group issued an ultimatum yesterday to Assyrian families, telling them to leave Christianity and convert to Islam within 24 hours or they would all be killed. The Islamic group also issued a fatwa (a religious edic) to confiscate the property of all

Christians, to force their women to veil themselves, to forbid genuflection (making the sign of the Cross) and the wearing of the Cross.

It is from a colleague in Baghdad.

We go to the hotel to rest and make plans. I open my email and find this message:

Baghdad- ankawa.com

By: Salim Abdalla

Armed groups are threatening Christians in the Dora district, in the southwestern part of Baghdad, to either leave the area or convert to Islam. The groups have tried previously to make the Christians leave their homes by threats, leaflets or writings on house and church walls, but it is the first time they give a time limit of only 24 hours. They have also forbidden Christians from taking anything with them from their homes. Several Fatwas have been issued. Ankawa.com has received news that most families have left their homes and moved to more secure places in Baghdad or have fled to other cities in Iraq.

We go to the Mor Afrem Syriac Orthodox Church in the evening so we can witness the washing of the feet. Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples is re-enacted each Maundy Thursday. The bishop or priest washes the feet of the lay workers in the same way Jesus did with the disciples.

The Church is full. Half of the attendants are Iraqi refugees. I go outside and sit next to a couple of young people. I want to ask them if they know anything about kidneys.

The kidney theft

Johannon, one of the young men who is an Iraqi refugee says:

- He was mentally retarded but loved by every one in the neighbourhood. They found him dead one day, both his kidneys missing. A girl from the neighbourhood saw how two masked men dragged him into a car.

Luca, Johannon's friend, has heard a different story.

Another man went to sell one of his kidneys so he could pay the ransom to those who had kidnapped his son. He never woke up. They found his body but without both his kidneys. The kidnappers did not give up. They called to the brother of the man and said: "We know that the unfaithful dog, your brother, has died and is no longer able to pay. If you others do not bring us 10 000 Dollars by tomorrow you will find the boy in the same state as the father."

The question is how the kidnappers could know that the father had died and in what condition he was when the family found him. According to Luca the boy's uncle is convinced it was the same gang who did it all. Or it was two cooperating gangs. The family could not collect the ransom and the thirteen year old boy is lost.

Members of Jordanian Church parishes are dejected. The situation with the Iraqi refugees is nothing they can handle. There is no way the Jordanians can help all refugees, no matter how much they want to.

She prays for peace

We go to Shimuni, or aunt Shimuni as everybody calls her. She is close to 100 years old, she does not know exactly how old she is. Her origins are from Miden, a village in Turabdin, the mountain of the worshipers, in the south east of Turkey. The place Sister Hatune, Febroniya and I were born. Aunt Shimuni is very happy to meet us. She is very smart and we talk for more than one hour. As a young girl she escaped from the genocide against the Christians during World War I and now she is very upset.

- History repeats itself. What is happening in today's Iraq is the same that happened to us ninety years ago and once again the rest of the world shut their eyes. It is not the first time the West allows people to massacre us.

She says she is praying daily to God for peace and tolerance between the religions.

Late at night we go home to Nisha. He has made copies of documents that prove the two sisters Linda and Rita were working for the Americans. Nisha says that there are about thirty families wanting to meet us. They all have similar stories to tell us. They have been driven away because of their religion and because they have worked for the Americans. There is no way we can meet with all of them, and most will be disappointed. Febroniya and Sister Hatune decide that they will fly back to Amman.

We are now told that Nisha has been working at Iraq's embassy in Amman and that is why he knows of so many cases.

Friday, 16 April

The priest Ammanuel Istifan Issa Al Bana has arranged so we can meet several refugee families in the Syriac Orthodox Church at ten a clock in the morning. We are almost late because Sister Hatune and I took a long walk in the morning, got lost and took a taxi back to the hotel. We then discovered I had forgotten my mobile phone in the taxi but we were soon relieved as the Muslim taxi driver brought back the phone and explained to us that it is against his religion to steal. It is a complex world.

It is a hot day. The church has prepared the mass for Good Friday by putting up a tent next to the church building so there would be room for more people, since they expect many to come. We sit under the tent and wait for the families to come. Not many show up. The priest says it is because they have lost hope. We are not the first to come for their stories. But still nothing has happened to improve their situation. I tell them that the Swedish migration minister whom they met will hopefully be able to make the world community help them. They pray to God it will happen.

The police ran over Tuma

June the 1 2006 two police cars collided with each other in Iraq. The scene of the “accident” was Tuma’s car repair shop. An “object” stopped the cars from destruction. The object was Tuma. They ran over him from both ways just for fun. He was a Christian and not worthy of living. Tuma fainted and was taken to a hospital.

A terrorist group must have misunderstood who ran over whom and visited him at the hospital to find out what relation he had to the police. They wanted to know why he worked for the police. Some minutes after the terrorists left the hospital Tuma’s relatives carried him away from the hospital.

He was kept hidden at a relative’s place for three months. No doctors dared visit him.

Both policemen and terrorists were out to get him. He could not stand on his legs, his blood got thicker and his body swelled. He received text messages on his mobile phone each day. The number was the same as the number of his famous car repair shop. Sometimes the text messages contained things like: “You Christians must pay taxes. You must pay us so we can fight your unfaithful Christian American dogs.” Other times the message was a picture of dead Christians with threats saying that this is what will happen to all Christians.

His repair shop was bombed and fell to the ground. His entire life was blown to pieces. His relatives helped him travel to Amman. The priest in the Syriac Orthodox Church arranged a small apartment with a refrigerator, a stove, mattresses, blankets and plastic chairs.

One reason why the police ran over Tuma could be they knew he had been a witness when terrorists captured the Syriac Orthodox priest Paulus in their car on a Tuesday morning. Tuma had no time to do anything; they were too far away from him. Anyway he would most certainly have been killed if he had acted. No one knows which policemen sympathise with which terrorist group. It is an inglorious mix. No one trusts the other in Iraq. Every one can be an informer. During the time of Saddam the saying went; do not open your mouth to anyone other than the dentist. Today, says Tuma, people are even afraid to visit the dentist.

By God
Six Days in Amman

The same night the priest was kidnapped his church and family received calls. The terrorists wanted 300 000 Dollars. The next day they lowered the sum to 250 000 Dollars. When they understood that nobody had so much money they went down to 40 000 Dollars. Each time the kidnappers called they let the family listen to his calls for help with the sounds of knives being sharpened in the background. Suddenly one day the mobile phones of the kidnappers were turned off. They could not be reached. A priest named Josef, the brother of priest Ammanuel, was a close friend to Paulus, the kidnapped priest. Josef boldly started to ask different criminal gangs and fundamentalist Islamic groups but no one gave him any answers.

A police patrol found him wrapt in a blanket at five o'clock the same afternoon. He was shot in the stomach; his legs, arms and head were cut off. Josef took his friend's mutilated body to the hospital and paid to have it sown together. As Josef was taking Paulus' body back to the church he found several threatening letters with sentences telling that "You carry the same cross as the Americans" and "You will be exterminated, you unfaithful dogs".

Tuma has applied to Spain and Germany for a visa. They told him he had no chance at the Swedish embassy. His only possibility to come to Sweden is to use smugglers. Both Spain and Germany have denied him visas.

Neither Tuma nor his wife Rivan have any work. The priest pays their rent and their food is dependent on alms.

The priest Ammanuel hurries towards us, he has with him a teenage boy and his parents. This boy has an illness that nobody here in Amman has been able to cure. He started showing the symptoms already when he was one year old, during the war between Iraq and Iran. The family have now been in Jordan for four and a half years. They were legal the first year but now they are here illegally and they live under terrible circumstances. The parents witness the pain of their son each day.

