

Iraqis visited in FBI probe;

CIVIL LIBERTIES GROUPS BRISTLE AT INITIATIVE

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Body

Two **FBI** agents came knocking on Zahraaldin Albedani's door Thursday, with questions about security, terrorist acts and the horrific life he fled as a political prisoner sentenced to death in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Albedani served them apple juice and pound cake at his San Jose apartment, and while they ate, he told them his story.

"I have nothing to hide. We are ready to cooperate, to defend America," said the Iraqi political refugee, one of thousands of **Iraqis** being questioned as part of a nationwide, wartime security dragnet.

Civil liberties groups in the Bay Area and across the country denounced the **FBI initiative** that began Thursday, an effort to find and detain **Iraqis** who are in the United States unlawfully, without visas or expired travel documents.

"What is the **FBI** interested in here? Busting a few immigrants for technical violations on their visas or cooperation that may result in helpful evidence?" asked Robert Rubin, director of the Lawyers' Committee for **Civil** Rights in San Francisco. Rubin said the questioning could alienate **Iraqis**.

Immigrant and refugee advocates say some **Iraqis** found the experience humiliating.

Ellen Dumesnil, a division director at Catholic Charities in San Jose, is monitoring the interviews since her organization helped resettle many Iraqi refugees like Albedani in the Bay Area after the Persian Gulf War.

"They want to cooperate, they want to help, but this whole thing creates a layer of stress," she said. Albedani, however, said the half-hour meeting was not disturbing. "They were very kind," he said.

The **FBI** agents, a man and woman, first promised to help Albedani if he became a victim of a hate crime. "I felt they were sincere," he said.

The agents also asked questions about Albedani's life in Iraq, his feelings about the war, and whether he has committed any crimes since coming here two years ago.

"They told me that if I saw anyone trying to do something bad to America, a person trying to commit a terrorist act, it's better to cooperate and contact them," said Albedani, who was jailed and tortured in Iraq for campaigning against Saddam Hussein's political party. He escaped to Jordan.

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The 41-year-old father of three small children said he answered emphatically. "I would still do that," he said. "It's my duty because America did a lot for us."

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