



Refugee Crises in the Middle East: A Shared Responsibility

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Remarks for

Session I: Resettlement and Integration Experiences of Syrian and Iraqi Refugees

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Good morning, everyone.

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Mazin Kamuona. I am an Iraqi refugee who moved to the United States in 2015. I am an architect and currently unemployed. Maybe it is time to retire.

I have a family of six, including my beautiful wife, two sons – Moudaher and Mohammed, and two daughters – Mina and Muna. Family means everything to me. I have worked so hard to raise a good family but living in my home country was so challenging.

It all started back from the 1980s when Saddam's regime went from the Iran War through the Gulf War and later on to the embargo which made it very hard to raise a family.

The Iraqi were very welcoming, happy, and optimistic when the United States took over Saddam's regime in 2003 but Iraq went from bad to worse over time. I even got kidnapped in 2004, just like other successful and well-educated people. It was one of the hardest ten days for me and my family because we did not know if I was going to live or if my family would ever see me again. But after a big ransom was paid in return for my life, I am alive.

After that, I decided that my family's safety is my only priority. So I decided to send my family to the neighboring safe country of Jordan while I stayed in Iraq to work as it was the only source of income to provide for my family.

In Jordan where there are millions of Iraqi refugees, my family applied for resettlement in 2008. The process included three interviews, the first of which was on why they could not go back home. I wish that I was also able to give reasons.

The second one was with UNHCR. Luckily, after an interview with an officer from USCIS, my family's case got accepted and they moved to the United States in September 2012.

After my wife got her green card in about 18 months, she was able to apply for me “to join a refugee family.” I went through the same stages as my family did, and my case was accepted in 2015 and I moved to Virginia.

My first day when I came here, my case manager was very welcoming and kind. He waited to greet me to the United States. Later on, he helped a lot in the transition state with my paperwork and getting medical appointments and health insurance. Yes, I am old and have a lot of chronic diseases.

So I just want to thank my sponsors – Catholic Charities and its team – for helping me. I am very appreciative.

And at last – yes, I don’t have big investment accounts, stocks, or bonds but my biggest investment is my family. They are safe now in a free country. And for that I am thankful and happy to call the United States home.

Thank you and have a great day.