- Look at his body. Why did Sweden's migration minister come here anyway? They will die, they are sick. For Gods sake, do something! We feel the whole world laughs at us.

Febroniya and Sister Hatune try to calm down the priest but he is too upset and he continues to relate the story of one family after the another. He talks too fast and we cannot manage to take notes of everything. We sit quietly and let him finish.

Sister Hatune promises to do her best for the boy. The least she can do is to let doctor Samir Hanna from the Mor Afrem foundation in Germany come and examine him. The priest calms down and brings in the next person.

He has a Swedish residence permit

The man shows me a piece of a newspaper. It is from a Swedish daily.

Västerås, VLT, Lotta Sandhammar

Their sons are forced to stay in Jordan.

There seems to be no hope left for the Mate family in Pettersberg who has been fighting since last year to get residence permits for their two disabled sons. The committee for foreigners has rejected their request. The sons are adults and in order to allow them to come to Sweden they must be dependent on their parents – economically, socially and emotionally. Both the Swedish immigration board and the committee for foreigners have decided that the dependency in this case is insufficient.

- I think it is wrong, they have made a very narrow interpretation of the law regarding foreigners, says Tomas Sjöstrand, the lawyer of the Mate family.

The decision of the committee for foreigners cannot be appealed. The family is now trying to do things on their own. They have for example contacted an organization for disabled people for help. The father, Toma Mate, has also decided to fly to his sons in Jordan to take care of them. But he is granted a visa for only one month.

Doctors have affirmed that the sons are in a bad physical and psychological shape but it has not been sufficient. The sons are 23 and 30 years old and both are blind. One of them suffers from brain damage and the other has epilepsy. They were taken care of by their sister until autumn when she got married and moved to Europe. The sons get some help from the church for now. The Mate family have been coming to Sweden in rounds. They fled from Iraq to Jordan in the end of 1990s.

We decide to go to their home and see the boys with our own eyes. We barely make it into the apartment before we all get tears in our eyes.

- It is unbelievable that Sweden sees them as adult people, it is children in grown up bodies, says Febroniya.

Their father Toma, who takes care of his sons on his own, can hardly speak because of all the tears and the sobbing. He shows us all the documents from the Swedish migration authorities. I promise him to speak to the paper that wrote about them and with the lawyer who might be able to declare his sons as under aged and thus get them to Sweden. Toma and his sons live illegally, hidden in Jordan ...

Nisha receives a call on his mobile phone; he gives Hanna the address to Fahmi.

Dora is empty of Christians

Fahmi Eliya Shamoun fled from the Christian district Dora in Baghdad eight months ago. He has four children, of which two worked for the Americans, Martin 23 years and Martina 22 years. Martin studied to become a hotel manager and he worked for the Americans at the Sheraton in Baghdad. He was hired because he was Christian and had the necessary education. Before the fall of the regime he worked for six months as a chef and a waiter at the Kaser al zuhur (Qasr al-Zuhur), the rose palace.

By God
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His aunt and her son who were already working for them recruited Martin to work for the Americans. They have now fled to Australia. Fahmi shows us several work certificates:

Mr Martin Fahmy, Al Sa'ah Restaurant Employee

The following individual is a paid contractor working for TF 4-1 FA. He is authorized accompanied access for the TF 4-1 FA FOB from the front gate to the Al Sa'ah

Restaurant. If there are any problems concerning this individual, please contact MAJ Lysinger, the TF 4-1 FA XO at DNVT 550-7129. # 0050

And for the British:

Janusian Security Identification Card

The bearer of this card is authorised to carry weapons in accordance with CPA Order 3.

Martin Famiye

Issue date: 1 July 04

Expiry date:

1 July 05

Janusian Security Risk Management

Baghdad

Tel: 07901914014/5

Green Zone

Martin worked there for four, five months with the same tasks.

We Janusian Security Risk Management limited would like to inform you that (Martin Fahmy) were working for us for six months and he was a good and responsible employee. For this we would like you to take that into consideration, hoping the best for everybody.

2/9/2004

General Manager

Steve Gill

By God
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Half an hour drive from the Green Zone one of the company's vehicles was attacked by terrorists. Four of Martin's friends and colleagues were killed. Two Muslims and two Christians.

The same night Martin and his sister Martina fled with their aunt Victoria and their two cousins Rita and Dani, who was wounded by a bullet. One and a half years later Fahmi and his wife followed.

- We took the highway, I followed the American troops, driving close behind them, says Fahmi.

The Assyrian TV channel Ishtar is on the screen and we stop a moment while we drink our dark tea and watch the mass on TV. Today is Good Friday, the day Jesus was crucified. Fahmi says Jesus' followers are being crucified the same way on daily bases these days. The camera zooms in on the faces and we see how they try to wipe their tears. The mass is from the north of Iraq.

Fahmi has only one arm. His right arm was blown away during the Iran – Iraq war. He does not like it when we discuss his arm; he wants to talk about his last days in Dora instead.

- The tank was empty of water. I went up on the roof to fill the tank and saw from a window my neighbours helping some unknown men to carry weapons into their home. I went to the police and told them what I had seen. They told me to protect my family by leaving my house because they would raid the area.

His house burned to the ground the same evening. According to Fahmi even policemen are engaged in acts of terror. Terrorists went to his parents' home a couple of days after his own home was burned down.

They did not touch the elders but they assaulted, shot and cut the head off Fahmi's fifty year old uncle, who happened to visit his aunt. When they had finished they took the head with them and threw it on the street as a gesture against Christians and Christianity. The house where Fahmi's uncle had been murdered was not the house Fahmi had grown up in. The house he grew up in had been burned down to the ground when the first church was bombed on September 5th 2004.

Two months later an Islamic group surrounded a Christian area and took the car keys from the Christians. They filled the cars with explosives, parked them around a church and blew up everything. This method subsequently became common practice. Churches were bombed using the Christians' own cars.

The tea is nearly finished and we are just about to leave when Fahmi shows a picture of his father and mother. He has not heard from them for several months. He hopes they are alive and that they have fled to relatives in Syria, but he does not have the phone number of the relatives and so cannot call them.

We meet Martin at the door and we go back and sit once again. I ask if they have been registered by the UNHCR. Martin is ashamed to say that he was interviewed by the UNHCR the day after his grandparent's home burned down and he had told the agency his parents had died in the fire.

By God
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He really believed his parents had died in the fire at the time because he could not find them. Now he does not dare to tell the truth to the handling officer at the UNHCR. Febroniya persuades him to call and tell the truth before his second meeting with the agency on the first of August.

Martin spends his days sitting in the Souq, Amman's supermarket, waiting for a recruiter to give him job for the day. Sometimes he is lucky but his time goes mostly to waste. His younger brother Michael is a tea-boy and earns 70 Dinars a month. The rent is 120 Dinars and they live on alms from relatives in Australia.

Fahmi becomes the sixth member in our team in Jordan. He takes us to a house nearby where he knows two Assyrian families are living in a two-room apartment.

Apartment without water

Ten people live in the apartment. It is the neatest apartment we have been in. But, the looks are deceptive for there's no water. They have to buy water for washing and drinking.

Two sisters live here with their families. One is a widow whose husband was killed by terrorists. He was travelling with four others in a taxi from Basra to Baghdad. Four of them were killed. The driver was the only survivor who could tell about the attack. My husband knew Basra would become a nest for fundamentalist Muslims. When

Saddam's regime fell in March 2003 my husband went to Baghdad to find a safer place to live.

She shows us a picture of her handsome husband. He was 49 years old. Her oldest daughter serves us coffee while her aunt brings cookies that are baked especially for Easter.

