



Since the 2003 invasion, the United States has accepted fewer than 500 Iraqis as refugees. In February, the US State Department said it would accept 7,000 more next year, a number clearly insignificant when held up against the four million-plus Iraqis UNHCR estimates have been displaced



No one seems to know how many Iraqis there are currently living in Jordan. Estimates often place the number at 700,000 or more. Some of these are wealthy business owners or investors, waiting for the chaos in their country to quiet down. Others are poor and have come fleeing violence or persecution. The latter live in a grey netherworld of legality, often allowed to stay with a wink and a nod, but without recourse to schools, healthcare, work or money. Officials say most will never get refugee status or a chance to leave for the West: for them, this half-life in Jordan's slums may be...

As Good As It Gets

WORDS *Nicholas Seeley & Alia Nusseibeh* PHOTOGRAPHY *Eyad Obeid & Phil Sands*

There is an image of Iraqis in Jordan that comes up again and again in conversations, as if saying it often enough will make it true. The iconic Iraqi exiles in Jordan are rich businessmen with spoiled trophy wives; they drive around in fancy, gas-guzzling SUV's, raising prices and lowering morals, and complain constantly about how inferior this country is to Iraq-that-was:

"[Iraqis] have nothing else to say but on how Jordan sucks," writes local blogger Lubna Taimeh, at xlubnax.blogspot.com, (who is, according to her blog, part Iraqi).

"Don't you have eyes to view with? Why are you in Jordan? Why aren't you in Iraq? You're in Jordan, you're screwing up our lives, you're making all prices rise above the skies, you're dominating Mecca mall... and yet with all that, YOU are nagging? You are not content? What is this?"

The stereotype is almost unavoidable, but for many Iraqis it is just not true.

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis are now residing in Jordan – 700,000 is the most commonly cited number, but some estimates say there could be a million or more. An unknown number of those are here illegally, having overstayed their residencies, but are afraid of going back home because of threats that range from general (bombings, kidnapping, rape and sectarian murder) to frighteningly specific.

The fact is that many Iraqis are poor, exhausting their savings or already in debt, and too scared of deportation to seek legal status. With the Jordanian government unwilling to acknowledge their presence as long as they remain illegal, few opportunities for resettlement abroad, and no hope of return, the situation of many of these exiles is unlikely to change for years, if ever.

NO ONE TO WATCH OVER ME

Karima [on page 57] is one of the Iraqis who inhabits this illegal netherworld. She lives with her sister and niece in Al Hashmi Al Shamali, home to a large Iraqi population. The family resides in a dreary house that floods with every winter rain, soaking the mattresses on which they sleep. Exposed electrical wires in the kitchen and bathroom get their share of rainwater as well, making it dangerous for anyone to get near them.

When they first arrived in Amman, Karima says, they shared a one-bedroom apartment with another entire family. They sometimes went for days without a meal. Their living



The news coming out from their relatives and colleagues and friends in Baghdad is not encouraging, it's terrifying to them. They're at the point where they're living off of their savings

conditions only improved when Karima's niece started working under the table as a part-time domestic helper in Jordanian homes. Finding employers who will hire an illegal Iraqi exile was not easy, Karima says, and the jobs are never regular.

Sixty-two year old Um Muntasser lives nearby, with two of her daughters, in a cramped two-bedroom apartment that they share with another family of five people. She suffers from heart disease, diabetes and cholesterol problems, for which she gets free medication from the Red Crescent medical center in Hashimi.

Her sons are gone: one killed in Iraq, another deported. Um Muntasser's elder daughter (who, like many Iraqis, does not want her name mentioned) has an industrial degree specializing in train mechanics, but works as a domestic: she says she works 28 days a month, and up to 14 hours a day, to be able to pay the JD70-per-month rent and support her mother, her brother in Syria, and her 15-year-old sister.

"We escaped death in Iraq, and now we feel like we're trapped in a deep, dark well," she says.

These stories are not unusual, according to non-government organizations that work with Iraqis.

The Jordanian Women's Union is one such organization, an NGO that helps women who are victims of domestic violence, and which started one of the first shelters for battered women in the Arab World, says General Manager Nadia Shamroukh.

