

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!
4 weeks for only \$19.99
plus 4 free Angels tickets



Click Here to Subscribe
ORANGE COUNTY
REGISTER

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

powered by Google GO

- HOME
- NEWS
 - Blogs
 - California
 - City-by-City News
 - Columns
 - Crime and Courts
 - Data Central
 - Education
 - Everyday Heroes
 - Military
 - Nation
 - Obituaries
 - OC Watchdog
 - Photos
 - Politics and Government
 - Science
 - Videos
 - World
- SPORTS
- BUSINESS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- LIFE
- TRAVEL
- OPINION
- FOOD
- JOB
- HOMES

Published: April 11, 2013 Updated: 3:49 p.m.

Text: + - ☰ Next Article »

Refugee reflections

- Tweet 0
- Search
- Facebook: You recommend this. Be the first of your friends
- Email
- Share

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

A year after the UC Irvine School of Law opened in 2009, students launched a chapter of the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project and started traveling to Jordan to assist refugees seeking resettlement in the United States. During this 10th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, some students paused to reflect on their experience and what they've learned from it.

Shaleen Shanbhag, J.D. candidate 2014



Caroline Reiser

COURTESY PHOTO

[MORE PHOTOS »](#)

Background

The Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project is a policy advocacy group, an active student organization and a pro bono project at UCI Law. Under the supervision of attorneys, we help refugees navigate the immigration rules and processes of resettlement in the U.S.

– Rachel Khalili, UCI J.D. candidate 2015

BACKGROUND Still in turmoil, 10 years later

As a second-year law student, I've had the opportunity to work on two cases through the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project. The first case, assigned to me over a year ago, still lingers in the back of my mind.

The case involved three Iraqis: an elderly woman and a younger couple. They had all fled Iraq for Syria and had been certified as refugees by the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

When I received the case, they were in the early stages of applying for resettlement through the International Organization for Migration. Their cases had been stalled for almost a year. About one month after I was assigned the case, the Syrian conflict began to escalate. All U.S. personnel were ordered out of Syria, the International Organization for Migration stopped its operations in Syria, and the Syrian, English-speaking local with whom we had been communicating left as well.

Our clients were unable to obtain visas to any of the neighboring countries. As a result, they were left with only one option: staying in Syria, another country where their lives were not safe.

As we are all aware, the situation in Syria has become much worse. It's been a year since my classmates and I have had contact with our clients.

Although I would like to think they found some way to leave, I know this is unlikely.

Welcome to Digital Access

A message from the owners FAQ **ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER**

ADVERTISEMENT

More from this story



SLIDE SHOW:
Refugee reflections
4 Photos »

More from Irvine

- Mike Derderian, Royalty Carpet founder, dies at 86
- Santiago Hills students raise funds for programs
- Westpark event kicks off with 'fast flying feet'

Find us on Facebook

President George W. Bush kept it simple in his short television address the evening of March 19, 2003: U.S. forces had begun their campaign to unseat Saddam Hussein, he said. The goals he outlined were straightforward: "to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger." Some 522 words later he promised the result: "We will bring freedom to others and we will prevail."

Ten years later, after tens of thousands of deaths, not just of Americans, but also of Iraqis – many, if not most, at the hands of other Iraqis – that country is still in turmoil. American troops are gone and a democratically-elected government rules. But bombings and massacres continue, and Iraq remains mired in sectarian feuding between Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

Source: Nancy A. Youssef, McClatchy Newspapers

It's been 10 years since the United States invaded Iraq. The commission has registered more than 1,428,300 refugees originating from Iraq as of January 2012. This number doesn't reflect those registered in the past year or the number of people who are unaccounted for.

The 10-year mark reminds us that what might seem like a distant event for some American citizens remains a scary, life-threatening reality for those in the Middle East.

Leah Gasser-Ordaz, J.D. candidate 2014

The 10-year anniversary reminds us that we still have a lot of work to do. As of January 2012, there are still 1.4 million Iraqi refugees.

Americans should know that even though the war is over for us, it is not over for the Iraqi people. In December 2012, the U.S. withdrew its nonessential staff from Syria, which included officials who processed visas for Iraqi refugees.

This essentially leaves these refugees stranded in Syria. Iraqi refugees have almost no choice now but to stay in war-torn Syria or travel back to Iraq, where they would be giving up their chance to get to the United States.

Caroline Reiser, J.D. candidate 2015

Even though the name of the organization is the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Program, we help more than just Iraqis who have been displaced.

My current client is an Afghani man. Three attorneys, a fellow UC Irvine School of Law student and I work through the middle of U.S. immigration law, gather documents and fill out the paperwork to get him approved for resettlement in the U.S.

My client is an inspiration to me. He's quite young but still seems to be the sole supporter of his family. He constantly refers to those of us who work on his case as his "buddies."

My client is a translator for the military and continues to work for the U.S. even though he and his family have received death threats. All he wants is to move to California and go to school to learn to be a translator so that he can continue to work with the U.S. military.

As U.S. forces withdraw from Afghanistan, it becomes more important every day that my client, and those like him, resettle.

I got involved in IRAP to help these people who are slowly being forgotten.

The general U.S. population believes the refugee crisis from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is old news.

While there are newer global crises that warrant our attention, including the formidable Syrian refugee crisis, shifting attention to new problems doesn't make the old ones go away.

This anniversary is a good time to consider the refugees, learn the facts of the situation, and remind ourselves to be especially kind to all immigrants because we often don't know the extent of hardship they've endured to try and start a better life in America.

- These essays were provided by the UCI School of Law.

For more information about UCI Law's IRAP chapter: law.uci.edu/students/organizations/list.html#irap


COMMENTS | PRINT | EMAIL |  SHARE

[More from Irvine »](#)

Reader Comments

Comments are encouraged, but you must follow our [User Agreement](#).













1. Keep it civil and stay on topic.
2. No profanity, vulgarity, racial slurs or personal attacks.
3. People who harass others or joke about tragedies will be blocked.
4. By posting your comment, you agree to allow Orange County Register Communications, Inc. the right to republish your name and comment in additional Register publications without any notification or payment.





Orange County Register

You like this.


You and 16,905 others like Orange County Register. 16,905 people like Orange County Register.


Editor Picks





Raw: Texas Shrimp Boat Engulfed in F



Pregnant Halle Berry Beams in Sheer



Teens Arrested for Assault After Girl's



Charlie Sheen Puts Iohan On Blast

ADVERTISEMENT

WIN A \$50.00 GIFT CARD

BY SAVING ENERGY!

cityofirvine.us/waterheater

CLICK HERE



FEATURED SPECIAL SECTIONS

- Top Workplaces
- Celebrations, March
- Race for the Cure

- The Gift of Giving
- Lunar New Year
- Celebrations, Feb.

VIEW ALL SPECIAL SECTIONS