Her sister's husband tells us how they got the news about the murder of his brother-in-law. Their neighbours had called to tell them. His corpse was in hospital in Baghdad. They fetched the corpse and buried him. He left behind three daughters and a paralysed son. Relatives took the widow and her children to Dora where they stayed for half a year before they arrived in Amman.

They have been in Jordan for more than two years and they are out of money. All ten persons are unemployed. The mother of the two sisters lives in the US and she is the one who provides for them by sending them her pension. They cannot spare one Dollar. Rent, electricity and teenage girls.

The brother-in-law has a trauma. His fourteen-year-old daughter and her two friends were hunted in school. His daughter and one of the other girls managed to escape. One was kidnapped and is still missing. Ten people from the Dora district were kidnapped and are still missing. They say their names; ask each other whose cousin, sister or brother it was. The first one to be kidnapped was Abu Samer. Last summer two daughters and an aunt were killed.

Hanna takes another look at the clock. It is time for church.

By God
Six Days in Amman

My frustration becomes unbearable late at night and I let my feelings surface as I write the following in my web log:

The sad psalms of the Syriac Orthodox Church are heard in the background. It is Good Friday, the day when Jesus, Moran (Our Lord in Assyrian) was crucified in Jerusalem, only two hours from Amman, where I am staying. In Amman's Christian district, Ashrafiye, the sounds from the loudspeakers have been racing each other today. The churches have been broadcasting the psalms of Good Friday and the Mosques have been broadcasting the Friday prayers. But the sound that does not leave my head is totally different. It is the sound of weeping Iraqi refugees.

Sister Hatune (the nun) from Germany, Febroniya Atto, the lawyer from Holland who has now joined us, and I have been visiting one family after the other. I took careful notes and kept it all-professional in the first homes we visited. I tried to at least. But Sister Hatune hugged, held hands, gave presents and alms – and supported the families in different ways while Febroniya and I took turns to film, photograph and write down their fortunes.

One terrible story after another. Rapes, bodies cut in pieces, brutal we decided even before we began the trip that we would not chose families. We wanted to have a random selection of families so we could find the truth about the ethnic cleansing of our compatriots, the Iraqi Assyrians (also called Syriacs and Chaldeans). We wanted to bring back with us a reliable report.

It started three weeks ago. Sister Hatune and Febroniya attended a lecture I gave in Germany about the Iraq war.

"We must go there. We must do something, and we must do it NOW", said Sister Hatune after my lecture.

A week later social anthropologist Naures Atto called to tell that her younger sister, Febroniya, has decided to come along.

Many see Sister Hatune as the new mother Teresa. She has built more than four hundred houses for poor Indians. She is known to be an incredibly strong and energetic person, which she also proved she is while here. But only for two days. She had run out of energy today.

"This is a genocide that has taken place without any outcry. We must tell, we must stop it", she yelled while shedding tears.

Sister Hatune started sobbing in the car again after we had visited a family whose daughter had been shot with 72 bullets. I looked at our driver, my good friend Hanna, our assistant Nisha and then at Febroniya and then I started laughing hysterically all of a sudden. I could not stop laughing. It was too much to hear for me as well.

My people suffer, I am more than willing to take off my journalist vest and be a fellow creature.

By God
Six Days in Amman

Our religious leader was crucified on this day; my people are crucified today because they followed him. Bush went to war with a Christian rhetoric. It is his responsibility to protect the Christian Iraqis who still speak in Jesus' mother tongue!!!

I walk into the crowded church. Even the tent outside is full. The church board has doubled the seats because they now have double as many members; the Christian Iraqis. The believers touch the cross, contemplate that Jesus was crucified, and shed tears. Most of them, the majority, also shed tears for someone they have lost in the war. The new genocide.

EVERYONE we have met, and I really mean just about EVERYONE, has been persecuted because of the USA. The American government has decided, reluctantly, to resettle maybe seven thousand Iraqi refugees. 7 000! Shame on the USA!

Saturday, April 7

Fahmi wakes us up early in the morning. He wants us to visit two men and their mother who just arrived in Amman.

Their “crime” was to work for the Americans

Karam, 37 years and his brother Raymond, 30 years, live with their mother in a small one room apartment; the kitchen is a part of the room. The rent is 120 Dinars per month. Karam came here four months ago but Raymond and the mother have only been in Jordan for three days. All three have been working for the Americans and they now live on their savings. None of them has a job and none of them will dare to seek a job, because they risk being repatriated. They have a sister who fell in love with an American and is about to marry him. They met each other at her work in Baghdad.

- I worked for an American company. Someone informed the resistance movement. I started to receive threatening phone calls and a letter, says Raymond. He shows a letter proving he worked for the Americans.

Iraq Reconstruction company

Letter of Confirmation

To whom it may concern

Date: 17 January 17, 2007-04-07

This letter is to confirm that Karam XX is one of Berger URS JV’s employees.

Karam XX has been employed by Berger URS JV since September 17, 2005. He works as Human Resources Assistant in Facilities and Transportation section.

If you have any question, please contact me.

My contact information is: Juan.Vargas@pco-iraq.net, VOIP 703-544-6810, and MCI 914-822-1143.

Juan Vargas

Acting Program Manager

GRD/Facilities Sector

Berger/URS JV

Multi National Forces

Karam had his own business but it was unsuccessful. He had a friend who worked as an interpreter for the Americans and it was he who arranged Karam too to get a job. His friend has disappeared, could be abroad.

By God
Six Days in Amman

Raymond worked for an American company that produces air conditioning facilities. The mother never left home, especially not alone. They have relatives who are still in Baghdad.

- Rich or poor, everyone has a headache. Money has become your enemy, says the mother regretfully.

Both brothers testify to the constant threats against them because they worked for the Americans. They could not report the threats to the police because no one knows if the police are part of the resistance movement or part of the terrorists. Neither Karam nor Raymond believes the police would have done anything anyway. They know many who were ridiculed and denied help upon reporting to the police.

Three of their Christian friends have been kidnapped. One of them was a bookseller and was kidnapped in the bookshop, the second one sold generators and the third one was a carpenter. All of them paid the ransom, between 20 000 and 50 000 Dollars. Karim does not know exactly how much they paid because the kidnapped usually do not tell for fear of the word spreading among people.

When their mother Nahle went out she had to cover her hair. Their sister had to cover her entire body with the black shawl when she went outside. There lived between five to six Christian families on each street of the Baladiyat district. Now there is perhaps one family.

All of them lived under terrible conditions, not knowing if one will ever be back after leaving home. The mother called each thirty minutes to check if her sons were still alive.

Different gangs trade kidnapped people with each other. Raymond's friend was kidnapped and the kidnapers demanded 50 000 Dollars in ransom. He could not pay. They announced they would sell him to more dangerous terrorists. He has disappeared since then.

The mother says she would not hesitate for a second if she had enough money. She would try to get herself and her sons smuggled to Europe.

- They do not call us Christians, they call us crusaders! But we Middle Eastern Christians have never been crusaders. On the contrary we have always taken the consequences of the west's crusaders, finishes Raymond.

Sister Hatune tells Fahmi about her physiotherapist education and about her contacts with doctors all over the world while we are in the car. Fahmi asks Hanna to turn back. He wants us to meet a young man with traces of a bomb attack on his body.

Roben still has the war in his body

We stop the car outside a football field. Some ten young men train for a coming game. It is the refugee football team. All are Iraqis, nine Christians and three Sunni Muslims. They even have a famous professional Iraqi coach.

By God

Six Days in Amman

Fahmi shouts to Roben, a 22 year old from Baghdad. We follow Roben to his home. He is a happy man, laughing, making jokes and smiling all the time. Febroniya is elated over Roben and his family's joy. Finally we have met a family that is not totally tainted by sorrow and misery. Roben's expression changes the next second. His mother tells us about his great love, a woman of the same age which he was engaged to. But she broke the engagement when she got a visa to the USA. The mother tells us he cried when the woman left him.