The union takes calls and visits from women fleeing violence in their homes. Out of the 13 to 15 calls they get every day, three or four are from Iraqis, says Haifa' Haidar, the head of JWU's abuse hotline. Typically, the organization tries to find work for the women it shelters as cooks, clerks or domestic workers. But Iraqis pose a challenge, Shamroukh says: when she has tried to get them permits to work as domestic servants, the Ministry of Labor has denied the applications.

"If you bring Sri Lankans, it's okay, but if you bring Iraqis -- you can't," she says. "They don't even have the right to complain about discrimination. [The authorities] will say 'why are you here? Leave'... We criti-

cize Europe and the United States when they don't allow immigrants, and then we do the same thing."

NO DIRECTION HOME

Go to the right neighborhood in Amman, and the stories of poverty and frustration seem endless. But the Iraqis who choose to live illegally in Jordan say they do so because returning to Iraq is even worse.

Um Rami, her husband and their five children are Mandaean Christians from Iraq - a minority known for producing many excellent goldsmiths. They used to own a jewelry shop in Baghdad. In 2003, Um Rami's son was kidnapped, and had to be ransomed for \$15,000. Later that year, their shop was robbed, and the family fled with nothing but their clothes and a little money.

Now, Um Rami says, her husband and son never leave the house for fear of being apprehended by the Jordanian authorities. Her daughters only leave to go to the Red Crescent clinic for medication. The family has no long-term plan: Um Rami says she hopes the Jordanian government will give them some kind of formal recognition as refugees, but until that time, she's just trying to get by. (See Box: Refugees and Asylum Seekers)

Shamroukh says the Iraqis who come to her center are almost universally afraid of being deported back to Iraq.

"They don't know the law, but they are afraid," she says.

Some families, like Um Rami's, fled outright from violence or persecution. Others came expecting to be here only a short time, but the news from their friends and relatives in Baghdad - of roadblocks, kidnappings, bombs and murder - soon convinced them they could not go back.

"They don't know how long they're going to be here, so it increases their own sense of uncertainty and insecurity concerning what the future holds for them," says Robert Breen, the head of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Jordan. "The news coming out from their relatives and colleagues and friends in Baghdad is not encouraging, it's terrifying to them. They're at the point where they're living off of their savings, and those who were middle class before and came here a while back have, in many cases, depleted their savings."

No one admits to knowing just how many Iraqis are deported on a daily basis. The official position of the government is that there are no widespread deportations going on, implying that the number deported is not large. But every Iraqi interviewed cited a friend, acquaintance or family member who has been deported.

In November of 2005, the international humanitarian organization Human Rights Watch published a report titled "The Silent Treatment," which proposed that all Iraqis should be, at least temporarily, granted status as "de facto refugees," because of the conditions of widespread violence in Iraq.

"The Silent Treatment" contained numerous accounts from Iraqis which are highly similar to the ones *JO* reporters found, and accused Jordanian officials of turning a blind eye to their plight. Government spokesman Nasser Judeh later called the report "baseless, inaccurate and unrealistic."

"If you look at the numbers – for this argument's sake, 700,000 – I think that is indication enough that Jordan has been extremely accommodating in allowing Iraqis in to the country," he told *JO*. "It's very... unconstructive, for anybody to say the 700,000 here are, like some international organizations claim, refugees. They're not."

The government, he says, also takes issue with the assumption that a large proportion of the Iraqis in Jordan are here illegally, saying the number of overstayers is certainly small in comparison to the total.

"The Iraqis here are property owners, restaurant owners, business owners, investors; by and large [they are] well to do," Judeh says.

NO ADMITTANCE

For years, Jordan's border with Iraq has been open and heavily trafficked by businesspeople and tourists. Before the war, estimates of the number of Iraqis residing in Jordan ranged from 180,000 to 300,000, according to a 2002 UNHCR working paper on the subject.

Even after the invasion, the border remained open. At first, UNHCR and Jordanian officials said, wealthy Iraqis streamed into Jordan to wait out the war. But when a group of Iraqis were impli-



An article in the UK paper the Guardian said that no Iraqi men between ages 18 and 35 were being accepted, and Human Rights Watch quoted a government spokesman in January saying Iraqi vehicles were not allowed to enter

The Numbers Game

Iraq is currently being called the "world's fastest growing refugee crisis," and the largest in the Middle East since 1948.

