

# Iraqi children seek medical care in U.S.

by Nancy Spannaus

Five children from Iraq arrived in the United States on April 1, in order to get medical care for wounds which they suffered during the Gulf war and which cannot be treated in Iraq due to the ongoing embargo.

The children, who range from ages 10 to 15, will be treated in the Children's Hospital of Richmond, Virginia. Their care was arranged by Dr. Ali Hossaini of Richmond, a well-known faculty member of the Medical College of Virginia. The hospital has agreed to treat them without charge.

The children are being sponsored by the Committee to Save the Children in Iraq, and were aided in their trip from Baghdad by the services of the United Nations, which flew them free of charge from Baghdad to Amman, Jordan; Royal Jordanian Airlines, which made special arrangements for their trip to Germany; and Lufthansa of Germany, which made special arrangements for their trip to the U.S.

The Committee to Save the Children in Iraq is a non-partisan initiative which was begun in May 1991 by the Schiller Institute, the International Progress Organization, and the Patriarchate of the Chaldean Church of Babylon. This is the third time that the Committee has brought children from Iraq for medical treatment; twice before they've been treated in Germany.

This is only the second group of children to come from Iraq to the United States for medical care; the first group of four children was sponsored by a group in New Jersey.

## The children

The group of children, who were accompanied to the U.S. by Mrs. Muriel Mirak-Weissbach of the Committee to Save the Children in Iraq, is composed of two boys and three girls.

The oldest child is 15-year-old Ibtisam Abdul Khitter. She suffered a crushed leg and bone infection after her home in the Iraqi town of Nasiera was hit by a bomb.

Another girl, Hiba Ibrahim Abdul Razak, 12, lost the fingers on her right hand during bombing in Baghdad, and the third, Farah Kareem Kathim, 10, suffered a paralyzed right arm from an explosion in the town of Karbala.

The two boys had face and eye injuries. Hayder Hassan Salman, 10, was hit in the eye during shooting in Baghdad.

Loai Ali Aziz, 11, suffered severe burns to his face during skirmishes between Iraqi troops and Kurds in the northern city of Kirkuk in the war's aftermath.

The injuries are typical of those suffered by many Iraqi children in the aftermath of the brutal war.

## Why they can't be helped

The question that was immediately raised by the media who gathered when the children arrived at Dulles International Airport, was why the children could not get adequate medical care in Iraq. Mrs. Weissbach emphasized that the United Nations-sponsored embargo was to blame. Because Iraq cannot sell oil or spend its foreign assets, it cannot afford to purchase the medical supplies which are essential to perform plastic surgery and reconstructive surgery of the kind these children need.

"They don't have the anesthesia," Mrs. Weissbach stressed. "Heart surgery has virtually stopped, for example. And if these children were not here, there would have been no further or better treatment available to them."

Mrs. Weissbach explained the conditions which she had observed in Iraq during her trip to pick up the children. She noted that while electricity and water supplies are being restored broadly through bubble-gum-and-paste methods, the food supply situation is disastrous. As for medicines, the supplies are limited to what is contributed, which is nowhere near the half billion dollars worth Iraq used to purchase yearly prior to the embargo.

## Future plans

Dr. Hossaini, a professor of pathology at the Medical College of Virginia, took the occasion of the press conference to express his gratitude to various institutions for facilitating the children's visit. This included the Children's Hospital and its medical director; the Committee to Save the Children in Iraq; and the U.S. State Department, which provided the visas cooperatively.

Dr. Hossaini also reported his plans to bring at least 15 more children to Virginia for treatment, and announced that he has been told to expect cooperation from the Wilder administration in Virginia.

## The committee

The Committee to Save the Children in Iraq has been involved since its inception in three levels of action: 1) providing immediate relief for children such as the present action; 2) facilitating the delivery of necessary equipment to Iraq for use in medical care and other care for Iraqi children; and 3) promoting the rebuilding of infrastructure in the region. Collaborators of the Committee in the U.S. from the farm community and the Chaldean Church have sent three shipments of milk powder to Iraq over the past few months.

The Committee has vigorously opposed the ongoing embargo against Iraq.