I asked him from where did his team managed to get the white and pink football sweaters. He smiles again and tells me proudly how he contacted a music show on the Assyrian TV channel Ashur, and told them about his team. A week later Ashur TV sent the sweaters to the team. The name of the football team is Lamassu, an Assyrian name for a symbol, which stands for strength, brains, freedom and courage. They have just won a game in a tournament and are about to play a new important game on Tuesday.

Roben asks me about Assyriska, an Assyrian team in Sweden which played previously in the finest league. The scattered Assyrian people consider it a national team. He becomes exuberant when I reveal that I am from Södertälje, the hometown of Assyriska. The ladies become tired of our talk about football. We go back to talk about why he and his family are in Amman.

The father decided he would take his family to Syria before the war started. But Roben, the oldest child, could not come along. The army called up all young men so they would defend Iraq against the allied troops from the west. The father and Roben stayed in Baghdad.

The rest of the family was sent to Syria. Roben went to be interviewed by the military and promised to join the defence two days later, but he never went back. All their relatives gathered at their house the same evening. They were living in a Shiite district; they had never had problems from what he remembers. His aunt and her children had to go to the Christian district Dora. He did not want to let them go alone so he joined them. His older cousin was staying in the house in Dora and he did not want Roben to go back alone. They knew that the Americans were approaching and that the night would be long so they brought with them a chess set and domino to while away the time. It was the first of April, the Assyrian new year of Kha Nison, and Iraq's special army, the Fedayin, were still in Dora.

There was an attack before they reached home and they were trapped in the middle. He thought the Americans had dropped cluster bombs. There were explosions from many different directions. They saw American aeroplanes in the sky. His military educated cousin understood the Americans were bombing from many different directions in order to surround the Fedayin. They tried to get out of the most sensitive area and take a taxi from there.

The Iraqis tried to attack the American aeroplanes with missiles, but their missiles landed on the ground and wounded many people. Roben was hit. He got three shrapnel pieces in the lower part of his right arm, which broke. They managed to take out one piece at the hospital, but two are still in the arm. He also has a bit of metal left in his right knee, a small bit in his left arm and a bit next to his right kidney.

By God
Six Days in Amman

- Oops, he says and shows us yet another bend on his body.

He has a piece just next to the spinal marrow. There is much this family forgets to tell us because of their great joy of being together and alive. One day, before the rest of the family fled to Syria, an old neighbour knocked on the door. She had something terrible to tell. The Muslim woman told them her two grandsons had joined a fundamentalist Islamic group. She had heard her grandchildren plan to kidnap Roben's younger siblings. She said the fundamentalists are saying all Christian children should be kidnapped and large ransoms should be demanded so they could buy weapons and fight the Americans.

Roben's father took a decision that night to leave everything and flee with his family to Syria. But Roben and his father had to stay yet a while because the army had summoned Roben. When Roben was well enough to travel, his father sent him to Amman, where the rest of the family had travelled with a relative. The father stayed and worked at the Sand hotel in Baghdad to gather as much money as he could. He knew they would not be able to work in Amman. He stayed for an entire year, until it became impossible to work there as a Christian.

The rent is 150 Dinars. They have an uncle in Australia who sends them 200 Dollars every month, just enough to pay the rent. At first they stayed in a cheaper apartment but the mother is very ill and cannot walk up the stairs. She has diabetes, high cholesterol and problems with one of her cardiac valves. The treatments of the mother cost them a lot of money. Caritas does not always pay for her medicine.

Two of Roben's younger brothers have jobs. One earns 50 Dinars as an assistant for a goldsmith and the other earns 75 Dinars by selling school materials during the season.

Fahmi asks Roben to tell us about the illness he got in Jordan. Roben becomes embarrassed and his face turns red. His testicles swallowed up and he had an acute operation when he arrived in Amman. The operation cost 350 Dinars. He has not asked Caritas for money to remove the metal pieces. He thinks they have already been generous enough.

Febroniya asks him if he has X-ray photos we can take with us and show to doctors in Europe. It turns out he did not afford any. We give him money and tell him to only use them for X-ray photos.

Before we depart he tells us:

I was born during war, was wounded in war and live as if in a cage. But at least I am alive.

Nisha joins us once again later in the day. He has just been talking to his brother in northern Iraq who told him they have started again to spread DVD films with torture and murder of Christians to scare the remaining Christians away. I told him about all the articles I wrote about the first such DVD.

By God
Six Days in Amman

Here is an article that was published in Sweden, England, Denmark, Finland and the USA in January 2005:

Farouk, a 66 years old Assyrian, opens the gate to one of the hospitals in Mosul in Iraq. Corpses found on the streets are dumped in the hospital yard. He searches. Finds a body with no head. Opens the sheet that the body is wrapt up in. Recognizes the clothes of his only son Raymond. He hugs the body whose throat is wide open. Shouts out his anger and sorrow. Something falls down from the sheet. His sons' head. He picks it up carefully, kisses the forehead and the closed eyelids.

He tears of a piece of the sheet and uses it to attach his sons head to the chest. He carries what once was his son to the car. Many watch him. No one helps him. No one wants to become a new target for the Islamists. The one who helps someone whose relatives were killed by the Islamists can be accused of being a traitor. Raymond was killed because he was considered an enemy. He interpreted for the Americans and he was a Christian Assyrian. A people considered being an ally of Christian America. Raymond's father and mother have fled today to the city of Dohuk in northern Iraq. The mother has been ill since she heard her son was on a propaganda movie that has spread all over the world. People all over the world have watched the scenes where her son has his head cut off. The head of her son was a means to drive out the Assyrians from Iraq. It is cold; almost raw in the apartment they live in. The walls are white, creepy and empty. Farouk's eyes are as empty as the walls. He tries to say something after some silent minutes. But he can only say the three first letters in his son's name. His face is expressionless. A few more silent minutes and then with a whispering, rough voice:

"We have no future in Iraq. Our family is dead. I am dead. They have killed us all. They kill us Assyrians. We have no future in Iraq now that even our neighbours, Muslims who were our friends, have turned against us."

Consequently Farouk is Assyrian, a Christian people who are also called Chaldeans and Syriacs. A forgotten people. Saddam Hussein changed the Iraqi constitution in 1978, establishing that there were only two peoples in Iraq. Kurds and Arabs. The Assyrians, the indigenous population of Iraq, were thus to be called Christian Kurds or Christian Arabs. Those who accepted it were treated "well". They were allowed to exercise their religion, culture and language freely. Those who opposed and wanted to maintain their Assyrian identity were accused of treason and risked death penalties. Assyrians in northern Iraq therefore joined the Kurdish opposition and fought against Saddam. But the Assyrians have no allies today, even the Kurds fail and oppress.

Nuri Kino

By God
Six Days in Amman

We drive to the next meeting, still elated over the fate of Roben and his family.

They catch up with her and empty the magazines

June 1 in 2003 was a dark day for Christians in Baghdad. Twelve persons were shot dead. Alice Aramais and her friends had been effective, finishing their laundry already at one o'clock in the afternoon. They were allowed to quit the job earlier.

Alice was Armenian and her husband Assyrian. She travelled each day to her work at the American base with four other Christian women. They had hired a Muslim driver to drive them back and forth each day. The car was fired upon at two o'clock in the afternoon, no more than one kilometre from their homes. Some masked men stopped it and fired their machine guns. Four of them died instantly. One of them opened the door and ran to the crowded market. One of the terrorists caught up with her and shot her with countless bullets in front of all the people. Those who saw her being killed ran away. No one dared to do anything. No one wanted to become involved.

