

## Brazil Welcomes Palestinian Refugees Barred from Iraq

Contributed by Lourenço Canuto  
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Brazil received this Friday, September 21, 35 Palestinian refugees who were staying in camps in the Jordanian desert, at the border between Syria and Iraq, since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. They had been expelled from Iraq.

Four families, including children and elderly, arrived in Brazil: 25 people went to the state of São Paulo and another 10 to the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost Brazilian state.

Two other groups will be brought next month and in November, totaling 117 people, who answered a questionnaire formulated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugee Affairs (UNHCR).

The secretary general at the Brazilian Ministry of Justice, Luiz Paulo Barreto, said that the Palestinians are going to enjoy the same citizenship rights as Brazilians do. They will receive ID documents, passports - in case they wish to leave Brazil - and will have access to public health and education services.

"Brazil is very welcoming, foreigners who arrive here feel as if they were at home. This applies even to the language, because Brazilians are also able to communicate with immigrants, even through mimicry.

"All of those factors make them feel comfortable, capable of integrating themselves with greater ease. Here, they can also exercise their religious freedom and wear their traditional garments, without being discriminated against," said the secretary.

The representative of UNHCR in Brazil, Luis Varese, informed that total assistance will be provided to the Palestinians, according to their aptitudes. Among them, there are engineers, teachers, merchants, and woodworkers.

Family heads will receive a minimum wage per month, the second person in the family will be granted 75% of the minimum wage, and the remaining family members, 50% of the wage, for up to two years, depending on their adaptation to the labor market.

The Brazilian Ministry of Justice has an annual budget of 680,000 reais (about US\$ 365,000) for assistance to refugees. The funds are transferred to the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Caritas do Brasil, which, along with the Antônio Vieira Association (Asav) provides assistance to refugees. The cities to which they were forwarded have not been disclosed, so as to avoid public exposure.

Brazil has received the refugees as a part of the Solidary Resettlement Program (Programa de Reassentamento Solidário), of the Ministry of Justice, which has catered to victims of conflicts in Colombia who did not adapt themselves to other countries in the continent.

There are currently around 3,400 refugees in the country, of 69 different nationalities, the vast majority from the African continent.

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