

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION,

CANBERRA, A.C.T.

9th June, 1966.

Indexed by

The Secretary,
Department of External Affairs,
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

EMIGRATION OF IRAQI NATIONALS TO AUSTRALIA.

In my memorandum 63/45223 of the 1st November, 1965, I outlined a problem which had arisen with regard to the emigration of Iranian nationals to Australia and sought your views on a possible approach to the Iranian authorities concerning it. These were given in your memorandum 1531/181 of 24th November, 1965, and although the approach has not been made, and it now appears that such an approach is unlikely, your submission of the matter to the British Foreign Office and the results of that submission have clarified the Iranian situation for us.

2. The revision of immigration policy which allowed Iranian nationals to lodge applications for unsponsored migration to Australia, and which largely created the problem in Iran, applied equally to all countries of the Middle East, including Iraq, from where applications have been received and are being received in considerable numbers.

3. In Iraq the examination of migrant applicants and nominees is undertaken on our behalf by the British representatives at Baghdad and Basra. Such examination of the relatively small number of nominees sponsored from Australia has not imposed nor is it imposing a workload on the British authorities in Iraq which they cannot handle satisfactorily. It early became apparent, however, that they could not handle the much heavier workload created by the new eligibility of Iraqi nationals in Iraq to apply for migration consideration on an unsponsored basis. In view of this, while their examination of sponsored nominees was not disturbed, it was decided that they should be asked to examine unsponsored applicants only in those relatively rare cases which involved urgent or other special features warranting special consideration.

4. Action on all other cases has been deferred, the applications being held in abeyance either in this office or at the Senior Migration Office, Beirut. Such deferred cases now number over 1,000. The thought behind such deferral action was that these cases would be dealt with by an Australian selection team from Beirut which would visit Baghdad and Basra when circumstances made this possible.

5. There is undoubtedly considerable interest in Iraq in emigration to Australia, particularly in the Christian minority, largely Assyrians, who claim to be subject to religious discrimination. A spokesman for this group in Australia suggested that some 2,500 families might be involved. Further, the Senior Migration Officer, Beirut, reported on 18th December, 1964, that following an official visit to Baghdad, the Acting Australian Government Trade Commissioner expressed astonishment at the interest in migration to Australia he encountered. Subsequently the British Embassy, Baghdad, reported on 4th June, 1965 that -

"Non-Moslem communities generally in Iraq consider themselves under Government pressure to an extent that it is to their advantage to uproot themselves and settle elsewhere - the bulk of our would-be migrants to Australia and Canada come from this group. As the pres-