

Testimony of  
**John\*\***

January 16, 2007

"The Plight of the Iraqi Refugees"  
Testimony before Committee on the Judiciary  
Tuesday, January 16, 2007

My name is John and I am 48 years old. I have a brief statement to give to the sub committee today. I would ask that my full statement be made part of the record. I am a native of Iraq born in Batnaya, Mosul. My family and I were granted asylum in the United States just two months ago.

My wife, my six children and I fled Iraq after terrorist groups targeted me and my family because I aided the Americans by supplying water to their service camps. I worked for a contractor paid by the American military to deliver water to its servicemen.

Additionally, my family and I are Chaldeans, and thus practicing Catholics. As a result we were often the targets of harassment and attacks by the Islamic majority who associated us with the Americans. It is because of this persecution that thousand of my fellow Chaldeans have fled Iraq making Christianity virtually extinct in the country.

On two occasions, I was beaten by Islamic terrorist groups that knew my name and threatened that if I did not leave the country I would be killed.

On the day of the first attack, I went to work delivering water to the Americans along with my son. At about 9 o'clock that morning, we saw what appeared to be a road blockade ahead. Before we could realize what was happening, my son and I were dragged out of the cab of our truck. We were positioned face down on the side of the road by a group of terrorists.

I could not make out the identity of these men but they were heavily armed and were wearing green bandanas decorated with the three-stars from the Iraqi flag. They kept saying to me, "Don't work with the Americans," and one of them struck me in the face with the butt of his gun permanently damaging jaw. Another man twisted my son's arm so severely that he broke it. They knew my name and instructed me that this was a warning and that I would be killed if I continued assisting the Americans. After they made their threat they departed, leaving us bloodied on the side of the road.

It was at this point that everything began to change for my family. My wife feared for our children's lives so much that she refused to let them go to school and I stayed up most nights watching out for any signs of trouble near our home.

Despite the warning from the first attack, I continued delivering water for the Americans.

I was attacked a second time, roughly five months after the first attack. I was alone making a delivery to the American soldiers. I was stopped on the road and a man got into my truck and pointed a gun at my head. He ordered me to follow the vehicle in front of me. I followed the vehicle into the desert.

When we stopped, five additional terrorists exited the vehicle and ordered me out of my truck. The men were speaking Farsi and were dressed in long white robes with masks covering their faces. The six terrorists blindfolded me and repeatedly struck me in the face with their guns. They called me by name and they knew I had been warned before. They told me they were going to kill me.

I pleaded for my life. Five of the terrorists were yelling "Kill him." One, however, spoke up and said "We will not kill you but you must leave the country immediately." If I did not leave, they promised me they would kidnap and slaughter my entire family. They continued to beat me until I was knocked unconscious. I awoke several hours later alone in the desert. I returned home to tell my family we had to leave the country immediately.

We had family in America and since my assistance to American soldiers was partly responsible for my family's persecution, we decided to flee Iraq for the United States. When we collected the money we needed and left the only home we had ever known, I arranged for a bus to take us from Iraq to Turkey. We then paid smugglers to take us from Turkey across the border into Greece. Once we had enough money for travel, we arranged to leave Greece on September 9, 2005. My eldest son and daughter were able to board a plane leaving Greece successfully; however, officers at the airport stopped myself and the rest of my family, and told us we could not board the plane.

At this point, we were again too low on money to try another attempt at fleeing the country. Finally in June of last year, we secured enough money to board a plane in Greece with the help of smugglers. After traveling through five countries and four continents, we took a taxi cab from Mexico to the United States border. We crossed into America at San Ysidro, California. I handed the officers my false passport from Greece and told them that, "I was an Iraqi," and needed "their help." A few days later my family and I were taken to the Berks County Family Shelter in Leesport, Pennsylvania. We were in detention until our petition for asylum was granted. Just one week later, we flew to California where I was reunited with my two children, my mother, and several other family members.

Two years ago yesterday, I was fleeing Iraq in the back of a bus just starting my long journey to America. My future was unknown. But now thanks to the help of many people, my family and I have been blessed with asylum in this country. I thank you for your graciousness in allowing me to speak here today and I ask that you continue to be as gracious to my former countrymen and fellow Chaldeans who have been forced to leave their homes. Thank you!