

## **Fayli Kurds**

During the past century, the Kurds in Iraq have faced the hardships of ethnic persecution and genocide. On April 4, 2006, Saddam Hussein was charged with genocide for the terrible Anfal Campaign that he waged against the Kurds in his own country, using such awful tactics as gassing and deportation. But this is hardly the only atrocity committed against the Kurds; in fact, the Fayli Kurds have long been persecuted in Iraq. The Fayli Kurds used to account for 15-20% of all Kurds in Iraq, which made them a minority of a minority. Once very influential in the social, economic, and political circles in large cities such as Baghdad, the Fayli have been forced to flee what had been their home for generations. The Fayli Kurds faced unspeakable terrors at the hands of Saddam Hussein and his predecessors, and now they are awaiting any possibility of return to their former homes in Iraq.

The Fayli people come from the Zagros Mountains that separate Iran and Iraq, though a century or more ago, a large number emigrated from there to areas in Iraq such as Baghdad and Basra. Most Fayli Kurdish families in Iraq had settled there long before the modern state of Iraq was founded in 1920. The proximity of their ancestors to Iran, led to the large influence of Persian culture, especially with their religion. Fayli Kurds, unlike most Iraqis are Shi'a, and this has long led to their persecution, as they are seen as "Iranian." After the immigration to Iraq, they became adept businessmen, merchants, and politicians in major cities around Iraq. But because they were Shi'a and because they came from the border area with Iran, they faced the worst of the persecution of any group during Saddam Hussein's regime. It is important to note also, the Fayli Kurds have historically maintained a liberal political philosophy.

### **The Deportations**

The first significant deportations of strictly Fayli Kurds came in 1969 and then again in 1971. Over 100,000 were forced to leave their homes during these two periods, which was unfortunately just the beginning for the Fayli Kurds. These deportations came during the immediate predecessor to Saddam Hussein, Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakir, who was in power from 1968 to 1979. In 1979 Saddam Hussein came into power, and shortly after gaining control of Iraq, he reinstated the program of deporting the Fayli Kurds. When Hussein ordered the forced deportation in 1980, less than a year after becoming the leader of Iraq, he included even more serious violations of human rights. These deportations were more than strictly forced removal of the Fayli; rather they were also death marches and detainments of young men.

The 1980 deportations occurred during the Iran-Iraq War, which created a more volatile situation than the deportations in either 1969 or 1971. The women, young children, and elderly, were forced to walk for days to the border of Iran and cross into Iran. This walk took them through several types of treacherous terrain, before reaching a country that would not welcome them either. Those on the journey faced the hardships of travel through a relatively uninhabitable stretch of land without food or any water. Many died because of dehydration during the march, while others were killed because of the surrounding war. The border between Iran and Iraq during this time was a place of

constant fighting, stray bullets, and land mines. Many who died during the deportations did so because they were caught in the crossfire or stepped on a mine in one of the many minefields they had to cross. The government allowed the Fayli Kurds to take little to none of their personal possessions during the deportations and the marches. They also stripped any and all identity documents from the Kurds as they were forced to leave the homes in which they had lived for generations.

The exact number of deportees in 1980 is not known, but estimates range from over 200,000 to almost half of a million people. This round of deportations started when members of the Ba'ath party sponsored a "meeting" of the Baghdad Chamber of Commerce on April 7, 1980. They invited the Fayli businessmen from Baghdad to this meeting where those who attended were deported to the Iranian border. Shortly after this, the government forcibly deported the families of those businessmen whom they had already deported. Within days, the full-scale deportation began, and hundreds of thousands of Fayli Kurds were removed from their homes by force. One final, and more disturbing, fact about the deportations stems from the fear of rapes by Hussein's army. There are reports that fathers killed their daughters before the army could get to them, because the army would force the father to watch as his daughter was raped. The deportations under Al Bakir paled in comparison to both the size and intensity of the 1980 deportation under Saddam Hussein.

### **The Detainments**

The deportations were only a part of the campaign in 1980 to remove the Fayli Kurds from Iraq. Saddam Hussein also had thousands of young men, mostly between the ages of 18 to 25, detained indefinitely. The families of those detained have never found out what happened to their sons. To this day, there has been no official or conclusive evidence about the fate of those detained during the 1980 campaign, but there is no doubt in the minds of the families that that the young men were killed long ago. The estimates of young men detained by Saddam Hussein range from 6,000, which is overly conservative, to over 12,000. Most sources would put the number somewhere around 10,000 young men detained during the campaign.

Despite any evidence of their fates, there are many people, both family members and outside human rights groups, like the Islamic Human Rights Commission, who believe that they were killed through possibly brutal methods. The most common belief is that Saddam Hussein used the detainees for experimentation and testing of chemical weapons. The families whose loved ones were detained have struggled to find any information about how they died, and where they might have been buried, but they have been unable to locate any information or find any possible mass graves. This has led to an uneven distribution of women and men in Fayli society, even more so than is seen in Iraqi Kurdish population in general. Throughout these detainments, international organizations and the United Nations did nothing to ensure that they were treated well, or to check up on their status. To this day, the United Nations has not looked into the fates of those detained.

### **Returning Home**

Since the end of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, Fayli Kurds have looked at returning to their homes from which they were removed. They however have run into serious problems with respect to returning to their homes and property. When they were deported, the Iraqi Government took possession of their property and sold it, as well as taking away their Iraqi citizenship. Thus, as families return to their homes they are finding them inhabited by other people, who have a "claim" on the property as well. Since they could not return for about 20 years, very few have been able to re-inhabit their former homes. There have been a couple of stories of people who bought the property after the deportations voluntarily relinquishing the property to those Fayli Kurds who are returning, but those stories are few and far between. As it is, the situation has no simple solution, and it has greatly reduced the number of Fayli Kurds who could have returned since 2003. The prediction is very few Faylis will return to Iraq, even though their family may have lived there for 200 years. Currently, the majority of those forced to flee remain in Iran, though some sought exile in Europe and the United States, and the majority will probably remain where they are now.

There are countless stories from thousands of families as to the atrocities committed during the three major deportations of Fayli Kurds. Many from the hundreds of thousands expelled from their homes during the massive 1980 deportation ordered by Saddam Hussein.

Sources:

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