The largest number of people are displaced within Iraq - 1.7 million, according to UNHCR.

The agency also estimates that 40 percent of Iraq's former middle class has fled to nearby countries.

Syria: about one million

Jordan: 700,000 - one million

Egypt: 20,000 - 80,000

Lebanon: about 40,000

Source: UNHCR

Photo by Phil Sands, courtesy of UNHCR.



cated in the bombing of three Amman hotels in November, 2005, it became clear the open door policy was admitting more than just the SUV-driving investors and property developers Jordan counted on to boost its economy (See Sidebar: Iraqonomics).

"UNHCR's tally of detained asylum seekers jumped from a monthly average of 16 cases to 40 cases in November 2005, the month of the hotel bombings," says Human Rights Watch in "The Silent Treatment."

On the phone, a Jordanian official of the Ministry of Interior insisted that even today "there is no immigration [required] for Iraqis... they are our brothers." However numerous reports indicate the Jordan-Iraq border is effectively closed.

An article in the UK paper *The Guardian* said that no Iraqi men between ages 18 and 35 were being accepted, and Human Rights Watch quoted a government spokesman in January saying Iraqi vehicles were not allowed to enter. Human Rights Watch, in their 2006 report, quotes a number of taxi drivers who work the Amman-Baghdad route, and other observers who say large numbers of Iraqis were being turned back at the borders for unclear reasons.

Even blogger Lubna Taimeh includes the following among the complaints she's

"fed up" with hearing from other Iraqis: "We've been humiliated at the borders, they're not allowing anyone to enter, our boys are sent back to Iraq, they kept us for five hours just waiting, and they talk to us roughly."

And more personal stories tell of rejection at the border: Sabah is an Iraqi blacksmith whose 5-year-old son, Omar, was severely wounded by American forces. A hospital in the United States offered to treat Omar's injuries, but when Sabah tried to bring Omar to Jordan in order to get the US visa, the pair found themselves held at the border for five days.

Cole Miller, the founder of No More Victims, the nonprofit organization bringing Omar to the US, went to the border in the middle of the night to try and get the two into the country. After days of work and frantic phone calls to the US, he said, the problem disappeared and Omar and Sabah were admitted.

With 1.7 million people displaced within Iraq and still exposed to violence, according to UNHCR, the stories of border rejection are troubling.

"The borders are open, Iraqis can come in," said Judeh, "but there are perhaps more stringent and better regulated procedures at the borders, given the fact that there are so many already here, and also given the security point of view... we've

had a serious problem at the border, in the last few years, with forged identity cards, and false papers and forged passports."

NO EXIT

The Government of Jordan says it doesn't have the resources to deal with large numbers of vulnerable Iraqis.

"The international community should look at ways and means to support, financially, and infrastructurally, the countries that are hosting large numbers of Iraqis," Judeh said.

On this front, Jordan and the NGO's are in agreement.

"The architects of the invasion, particularly the US and Great Britain, need to provide the resources for neighboring countries" to accommodate refugees and displaced people, said Miller.

Breen, at UNHCR, said it could be possible: "If [the governments of affected countries] ask for it, and they come out with what kinds of programs they need... there is, usually, a very generous response from the international community."

When UNHCR called on donors to raise \$60 million to support its efforts to aid and resettle displaced Iraqis, the United States announced that it would offer \$18 million. The sum is about equivalent to the production cost of three Army Black Hawk helicopters, or two of the more ex-

pensive Air Force variety. Between January 20 and the writing of this article, the US military lost eight helicopters in operations in Iraq, according to a Pentagon official quoted in a UPI news report.

And a strong response does not mean rescue for any significant portion of Iraq's displaced people.

Resettlement, Breen says, is "not going to be a solution for anything but a very very small minority... that have really severe protection needs... we're talking hundreds, in the low thousands, on an annual basis, not the hundreds of thousands that are here."

