



Sweden May Have Illegally Deported Iraqi Refugees

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Stockholm (AINA) -- Kalle Larsson, member of the Swedish Parliament for the Left Party and Spokesman on migration and refugees, has called for an investigation of Tobias Billström, Swedish Minister of Migration, following allegations that Iraqi refugees were illegally deported to Iraq. The allegations were detailed in a series of [reports](#) for Swedish Public Radio's news program *Ekot* by award winning investigative journalist Nuri Kino and his colleague Susan Ritzén.

Sweden and Iraq signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) on February 18, 2008 regarding the repatriation of Iraqi refugees from Sweden to Iraq. The MoU outlined criteria and a general process for returning Iraqi refugees ineligible to stay in Sweden to Iraq.

In a [letter](#) sent to the Constitutional Committee of the Swedish Parliament, Mr. Larsson accuses Mr. Billström of deliberately misrepresenting the MoU and of carrying out a policy of forced deportation contrary to the agreement. Larsson says in the letter:



Tobias Billström, Swedish Minister of Migration

However, information has emerged, including an interview with Nuri Kino for *Ekot* on August 26, 2009, that Iraq does not consider that there is any basis in the MoU for any forceful expulsions. On the contrary the Iraqi Minister of Migration Abdul Samad Sultan Rehman stated to *Ekot* that "[t]here is no agreement on involuntary expulsions, we do not want to force anyone to return and we will not accept that anyone is involuntarily expelled," and "We, like all other countries, will not contribute to forced expulsions since it contradicts the human rights. I have difficulty to believe that the Swedish government, which has been so generous to Iraqis and it's renowned for its humanitarianism, would make use of methods of coercion."

Larsson calls for an investigation at the end of the letter:

An agreement is valid if both parties agree on its contents, sign and comply with it. At present that is clearly not the case. I call upon the Constitutional Committee to review the statements and actions of Tobias Billström in this regard.

Following a five month investigation, investigative journalist Nuri Kino aired a series of reports on Swedish Public Radio, which prompted Larsson to call for an investigation. The reports ([AINA 8-10-2009](#), [6-18-2009](#)) painted a grim picture of refugees -- mostly Christian Assyrians -- being forcibly returned to Baghdad with no support or planning.

Nuri Kino followed 25 Assyrian persons and families who were forcibly returned to Iraq. Upon their arrival at Baghdad airport, no arrangements were made to safely transport them to their final destinations. With the threat of kidnapping very high, nearly all stayed at the airport, only to be helped by Assyrians working at the airport, who realized the returnees were Assyrian. Of the 25 who were returned, 24 fled the country again, and one was given refugee status by UNHCR in Ankara, which has acknowledged that it is not safe for Assyrians and other Christians in Iraq.

According to Kino, the criteria by which the Swedish migration board determines that a refugee will not be endangered upon his return to Iraq is arbitrary. In one case, a man fled from Iraq because an attempt was made to murder him and his cousin. While driving with his cousin in Baghdad unknown assailants shot at their car, wounding him and killing his cousin. The Swedish migration board denied his request for asylum, saying that since he had survived he was not in danger and could go back. In another case, a couple were granted asylum because the woman's brother worked for the Americans and had to hide in the couple's house after being threatened by the Mahdi army, but the brother was denied and is now one of thousands hiding in Sweden. In a third case, insurgents threatened an Assyrian man working for the Americans, but the Swedish migration board ruled that since the death threats were anonymous, he was safe to return.

In another case, an Assyrian man working for the Americans, whose brother was killed because he also worked for the Americans and

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whose brother-in-law fled to Syria, paid smugglers to bring his family to Sweden. He did not have money for himself. While his family was in Sweden, he finally made his way to Turkey but drowned in the waters between Turkey and Greece when his boat capsized. Sweden is sending this his widow and her three children under the age of 12 back to Iraq.

Two Swedish MPs, Ms Karin Granbom Ellison for the Liberal's and Ms Anne Ludvigsson for the Socialdemocrates, met recently with hundreds of Assyrian refugees at a church. The MPs were moved to tears by the stories of the refugees, some of whom still had shrapnel in their bodies. The MPs vowed to take action regarding this policy.

According to Kino, examination of court records in the asylum cases shows that when asylum decisions are made, evidence from international bodies and other governments is quoted out of context; reports are selectively quoted to give the appearance that Iraq is safe while ignoring the substance and detailed documentation of the reports, which actually say that Iraq is not safe for Assyrians and other minorities.

Refugees who "voluntarily" return to Iraq after being refused in Sweden can in Erbil receive \$4,300 so they can start a new life. Sweden has boasted about how many that have left the country use this program. But all the refugees that have been interviewed in *Ekot* say that they had no choice, and that there was nothing voluntary about it.

Refugees who refuse to voluntarily return to Iraq are threatened with arrest in Sweden and denial of all aid when they are returned to Iraq. Using a hidden microphone placed on a refugee, Kino recorded a Swedish official saying "if you do not return voluntarily we will arrest you and send you back without any help, you don't have a choice, use the money you receive and go to Syria or another neighboring country and then register with UNCHR and maybe Australia or Canada will accept you."

Those that were forcibly sent back tell horrifying stories about how they were handcuffed by the Swedish police, forced onto airplanes and then dropped in Baghdad with no help at all.

Arne Malmgrem, who worked for the Swedish immigration board, said Sweden is doing this to discourage Iraqi refugees from coming to Sweden. Mr. Malmgrem resigned recently to protest this policy.

Thousands of refugees that are rejected and are hiding are now waiting for Sweden to change this policy. Most of them have sold whatever they had to be smuggled to the Scandinavian country. Nuri Kino says that he and his colleagues at the Swedish Radio will follow the development for Iraqi refugees both in Sweden, Iraq and its neighboring countries.

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