We are in the home of Alice's family. Her widower is not at home but her seventeen years old son George and twenty year old daughter are at home with their aunt and grandparents. Several framed photos of a laughing Alice hang on the walls. George takes out something looking like a medal.

It says on the front: *1st Battalion 6th Infantry, Unity is strength, "Regular"*, on the backside: *Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003*, and a map of Iraq. Two rifles cross each other at the bottom, below the map, with the words: *By God*.

Her son wears the bracelet of Spanish football team Real Madrid. He loves football. It was football he was playing when he heard about his mother's death:

- The time was half past six when I saw my father come running towards me across the football field. I understood instantly that something terrible had happened.

His sister wants to give us the background information. The Americans started looking for interpreters after the fall of Saddam's regime. One of her friends who already worked as an interpreter asked her if she wanted to join. She was a housewife but she had to take a job because her husband's store went bad. She started working for the Americans pretty soon, only two months after the fall of the regime.

She had pictures taken with the Americans but they burned them because of fear that someone would see them and it would lead to someone else in the family being hurt.

All of them who were shot to death left children behind. They brought the bodies the next day and buried them.

The Americans gave each family 3 000 Dollars. They did not ask for protection or help from the Americans. And the Americans did not bother to ask if they needed help. Her husband asked the Americans to write a certificate to prove she worked for them but they said "No" and told him it was for his own good.

By God
Six Days in Amman

When the terrorists found out two weeks later that the family had received 3 000 Dollars they demanded to have the money. They would otherwise kill their son. They fled to Jordan the following day. Grandmother, grandfather, sister, aunt, and the aunt's daughter. The aunt's husband died from a heart attack on the way to Amman. He had injuries from the Iran – Iraq war.

They have now been here for three years. George has not been to school since his mother was killed. His dream is to play football. He has many friends in the area. They do not differentiate between Christians and Muslims here; all Iraqi children play football together, no matter which religion they have.

No one else in the family dares to leave home in fear of being repatriated.

The rent is 110 Dinars a month. Their brother sends them money from Holland every other month so they can pay the rent and buy some food. The grandfather has diabetes and prostate difficulties. The grandmother has sciatica, problems with the heart and many other illnesses. Caritas is helping them. All of them have been interviewed and registered by the UNHCR.

Febroniya asks if they have applied for visa at the American embassy. The grandfather replies:

- It costs 100 Dollars per person and it is meaningless. No one we know has been granted a visa to the US.

Our energy is drained when we come out of the small and stuffy apartment that lacks windows. Things do not get better when Sister Hatune receives a text message from Germany:

German media has reported that a two-year-old Christian baby was left outside the mother's house with his head cut off and placed on a bed of boiled rice.

We visit two night masses in the evening. We go first to the Chaldean Catholic that has rented a sports hall so there will be room for everybody. After that we go to the Syriac Orthodox Church of Saint Afrem. Sister Hatune, who has never witnessed a mass other than that of the Syriac Orthodox Church, is amazed by the strong similarity between the masses and that both are held in the Aramaic dialect called Syriac.

Nisha is baptised in a Chaldean Catholic parish, Fahmi in an Eastern Assyrian and we others in a Syriac Orthodox. This year all of us celebrate Easter the same weekend.

Sunday, 8 April

Sister Hatune and Febroniya ask Nisha and Fahmi to help us come in touch with prostitutes. Assyrian women who are forced to sell their bodies in order to provide for their families. Nisha knows two such women. One woman has a Jordanian lover who has rented an apartment where he can have sex with her. Another one has several customers. She has no relatives in the west to send her money. She sells her body so she can pay the rent, the electricity and buy food.

Her family knows about it. All except her brother. Her brother, sister and mother live with her. Her brother believes she works as a nanny for a rich Jordanian family. She has a pimp who takes care of things for her and takes some of the profit.

They have been here for three years. Her brother cannot work. He only earned enough money to buy cigarettes when he did work.

We try to come in touch with any of them but we fail.

Fahmi knows another case of oppression of women. He saw her in church, recognized her and waved. She was gone as soon as he turned his back. It was Chammi who had been working for Uday and who had been raped by the Mujahedin in Dora. Everyone knew it except her brother. That is at least what she thinks. Fahmi called around and got hold of her number. She agreed to meet us after several persuading calls. But we first met with her brother who has a smuggle history that fulfils every criteria for a tragedy.

Firas is accused of smuggling

Firas tried to get to Sweden via Turkey but ended up in Greek prison, accused of being a smuggler.

He contacted an Assyrian smuggler in Amman on 1 July 2006. A few days later he found himself in a hotel in Istanbul with thirty other Iraqis. Each one had to pay 200 Dollars for food costs during the operation. They were to pay the rest upon arrival. They were gathered in a house somewhere in the countryside the day before they were supposed to head for Greece and thus the European Union. They were taken by bus to the Turkish – Greek border on the third day. It took the bus three hours to reach the border. It was eight in the morning. They sat and waited in the bus for twelve hours. The journey began in the night and by foot. They walked for several days, or more correctly nights. They hid at day and walked from village to village at night. They arrived at a lake after three days.

The smugglers companion had two boats, a big one and a little one. Those who cannot swim were taken by boat, the others had to swim. A mother and her three little children were put in the first boat along with others who could not swim. Firas joined them because he cannot swim. The smugglers had to row back and forth several times because it turned out most Iraqis cannot swim. The Iraqi smuggler sent his Greek companion to see whether there was any Greek police control. They had now left Turkey behind them. The Greek came back after two hours and told them it was safe. They walked for a couple of hours until they heard dogs bark.

By God
Six Days in Amman

The Greek police was on patrol. The refugees ran and hid in tunnels, they could hear the policemen walking above them. They were not discovered and they continued to walk. They were almost caught on several occasions but they were lucky. It was muddy till the knees but they kept walking. The first day they walked until three in the morning. The smuggler took them to a safe place where they stayed over the night. Sometimes they had to walk at night, sometimes at day. They eventually arrived at a village named Kristianapoli. One of the refugees had made the trip once before but had been caught. He knew where they were. They walked until four or five in the morning. They travelled for seven days all together, three days in Turkey and four in Greece – by foot. Exhausted. They were given energy pills; it was included in the 200 Dollars they had paid for the food.

They stood in line to fill their bottles with water when they had almost arrived. But the water tap was off. Lights were lit, they had been fooled. The Greeks had set a trap for them. If they had not bothered about the water and crossed the high way instead they would arrive at the house where a bus was waiting to take them to Athens. The smuggler told them that it would not be his fault if someone died. But he did not think the high way was busy. They believed him because it was in the middle of the night. As soon as they arrived at the high way they saw a car, two cars, many cars ...

Firas asked how come there were so many cars; the smuggler replied it was weird, that there were usually not many people. Firas realizes it is the Greek army that is driving the civil cars in order to stop them from crossing the high way. They went back towards a village. Police came from all directions and fired bullets in the air to scare them. Among those to be smuggled were many children in the age of eight to ten. They were surrounded. The policemen asked them to come forth and forced them down on the ground, one by one. The Greek smuggler pointed at Firas, raised his voice and shouted, “That malaka is a smuggler”.

The real smuggler, an Assyrian from Iraq, sat quietly and looked on. He told Firas in Assyrian not to be afraid and to go first, so that the policemen would be less brutal against him. The policemen wore night vision glasses and they noticed Firas went first. A Greek policeman shouted something. Firas believed he was saying that a long penalty was awaiting him. He did not want to inform on the others and said in poor English that they had no smuggler with them. The police asked how they reached so far if they did not have any smuggler with them.

The police took one of the refugees, Muhammed, and abused him physically behind the car trying to make him tell whom the smuggler was. They then took a Christian and did the same thing with him. But no one dared to reveal the smuggler.