Since the 2003 invasion, the United States has accepted fewer than 500 Iraqis as refugees. In January, the issue of exiled Iraqis briefly made headlines in the US, and in February, the US State Department said it would accept 7,000 more Iraqi refugees next year, a number that is clearly insignificant when held up against the 4 million-plus Iraqis UNHCR estimates have been displaced.

Furthermore, public sentiment towards Middle Eastern immigrants and refugees remains cool:

"With all the problems we're having right now with illegal immigration, it just doesn't make sense why [Bush] would want to let these people in here," the head of one anti-immigration group recently told FOX news reporters. "We can't trust them over there. Our troops don't know who they're fighting." The quote appeared in a news article with the ominous (and inaccurate) opening line, "The Detroit metro region is home to the largest population of Arabs outside the Middle East. And soon, there will be thousands more." On February 14, the US Assistant Secretary of State who deals with migration told reporters that probably only 3,500 refugees would be admitted by September.

Nonetheless, since the announcement, thousands of Iraqis have been lining up daily outside UNHCR's headquarters' in Amman and Damascus, hoping for a ticket out that, for most of them, will never come.

According to Cathy Breen, a researcher for the NGO Voices for Creative Nonviolence who has spoken to more than 20 em-



Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The international definition of the word refugee is found in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and describes a person who is seeking shelter from persecution in his or her own country on the basis of a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

Those who are seeking refugee status must go through a process to be recognized as refugees by the UN or by local governments; while they are seeking such status, but it has not been confirmed, they are called "asylum seekers"

According to UNHCR, a refugee does not "become" a refugee when he is granted refugee status by a government or UN body; rather, a refugee is one who meets the criteria stated in the convention, and refugee status is simply a formal recognition of that reality.

Though many Iraqis who have fled their country could not claim they were the victims of specific persecution, Human Rights Watch and other NGO's have suggested that they should be considered "de facto refugees," based on the belief that the unrelenting violence in Iraq makes all Iraqis endangered.

Jordanian Government Spokesman Nasser Judeh said NGOs should not try to force people to declare themselves refugees against their will.

Jordan has not signed either the 1951 convention or the 1967 protocol on the status of refugees: there is no such thing as a refugee or an asylum seeker in Jordan. UNHCR recognition as an asylum seeker confers no legal status in Jordan, and anyone UNHCR recognizes as a refugee must be resettled out of the country within six months, according to the organization's agreement with the government, officials said.



Photo by Phil Sands, courtesy of UNHCR.

An article in the UK paper the Guardian said that no Iraqi men between ages 18 and 35 were being accepted, and Human Rights Watch quotes a government spokesman in January saying Iraqi vehicles were not allowed to enter

bassies, there are few ways out for Iraqis. Prior to the American announcement, the most generous country to Iraqi asylum seekers was Australia, which admitted more than 2,000 a year, and did not require them to have UNHCR-recognized refugee status before applying. Still, she says, Australian officials say 90 percent of the asylum seekers they interview are rejected, even though 80 percent of their claims were valid. Australian embassy officials did not respond to, confirm or deny this statistic.

Um Sam left Iraq for Jordan two years ago, after her husband was kidnapped – for the second time. He was released

after Um Sam paid a ransom. Today, the couple and their four children share a 2-bedroom house with another family of eight. Unlike many Iraqis, she says, she is lucky, because she has a brother in Australia who can occasionally send her money – sometimes \$150, sometimes \$200 a month. She's hoping that Jordan will only be a temporary home for her and her children. She has applied for immigration to Australia twice, and was rejected both times, despite having family there.

She says she is reapplying soon.

Dreamers may hope the United States and its coalition allies will develop a

sudden sense of responsibility, and take unprecedented measures to deal with the Iraqis who have fled their country, but realistically, it seems that Jordan, and the Iraqis living in Jordan, are on their own.

NO FUTURE

So far, Jordanian government officials say, there is no plan for dealing with the Iraqis in Jordan. The first step, they say, must be to find out accurately how many Iraqis there are in the country, and how many have residence or employment. The government has asked a Norwegian NGO called Fafo to perform a comprehensive demographic survey on the Iraqi population, hopefully in the very near future.

The details of how the survey will be conducted are not available yet, because while the agreement between the government and Fafo is concluded, it has not been formally signed and funding has yet to be allocated, said Åge Tiltne, a Fafo researcher working on the project.

