

Iraq Forum

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Testimony of Faiza Al-Araji

My name is Faiza Al-Araji. I am an Iraqi independent Civil Engineer, and a mother of three. My family used to live in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's regime during the sanction time, and during the invasion of our country. We left Iraq in the last summer after the security men from the Ministry of the Interior kidnapped one of my sons from his college. He has a beard, so he was a suspected terrorist! They kept him for 12 days in the Ministry of the Interior jail, they told him you are innocent, but your family has to pay to release you. So, we paid thousands of dollars to take him to the judge, and then the judge released him. We left our house and left Iraq to live in Jordan, like thousands of other Iraqis living in exile and waiting day after day to go back home.

We lost our house, our jobs, our friends, our relatives, and our homeland. This is the situation of Iraqis living outside their country. What about Iraqis who are still inside? They are suffering for the last three years from the lack of security, electricity, clean water, medicine, fuel, jobs, and even hope.

Since the beginning of the war, I started to write my diaries, it was just to fill me time, but now I find it as a kind of responsibility. I publish my thoughts on a blog entitled: AFamilyinBaghdad.blogspot.com. I am still writing about Iraq now. My blog is turning into a kind of documentation about what happened in my country since the beginning of invasion.

The culture in Iraq is mixed, and this is the beauty of it, like how the culture in the USA is mixed as well. Arab and Kurds lived together, as well as Sunnis and Shias, Muslims and Christians, and other small religious groups. For thousands of years we all used to live together like brothers and sisters; reconciliation was in our culture. Even if there was conflict in the past, it was between the government against Kurds or Shia or Sunnis for political reasons, not as a civil conflict or faith conflict.

I have three sisters, and four brothers. We all have mixed marriages – we are Shia and our spouses are Sunnis. We used to live in mixed neighborhoods, mixed schools, and even the government workplaces – like ministries, universities, and hospitals – were mixed. In the past, Sunnis and Shias stood together to fight the British occupation of Iraq (1914-1958). This is what we have learned from schools and grandparents. After the invasion of Iraq, new culture entered our lives. It's the culture of sectarianism and ethnicity. A culture of hatred and revenge, while what we need now is the culture of forgiveness and reconciliation.

We need leaders like Nelson Mandela and Gandhi to unite our nation. When Paul Bremer divided the map of Iraq into three different parts, and said: this is Kurdish zone in the north of Iraq, this is Sunni triangle in the north of Baghdad, this is Shia zone in the south of Iraq...Iraqis were surprised and asked: where did he get these names? And why did he create this strange definitions for Iraqis? We lived all

our history saying: we are Iraqis!

When he wrote the draft of the new constitution in Iraq, it was based on the theory of Federalism, not the choice of Iraqi people. Then he created the transition governing council, and chose the new leaders of Iraq based on a sectarian and ethnic rationale. Since that time, Iraq has started to pass through darkness. These new leaders are not national leaders; they just think about how to divide Iraq and get the best piece from it. They don't care about the suffering of Iraqis from the lack of security, electricity, water, etc. They spent three months after the first election to fights about chairs and positions, and they did the same thing after the second election, when they took four months to announce about the new names of the government members.

We always say that the alternative of Saddam is not occupation forces or sectarian leaders pushing the country to civil war. The best alternative is a national unity government, composed of independent, educated, patriotic Iraqi men and women, who can get the country out of this ordeal and who will do their best to solve the hot issues in Iraq like security, services, jobs, and reconstruction of the country.

After three years the scene in Iraq now is like this: unknown civilian armed men enter mixed neighborhoods to shoot Sunni in the morning, Shias in the evening, to market the idea or myth of civil war. And because Iraqis refused this idea from the beginning, some groups are trying now to accomplish the idea of "federalism on the ground." After killing hundreds of Iraqis from each side, by the hands of unknown death squads, the Iraqi families started to move to its old cities, with the Sunnis staying in Sunni cities, and the Shia staying in the Shia cities.

And in the last government, if the minister is Kurdish, the majority of the ministry employees will be Kurdish, and if the education minister is Shiite, the majority of the employees will be from Shia, Iraqis are asking: is this the justice? Is this the way to build our new Iraq? And who made these new rules?

The new constitution was not written by the hand of Iraqis, so, how could we go to vote for it? Iraqis want to rewrite the constitution by their own hands, in the near future.

The existence of the occupation makes the situation more complicated. The Iraqi army and police have been trained by the occupation, are working with the occupation to attack Iraqi cities, and arrest Iraqi men and women, so, Iraqis now are angry and they want national government, not sectarian, national army and police. The new government should be responsible about the training of the new Iraqi police and army, to defend and protect their people, not to attack them. So, the violence against the Iraqi army and police will be less in the future.

The occupation countries have to put a withdrawal time schedule and stop building permanent bases in Iraq. The Iraqi Prime Minister recently asked for the U.S. to put an 18-month timetable for pulling out the troops, and 87% of Iraqis support this according to the latest polls. The occupation countries have a moral and legal responsibility in fixing the mistakes they made in Iraq, in part by paying compensation for what they have destroyed in Iraq, the same way Iraq is paying compensation to Kuwait because of the illegal occupation in the early 1990s. Or at least through the creation of a new Marshall Plan implemented by Iraqis. Iraqis can rebuild their country by their own hands. There are millions of well-

educated Iraqis, men and women, who can work together to start the reconstruction of our country. The future of Iraq should be in the hands of Iraqis people – because Iraq is the cradle of civilization.