The Greek smuggler was quiet, but the Assyrian shouted something to him in Greek and was caught. The police understood he was the smuggler because he could speak Greek. He had lived in Greece for ten years. Firas was put in the same car as the exposed smuggler. The policemen said they knew that the two were companions. Firas pointed out the third smuggler, also an Assyrian from Iraq. The smugglers shouted at him that he and his family would be killed in Amman because he had pointed out one of them. Bashar, the smuggler, started running when Firas pointed towards him.

The police shot him in the leg.

By God Six Days in Amman

Firas became very afraid. The smugglers knew where his wife and children were living. They had planned he would call when he arrived in Athens. His wife would then give 3 500 Dollars to another member of the smugglers gang. Either his wife and children or he would find himself in real trouble if the wife did not pay the smuggler.

Firas had heard many stories in Turkey about smugglers who had killed refugees and it made him very scared. But if he would be convicted in Greece for human smuggling he would receive ten years in prison.

The refugees were divided in two groups and taken to a remand prison. The police interrogated them. The next day they were removed to another prison, full of refugees from all over the world. On the third day they were taken to the border by car, some two hundred people. The police filmed everything. There were also many young men in soldier's cloth driving motorboats. The Greek police made sure there were no Turkish colleagues on the other side of the water and then gave the sign to the soldiers to force the refugees of the boats.

They were soon arrested by Turkish police on the Turkish side of the border and taken to small and tight rooms where they could barely move. They remained there for three days and were thereafter deported to Zakho in northern Iraq. Firas stayed there for three months. His wife sent him his real passport to Zakho. His uncle gave him a ride to his aunt in Telkef, from there Firas continued to Syria. Four persons had come home to his uncle in Zakho searching for him because he had informed the police about the smuggler. The uncle lied and said Firas had fled directly to Syria. He had parked his car in Syria before joining the smugglers. He now took the car to Amman. He had been gone for six weeks. He departed from Amman on the 13 August and was back on the 24 November.

When he came home his wife introduced him to her new husband, her lover. He battered the lover and ended up in jail. He would have been deported if his sister did not know the secretary of Uday, the son of Saddam Hussein, who has many contacts in Jordan. Firas is on a ten-day respite when we meet with him. He must leave the country after that. If the members of the smuggler gang know where he is they will certainly not let him be. He has squealed on two of them.

- I wanted my children to be able to go to school. That drove me to be smuggled although everybody is warning each other about smugglers these days. My wife's lover knows that my sister is living with a fake identity in Jordan, says Firas.

The story of Firas' sister, Chammiss, leads us straight in to the life of Saddam Hussein's family. Chammiss used to work for the former dictator's family and runs therefore a great risk of being hurt. We sat with her for more than four hours but I chose to only write down a piece of it here.

The phone rang one day when she had come back to Dora. It was from a Shia Muslim she knew from before. He told her she had to visit him if she did not want anything to happen to her family. He stood by the door, two hundred metres from her parent's home, asking her to read a document. She told him that she was illiterate. He then forced her into the house, claiming he would read it for her. There were two more persons inside. They raped her. The rape was repeated for three months – otherwise they would kill her entire family. They were known to be able to do such a thing.

Kidnapped UN interpreter

We have a late Easter lunch at a Jordanian – Assyrian family of the Syriac-Orthodox community before we go back to the hotel and go through all the interviews. We are barely halfway there when a man calls and asks to meet me. He says it is very important and that I will regret it if I do not give him two hours.

The two hours become three.

Bashar Alber Nazo belonged to Baghdad's upper class. He says his family does not suffer economically. His wife is selling off her jewels. They have stayed in Jordan for a year and two months. The family consists of a father, mother, a 20 years old daughter, a 16 years old daughter and a nine years old son.

Bashar started working as an interpreter and translator in Baghdad in 1999 with the notorious "Food for oil programme" for the UN body called UNOHCI. The UN director was killed in Iraq and the UN left Baghdad. The premises were closed on the 31 December 2003. Bashar started working with construction, imports, exports and Iraqi agents who acted as intermediaries for American companies. Bashar immediately signed two contracts with something he calls the KBR, which is a part of the American Army. The first project was to construct three buildings. He does not know what the army utilized them for. The second project was to build three landing spots for helicopters. Bashar was very content with the projects.

The projects were completed in February 2006. On the evening of 13 February, when he and his wife had just got into the car, someone knocked on the car window. They asked him if it was true he had been working for the UN. They dragged him out of the car before he had time to give an answer. They ordered his wife to remain in the car and keep quiet. They pulled a black hood over his head, shoot two pistol bullets in the air and forced him into a car. He was kept captive for four days.

The kidnapers belonged to Islamic abu-Kassem, one of Sayouf al-Hakes groups, who are part of Al-Qaida.

- I asked them why they were treating me like that and they replied I had worked for the UN from 1997 to 2003. They knew who I was and they also used my correct name. They said the UN and all its branches are part of CIA and that all Iraqis who had worked for the UN are therefore CIA spies. They also told me I had worked for the American army through my company and that they had complete information about my family. They had tailed me for a long time. They demanded 50 000 Dollars.

Bashar endured all kinds of physical and mental abuse because of his Christian religion during the four days he was kidnapped. They took off the black hood and ordered him to tear the bible they gave him and to convert. He refused. He pointed out to them that the Koran says that the Bible should be protected. They told him they had a new Islamic religion. One of them stepped on the Bible. It was only the beginning. His eyes were covered all the time and they called him Abu-Kamar several times each day to let him understand they knew he had only one son and that they would hurt the son if he did not comply. The terrorists fired bullets near his ear at least once a day.

By God
Six Days in Amman

It was very cold in the room. They took off all his clothes and put him on the stone floor. His hands were always tied. The only time they released his hands was when they gave him old bread to eat. They urinated on him, beat him and threw cold water on him. They shouted they would destroy his sex organ because three children are more than enough for a Christian dog.

- They tied my testicles as hard as possible, among many other things, which I am not able to tell.

They interrogated him and asked for the names of everyone who had worked with him at the UN. He knew that two of those who worked with him were already killed. Two more were killed when he left Iraq. They enumerated names but wanted more. He told them those who had worked with him had already left Iraq. UNOHCI had 36 interpreters, 30 of them fled directly after the UN office closed. The only one remaining in Baghdad today is Khaled Hamami. His son was killed before his eyes half a year ago.

The kidnappers also demanded the names of those who had worked with him on the two construction projects he did for the Americans. They told him they had already caught some of them. They wanted 50 000 Dollars otherwise they would bring his family, rape his daughters and kill his son before his eyes. They shouted that all the money he had earned from the UN and the American army were dirty. He told them it is impossible to gather so much money. Later he found out they were negotiating with his wife and her brothers. He said that 10 000 Dollars was all he could gather.

On the morning of the fourth day they told him he would be released because his wife promised to pay. He would be released on the condition that he would go back and cooperate with the Americans again and spy on them. They claimed they had such deals with most of those who work for the Americans and that was the reason they were still alive.

Later his wife explained that one of the terrorists agreed to meet her at the Abu-Hanifa Mosque. They called her up six o'clock the same morning demanding the ransom and her mobile phone. She told them she refused to come by herself and that she would send the money with one of her brothers. They demanded he would bring with him her phone so they would be able to communicate with him.

Bashar's brother-in-law gave them the money and the mobile phone. They had given him instructions: "Turn right, left, you have a car beside you, turn around..." The man in the car asked him why his expression was so miserable. They told him they would not take the money unless he started smiling, because it meant he did not really want to do it and it would be against their religion, against the Koran, to take the money.

- One of the terrorists came the same evening and treated me in the most inhumane way. They put a bag on my head although I already had a band tied on my head so I could not see. They abused me sexually... He becomes silent; a tear appears in his eyes, looks down at the floor and asks for a break.