So many questions remain unanswered – for example, how the surveyors will accurately assess the size of a population of illegal Iraqis that is clearly scared and unwilling to deal with the government. If illegal Iraqis do not come forward, it seems likely that the survey will simply reinforce what Jordanian officials have already said: that there are relatively few illegal Iraqis in Jordan, and those should simply approach the government and take steps to attain legal status.

Even Judeh says there will be a margin of error in the survey: “If you’re an illegal immigrant, you certainly want to avoid reporting incidents to authorities, regardless of the reason. In this case, you have the added fear of being thrown back into Iraq.”

Tiltne agreed it would be a serious challenge to avoid under-representing a population, if it was or is scared of contact with authorities.

“If we are going to get into sensitive issues, people may underreport,” he said – however, such underreporting is something surveyors often have to deal with, and he said he thought it would be possible to achieve reasonably accurate results, nonetheless.

Breen, at UNHCR, admits options are few. "What we're trying to do is present or to create a space for a period of time where there can be reasonable assistance and services provided to the Iraqi population, awaiting the opportunity for the return, but that does not include legalization, or citizenship." Even building refugee camps – something of a last resort in refugee cases – is a possibility UNHCR said was not off the table, if it were acceptable to the government of Jordan. But options are few.

"[Iraqis], as with all refugee populations, unfortunately, have to maintain an existence pending an opportunity, a stabilization in their home country for them to return...what can I say? I'm not being unsympathetic, it's just that... don't underestimate the resilience of individuals under the most dire circumstances... But the great majority of them have to make their own way."

For the illegal Iraqis living in Jordan, nothing seems likely to change. Sometimes, there just isn't any help to be had. **JO**



Iraqonomics

WORDS *Nicholas Seeley*

It's common to see Iraqis blamed for Jordan's economic woes, but economists say the picture is much more complex, and that the influx of Iraqis has done as much good as harm – and could still be a positive economic force.

In an article for bitterlemons.com, economist Yusuf Mansour described the influx of Iraqi money into Jordan as an economic driver that was offsetting the depressing effect of rising fuel prices.

"Jordanians employed in the Gulf, petrodollars, and Iraqi expatriates have been pouring their savings into the real estate market, causing a 100 percent rise in real estate prices in 2005," economist Yusuf Mansur wrote in an article for the web news site.

At one point, the rise in housing prices was seen by many as a positive thing. Now, as real estate prices go ever higher, rents rise and homeowners struggle with debt, the rise in prices begins to look like a dangerous market bubble, according to economist Nader Salim. But while Iraqis buying homes may have started Amman's real estate boom, local speculators and lack of market regulation are what have fed it, driving real estate prices ever higher, Salim wrote, in the October 2006 issue of *Venture* magazine:

"It is definite that investors and speculators constitute the outward forces driving up the real estate market in Jordan. And the speculators, he says, are not just Iraqis. "Today's speculator is the person next door."

"The Iraqis provided the impetus for a speculative market, and then speculation drove prices way out of proportion. But it wasn't just Iraqis... 9/11 brought a lot of Arab money from abroad," Mansur agrees.

The stereotype of Iraqis driving up prices, in other words, overlooks the effects of market speculation and local fiscal policy, which turned what was originally a market boost into a massive over-valuation of real estate.

But even today, Mansur says, Jordan could potentially benefit from the influx of Iraqis seeking work in low- and high-skilled jobs.

"We definitely could benefit a lot from the Iraqi labor... judging from our experience in the 90's, after the first Gulf War: all the universities in the private sector were fueled by Iraqi professors... we were able to get high-quality full time professors for salaries commensurate with assistant professors."

An influx of new skilled labor, he says, could help block the brain drain caused by 200,000 Jordanians working in the gulf right now, while unskilled laborers could take jobs that Jordanians seem unwilling to accept (On February 21, the Jordan Times ran yet another report highlighting the fact that a large proportion of Jordan's endemic high employment springs from Jordanians refusing to work in unskilled jobs).

The problem, Mansur says, is the lack of information available on the quality of labor force coming from Iraq – to prevent Iraqis from competing with Jordanians in the semi-skilled labor market.

