

## **Forced returns of Iraqis from Sweden**

On 14 June, the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* reported that a total of 111 failed Iraqi asylum seekers have now been deported to Iraq from Sweden. The summary below of Sweden's forced returns policy is based on the *Dagens Nyheter* report as well as a news item broadcast on the Konflikt programme on Sveriges Radio on 15 May 2009. Journalists, Julia Lundberg and Randi Mossige Norheim, managed to make contact with some of the deportees after they were removed.

The Minister of Migration has designated 2009 the Year of Return and Sweden has now reached an agreement with the Iraqi government to take back failed asylum seekers. This means that the government in the Kurdish region, which previously refused to take back deportees from Sweden, will now be forced to abide by the new Sweden-Iraq agreement.

On 23 February, 45 Iraqis were deported from Sweden to Baghdad on a specially chartered plane in what police codenamed operation 'G Baghdad 2'. In order to fill the chartered flight, the police carried out searches for Iraqis and then took those arrested to different deportation centres throughout Sweden. Once on board the flight, the 45 refugees were accompanied by 107 Swedish officials, 88 from the Prison Board (which has main responsibility for deportations) and sixteen from the police. There was also one doctor, one nurse and an interpreter on board. The cost of the journey was estimated at 1,728,662 kronor (around £135,500).

At least nine of the Iraqis, whom the radio journalists managed to talk to afterwards said they were handcuffed throughout the whole process, from the time that they were arrested in the morning, during the journey, and until they landed in Baghdad (a total of at least nine and a half hours). Six of those interviewed said that they were physically restrained throughout the journey by being 'locked' onto their aeroplane seats through the use of a kind of special belt. The police's internal report claims that all handcuffs were removed once the Iraqis were placed on the chartered flight. One of the men the authorities sought to deport was partially paralysed and in a wheelchair. In order to remove him, the police had entered his apartment by using the keys of his care workers, who had just visited him. The disabled man was so

desperate to prevent his removal, that he started to break off pieces of his own wheelchair, in order to throw the parts at the police.

Six out of the 34 Iraqi deportees, whom the reporters managed to interview, said that they experienced feelings of drowsiness and sickness after taking food or drink during their time in the custody of the Swedish deportation authorities. They believe the kind of sensations they experienced were due to some sort of sedative (as the administration of sedatives during deportation is illegal, the suspicion is that drugs were secretly placed into the food). The authorities, however, report the atmosphere on board the flight was calm and people who were aggressive before getting on the plane had come to terms with their removal. In the official report produced by the authorities, all names of officials have been blanked out.

One man interviewed by the journalists was an elderly Iraqi who has permanent residence status in Sweden. He spoke of his despair, because his 32-year-old son, who has such severe learning difficulties that he has the mental age of a young child, was one of the deportees. In one case, involving the deportation of a family, the children had to be put into the care of social services the day before the deportation flight, after the mother suffered a nervous breakdown. The family were only reunited on the deportation flight.

The Swedish government dispute the facts as reported on the programme.

**Translation provided by Lotta Holmberg for the Institute of Race Relations'  
European Race Bulletin**

The programme can be accessed at <[konflikt@sr.se](mailto:konflikt@sr.se)>