Sister Hatune gives him water. He continues.

They handed him over to another group who put him in an old car. He believes it was stolen from the Iraqi army because the engine sound resembled that of army vehicles.

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They took him out of the car twice and put him back in the same car in order to make him believe they had changed cars. He believes they drove out from the city, because it was very quiet, the only sound was that of prayers from a Mosque far away. A third group picked him up in a new car. There were four persons in the car. One to each side of him, the driver and a passenger who seemed to be the boss.

The man right next to him stuffed something in his pocket, took off the hood, loosened the ropes around his arms, opened the door and pushed him out of the car. The boss shouted they would return before they drove away. He had a choice: either he started working with the Americans again and become the spy of the terrorists or they would kill his family.

- I tried to take off the band, could not see, was afraid I had become blind but realised, when I could see again, that it was already dark outside. I recognized the place. I was in Rustamiye, an area six kilometres outside the city. I tried to stop a taxi but realised I did not have money. I remembered they had stuffed something in my pocket, I thought maybe it was money.

It turned out to be his wife's mobile phone. He called home but no one answered. He called his brother-in-law who picked him up with another brother-in-law. He stayed at his brother-in-law's house that night. He was taken to a hospital the next day. He was suffering from all the beating. The treatment at the hospital was bad and he checked out. He knew a private doctor who came home to him and gave him pills for the ache.

The Alber Nazo family returned to their home on 22 of February, the same day as the Samara crisis. On the morning of 23 February a grey Opel stopped outside their house. An armed person came out of the car and knocked on the door. The aunt of Bashar's wife opened the door. The man said they wanted to meet Bashar. She went in and told Bashar who was ill and lying in bed. He went to meet the stranger. The stranger shouted that Amir abu-Kaser is called Amir because he has killed 25 persons. That makes him Amir, which means prince. The man demanded the rest of the information and the rest of the 50 000 Dollars before 25 February.

"If you inform the authorities or try to flee outside Baghdad you and all members of your family will be killed. We have been watching you twenty-four hours", was the last thing the man told him.

Time has passed two in the night and we have yet another booked meeting. Bashar hands over all his documents, his registration at the UNHCR and a detailed account of the escape route before he leaves us. One of his letters to the UNHCR begins:

There is a verse in the Koran: "prepare yourselves to terrorise the enemy of Allah and use all power you have to crush the enemy".

The terrorists use this verse and say they have received instructions from Allah to kill all non-Muslims.

Monday, 9 April

Febroniya receives a call in the morning from one of her Iraqi friends in Syria. He says Syria will soon change the visa rules. As it is today they get a six months visa. They have to go back to Iraq and renew the visa after six months. The new proposal means that their visas will be valid for only three months at a time.

We decide to have a steady breakfast before we begin with the interviews of the day. Hanna takes us to a Lebanese restaurant. They have fantastic fruit cocktails made of fresh fruit, but they have no coffee or tea. The sandwiches are also a disappointment but we begin the day with a vitamin kick in the form of big glasses filled with fresh squeezed fruit juices.

Many liquor storeowners, hairdressers and music storeowners have been killed because of their profession. Nisha knows a liquor storeowner from Basra. He calls to ask if we could meet him. He is very happy for our visit.

The liquor storeowner

It is Easter Monday. The wife is speaking in the phone with her maternal uncle from Baghdad as we come in. He tells her that her former neighbour and his son are kidnapped. The terrorists separated them from each other. The father had a heart attack and died when he thought his son was killed. They later found the sons' body in a street, after someone from a fraction within the Sadr-group called and told them where it could be found.

The reason for the murder is unknown. But the most probable reason is they had a car repair shop and were Christians. They do not want Christians to have businesses. The liquor shop owner, his wife and two sons came to Amman in November 2004. The sons, 15 and 16 years old, have not been to school for two years. They attended one of the unofficial church schools for a couple of months but it was closed.

Their rent of 210 Dinars is relatively high. Especially as no one of them has a job. Michael Faraji Micha, the liquor storeowner, is 47 years old but looks much older. Sorrow and melancholy has consumed him. He would not have survived if it were not for his four siblings in Detroit, Michigan, where many members of the Chaldean Catholic church live. They send him money each month. But he has three brothers left in Iraq and he is very worried for them.

Michael had a liquor store in Basra. That became equal to a mortal sin after the fall of Saddam. Selling alcohol is against the conviction of the terrorists. They threatened to kill him and kidnap his sons. There stood a church next to his store. His wife was stopped in front of the church. Two men shouted at her she must wear a veil, stop attending church, convert to Islam or watch her children being slaughtered.

One evening Michael and one of his sons were shot at. Both survived, but the machine gun bullets killed two men standing next to them. Michael realised it was the end. He sold everything he owned and fled.

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The sons serve us newly-baked cookies. The mother has baked them. She asks us to try her coconut cookies, smiling and saying it is a secret recipe. They taste very good. Michael comes back to the room with his hands full of hand-written threatening letters, mixed with photos from the good old time. It is photos of his liquor store, his colleagues and rivals, all of them either killed or on the run.

Michael's first stop on his escape was Baghdad. But they received the first threatening letter only some week after they arrived there. He holds it up so we can take a photo.

They got 24 hours to pay taxes to the resistance movement so they can fight the Americans, otherwise one of their sons would be killed. The letter is signed "Shekh Al-Beyt Awali, Hizbe Dawa Islami", (The party for Islam's cause).

They packed their things and came to Amman. There were 700 Christian families in Basra before the war broke out. Today maybe 30 of them are left, those who cannot afford to flee. He shows us pictures of his friends who also were liquor storeowners, something only the Christians worked with. Out of six storeowners in Basra he is the only one alive today.

Michael has applied for visa to the USA, hoping for approval. The melancholy is killing him. He is losing his teeth and he has a high cholesterol value and many other illnesses. Caritas has paid for the acute dental care.

The sons on the other hand are alert and happy and they are out playing all day. But Michael is afraid they will get into trouble with Jordanian children and the family will be deported. He has been in contact with a church that has promised to teach them English and Arabic.

One of Michael's brothers, Adel, was imprisoned in Iran from 1987 to 1991. They did not know he was still alive. Their father died of sorrow. He fell dead in front of the gate of the church he used to visit daily and appeal to God to let him know what had happened to his Adel. They received a letter from the Red Cross shortly after the death of the father. It said Adel was alive.

Adel lives now in Telkef in northern Iraq. He worked previously for the Americans in Tikrit. Michael does not know exactly what his brother was doing but he knows he was threatened and later fled to Telkef where he is working with his parents-in-law. Michael feels split. Just a month ago he was prepared to take his family and move to Telkef because neither the UN nor the USA seems ready to approve any visa. But even the Christians of the otherwise safe Telkef have started to feel threatened.

Febroniya has read our notes about the two sisters, Rita and Linda, who were killed at the same time. She wants to meet their family before we return to Europe. Sister Hatune, Hanna, Nisha, Fahmi and I have also made up plans for the future of the family. We want to take them to a better apartment, buy furniture and cloths for them and make their case known in the USA and Europe.

The police arrest Jouni

They have barely woken up when we arrive. They have probably also been to one of the late Easter masses. Leyla is very happy to see us, and so is Erkan and Nora. Wassim is lying and half sleeping but still gets up to greet us politely. Samir has already started on his second coffee. Jouni is not at home. They have not heard from him so they believe he has been sleeping at his friends' house. We tell them that we have begun to search for a new apartment for them and that we will also collect money for furniture, clothes and other things they need. Samir is a proud individual and becomes almost hurt at the beginning. Leyla does not want to change apartment because she is afraid a new apartment can make the Americans believe their situation is not bad enough for a visa approval.