"It sounds odd to say, yes, let them stay, based on the unemployment figures. But to say yes or no should be based on quantitative data... We could make some rules: 'if you are qualified, and etc., you can live and work in Jordan... in one respect, increasing the human capital in the country, in another, blocking [Iraqis'] departure, because they have had a positive effect, motivating the Jordanian economy with their spending."

Encouraging more Iraqis to remain in Jordan could have other positive long term impacts, for example including forestalling a crash in an overvalued real-estate market and securing Jordan's position as a gateway to Iraq.

While the situation is inherently complicated, economists suggest that looking at Iraqis simply as a drain on Jordan's economy is a limited and inaccurate view. **JO**

Fixing Scars, but Some Remain

WORDS *Yousef Ziad Shuwayhat*

In a tiny room in a residential apartment building on the outskirts of Amman, 5-year-old Omar laughs gleefully, looking delighted to have his picture taken. He bounces excitedly on his father's knee, alternately posing for the camera and hiding his face, clueless of his newfound status as a symbol of the disaster that the American invasion of his country has become.

Omar and his father, Sabah, illustrate one of the major forces at work in this crisis: the devastation of medical and psychological services that drives Iraqis to countries like Jordan, seeking help they can no longer find at home.

In January of 2006, Sabah, his wife Suad and their sons Omar and Ali were traveling to spend the 'Eid with relatives in Baghdad, when the bus they were in came under fire from US forces. Sabah, despite burns and multiple gunshot wounds, was able to drag Omar from the wreck, but when he tried to return to save his wife, he says, he was restrained by Iraqi police. No one, they told him, could survive.

Suad burned to death as her husband watched. Ali escaped unhurt.

Omar suffers from severe burns that cover the entire right side of his body; his right hand is destroyed, missing one finger and the thumb, while his left thumb is fused to his palm. He and his father are in Jordan on their way to the United States, where Omar is to receive reconstructive surgery, provided through private community donations to the nonprofit organization No More Victims, founded by Cole Miller.

"I would like to express my gratitude for the generosity of the Jordanian government and the Jordanian people... in helping to get these kids through the country and to the US," Miller says.

Medical care in Iraq has been decimated by the war, explains Maki Al Nazzal, NMV's Iraq coordinator, and what remains is expensive.

"You know you can find a doctor in any village in Jordan," he says. "All our good [Iraqi] doctors, they are in Jordan now."

Miller's is only one program working to help Iraqis who have been severely wounded in the fighting. At the Red Crescent hospital near Amman's downtown, many more Iraqi victims of violence wait for help from Jordanian and international doctors.

The hospital has a partnership with the French branch of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) an international humanitarian NGO.

"These cases are not hot cases... they are people who live with their wounds," explains Assistant Coordinator of the Jordan program Mira Kassis. "Most of them have had surgery before," but the quality of healthcare available has left them with continual problems.

The program started in August 2006, and has treated about 90 patients so far, Kassis says. Currently, they treat about 30 a month, but hope to increase that number to 80, she says.

The patients themselves paint a bleak picture of the situation back home. All were victims of explosive attacks, be they mortars or booby-trapped cars. And the hospitals in Iraq, they say, are severely lacking in qualified personnel, medicines and equipment. Many of them suffered complications due to infections which could have been easily treated if the hospitals had access to simple antibiotics.

One patient, who refuses to give his name or have his picture taken, says he had to pay a bribe to get himself smuggled out of the Iraqi hospital where he woke up after being injured in a mortar attack. His left leg is heavily scarred, his right is held together in a metal frame.



Omar and his father, Sabah.

In some hospitals, the Shia militias have been known to go in and kill patients, he says – they often assume wounded Sunnis are insurgents unless proven otherwise. If he goes back to Iraq he is afraid he will be targeted. So he waits, hoping to get a visa to work in Syria or Sudan.

MSF treats patients from all over the Iraq – some are Sunni, others Shia. But despite their varied backgrounds, sectarian tensions never run high in the hospital.

“They all know why they’re here,” Kassis says, matter-of-factly.

Most of MSF’s patients go home, Kassis says. “Only two have wanted to stay in Jordan,” she says. “We channeled them to the right parties [UNHCR], who deal with such a thing... five, maybe... it is not our place to make them leave.”

Some they can help, some they can’t.

One infant girl at the clinic with her father had her face torn apart by a car bomb. The cosmetic damage can be helped, but Kassis says there is nothing the doctors can do to restore her sight.

In some hospitals, the Shia militias have been known to go in and kill patients, he says – they often assume wounded Sunnis are insurgents unless proven otherwise

“Some cases are just too complicated for us to handle,” she says.

Miller, however, says there is a goal that is almost as important as healing wounds and fixing injuries. He hopes that bringing young patients like Omar to the US will help raise awareness among the American people, who he describes as “suffocating in misinformation.”

“It’s time for people to stand up,” he says, and it’s hard for them to act if they aren’t informed. “I want to make it possible for the American people to help those who have been hurt, and to see that

it’s possible for them to become directly involved with Iraqi families,” he concludes.

When Omar’s surgery is over, Sabah says, he will return home to Iraq. There is no life for him anywhere else.

Before the reporters leave, Sabah goes to his room, and returns with a photo album. He produces an old picture of his family in happier times: mother, father, two sons. Omar reaches for it excitedly.

“Mama?” he says, “Mama?”

Some things can be reconstructed, some can be rebuilt or fixed. Some can’t. **JO**

A School for Scandal

WORDS *Nicholas Seeley*

"The thing we appreciate the most about Jordan is the safety, but safety is not everything," says Um Sam, an Iraqi mother living illegally in Amman. "Our kids have no future here."

The lack of access to basic services like education and health care is a problem commonly cited by Iraqis in Jordan, along with fear of deportation and lack of a right to work. A valid residence permit is necessary to register in any Jordanian school, public or private.

Um Sam's daughters have none, and cannot go to school in Jordan. They used to spend their days at a local church where they could get some basic classes in reading, math and science, Um Sam says, until the classes were shut down by the government.

The "training program," as its administrators call it, was started by a former pastor at the church who was shocked by seeing school-aged Iraqi children hanging out in the streets during school hours.

"It's not a school, we don't offer a diploma or tawjihi," explains Pastor Jody Miller, who ran the church's informal "training center." The 200-300 students were all Iraqi, he says, and few if any had legal residence. The training center taught classes at levels ranging from 1st to 10th grade, but pupils' ages varied, with some as old as 21.

"Some of them have, for years, not been in school," Miller says: schools in Iraq are unsafe, and those in Jordan are not open to them. "If they are out of school more than three years, chances are they are finished, they'll never go back," he says.

The teachers were mostly from the Iraqi community. Many were teachers themselves in Iraq, Miller says, others were not. All were volunteers. They gave kids about three hours of instruction a day, in English, Arabic, Math, Science and Computers. When the program started, some classes didn't have books; recently the center started using books that had been discarded by Jordanian government schools.



Iraqi children, according to the law should be in regular schools – except, of course, that they aren't allowed in regular schools

They charged no tuition, Miller says, because families wouldn't be able to afford it. Once, he says, they tried to put a JD 5 deposit on books, because students who left the area would often take their books with them.

"We had mothers coming in and saying, we have three children, how can I possibly afford that," he says – so they waived the deposit for those who could not pay it.

The Ministry of Education would not comment officially on the closure of Miller's training center, but a source there said they believed the school was engaging in missionary activities – something Miller categorically denies.

"We're a church... [but] they're trying to put it in a bad light. Our church engages in church activities," but he insists they are not trying to convert people.

Miller says the ministry simply said what he was doing was illegal – though they did not specify under what law, since Miller's "students" do not, officially, exist.

Officially, the Ministry of Education source said anyone who wishes to start a non-formal educational center should get a form from them and go through the proper channels. The situation becomes complicated, however when dealing with school-aged Iraqi children, who according to the law should be in regular schools – except, of course, that they aren't allowed in regular schools.

The ministry source said schools were open to all children who have residency in Jordan. Those with only short-term residencies can enroll, the source said, but should be encouraged to renew their residencies by school authorities. Those without residencies were urged to contact the Ministry of Interior and seek legal status. **JO**