We reformulate what we have said and tell them they will only be allowed to use the apartment for a while, that we will pay the rent during six months, that furniture and other things will not be owned by them. Nora and Erkan look expectantly towards their mother. She cracks a smile and says she is thankful for our support before she asks her children to bring sweets that are offered during Easter. The children have tears in their eyes because they are happy. Finally they can get rid of the "apartment" which actually is a shed.

We sit on their mattresses. Hanna and I write down what they need and how much it will cost. Sister Hatune, Febroniya and Leyla are chatting. A mobile phone rings. It is Samir, Leyla answers. She stands up after a couple of polite greeting sentences, starts to scream, cry, drop the phone and fall on one of the mattresses. Her son Jouni has been arrested by the police and will be deported.

- What can we do? Asks Sister Hatune and looks at me.

I decide we shall go to the police station and demand they release him. He is registered at the UNHCR and has thus the right to stay in Jordan. One cannot just ignore international rules. On the way there I call Nasser el Nabisi, a UNHCR refugee lawyer. He promises to call and fax immediately the police station and demand they release Jouni.

Nisha gets out of the car a couple of hundred metres before we reach the police station; he has no permit to stay in the country.

Ayman, the head of the police, is pleasant, polite and keen. Leyla on the other hand is hysterical and unreachable. I ask Ayman to tell us what has happened, what laws and rules apply and what they plan to do with Jouni, who is obviously detained in custody.

The head of the police says they arrested ten Iraqi Christians the previous night. Nine were released because they had valid ID cards and because it is Easter.

Leyla, who has stopped shouting, says that her son was arrested just because he is Christian and that they do not want to have Christians in the country and are therefore repatriating them. Ayman looks at me and says it is not true. He says his own grandfather was breast-fed by a Christian woman as a baby and that he himself grew up in a city where Christians and Muslims live side by side without any problems.

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The only reason Jouni has not been released is because they have not seen his UNHCR registration and a valid passport. I tell them they certainly have seen a copy of the UNHCR-registration and that it should be enough for identification. He then claims the UNHCR has instructed the police that all registration certificates issued in February have been declared invalid. He does not know why that month in particular but Jouni's certificate is from February.

Another head at the police office comes and takes Ayman to the side after a big drama with a hysterically crying Leyla, Hanna trying to calm down everybody and Ayman becoming increasingly careful as I tell him more about the reason of our visit to Amman. The two officers do not notice Sister Hatune, who is standing very close to them. She hears the other officer tell Ayman to be careful, because I could have come to make a documentary about persecution of Christians, and that is of course not the image they want the western world to have of Jordanians.

- OK, he can be released if you can identify him, says Ayman when I tell him that I have spoken to the UN and asked them to fax evidence and that they said they have not heard about any registrations being declared invalid.

I answer him that I can point out Jouni from a row of a hundred men. He says he will do us all a favour because it is Easter, because he likes Christians. He orders one of his men to bring Jouni.

A tired Jouni is led in to Ayman's office. The young man sits down and tries to explain to the head of the police, but the two cannot agree. They have totally different versions of what had happened.

Jouni says Ayman and seven other police men came in to a pool hall, arrested ten Iraqi Christians and told them they would celebrate Easter in Baghdad. The others were released except for him, and he has no clue as to why.

We are relieved and leave the police station with Jouni, heading home to his family for Easter dinner. I call an employee at the UNHCR in the evening. He demands to remain anonymous and confirms that the Jordanian police are repatriating Iraqi refugees although they are registered at the UN.

The wild pig hunter

It is very late in the night and we should go to the hotel to prepare for tomorrow but Nisha has been in contact with a wild pig hunter who would like to meet us now. We knock at the door. It is a Spartan but beautifully decorated apartment on the second floor.

The oldest son, Luay, opens the door. He is dressed up for Easter, as is the rest of the family. The middle son Aboud serves coffee while Luay tells us he has not been outside the home for more than a year. The church is the only place he has visited since the police seized his ID card. He does not even go outside for fresh air. If he is arrested and repatriated to Iraq it would be equal to a death sentence.

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The entire family, father, mother and three sons came to Amman on 29 November 2004. The father, Laith, and his friend and companion Andrew Kanady were having lunch on 19 of April, half a year before the family arrived in Amman. Andrew was originally from Russia and had also a Canadian citizenship. They co-owned an import-export company and also did carry out some work for the Americans, so called contracts. Their third companion, Munir Solaka Toma, the brother-in-law of Laith, was also having lunch. Around two o'clock their secretary called Munir's wife: "Your husband has been killed".

Munir's wife and daughter went to Dora, the Christian district and saw both Munir's and Andrews's dead bodies in a car. The police arrived, took the bodies to the hospital and the wife and daughter for interrogation. They got back the body two days later. The third day they saw a car drive back and forth in a suspicious way. Someone found a threatening letter in the church, with threats against the family. They did not take it seriously. An older man came and asked about Munir's wife and children in the evening. Now they took the threats seriously and became afraid that the rest of the family may also be killed. In one of the threatening letters it said Munir and Andrew were killed because they had non-Iraqi citizenships.

Another reason might be that they used to hunt and eat wild pigs, which is forbidden according to the Koran. Fundamentalists had warned them already before the fall of Saddam.

They called Munir's sister in Toronto, Canada, who advised them to remove the family immediately. The sister also sent a Canadian journalist who advised Munir's wife to flee from the country with her eight year old daughter. An MD for a Canadian company moved the wife and daughter to one of Saddams former palaces, where they were kept hidden. The terrorists started to threaten the rest of the relatives of the family. They went home to their relatives several times not even wearing any masks. Laith spoke to one of them and asked why it was important for them to speak with the wife of Munir. The man said he did not know. He was just following orders and had no idea why she was interesting.

In Iraq they put up a piece of paper when some one dies so relatives, friends, and neighbours can know when the burial is taking place. All papers about Munir's and Andrews' burials were torn away by those who were threatening his family. Laith was close to being killed twice during that time. American army vehicles on patrol saved him both times by driving pass him.

One day when Laith was to drive his wife to a relative's house a car started to follow them. Laith's family had now become a target. Two persons came home to him and showed grenades they had wrapped around their legs saying they would blow up the building with all the twelve Christian families in it if did not tell them where Munir's wife was. Laith and his family hid at a relative's house for a week. When they went back home they remained together in the same room all the time. They were together even when they left the house.

Laith's father-in-law had problems breathing and was staying with them. They had to take him to hospital each day for oxygen and an injection. When the problems started they bought home oxygen, his health improved and they could leave. Some one knocked at the door one day when Laith was alone at home.

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He jumped down from a height of three and a half metres and injured his back. That was when they decided to flee the country.

They took with them the most necessary things and drove away in the middle of the night. There was a curfew and police could kill them. He drove very slowly, kept a warning triangle light on so the police understood it was something special. They did not put all the bags in the car at the same time. Instead they put one at the time, so no one would realize they were going away.

Their rent is 100 Dinars. Water and electricity cost 15. No one of them dares to have a job because they are afraid they will be repatriated. They are very tired but still happy they are alive and together. The wife says it is not true that no one of them has a job. She is working sometimes at the Mother Teresa old peoples home. She is registered as a volunteer but is paid, five Dinars a day.

The sons tell about their dreams. They want to leave here. They want to study and create a future in Australia. Luay has always dreamed of having his own car repair shop, he loves to repair cars. The two brothers are specialized in BMWs. They used to work as mechanics in Iraq during school holidays. They proudly show pictures from that time.

Hanna picks us up early in the morning the next day. By nine o'clock we are on our plane back to Europe and security.

Certain persons in this report have demanded to have their first name and their family name published. Others have only wanted to have their first names in the report and a third group remain anonymous and have been given fake names.

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