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## **A View from Above**

In the last four decades, many people have come from Iraq as refugees. In 1991, a division was created between northern Iraq (Kurdistan) and the rest of Iraq. The UN considers Kurdistan a safe zone. As a refugee you have to come from the unsafe zone, or at least prove that you do, in order to qualify as a refugee.

During the interview for refugee status, an official checks to see whether you really come from the unsafe zone. He asks about small details of the city you claim to come from, and compares your answers to a map to confirm that your answers correspond to it. If you cannot prove that you come from the unsafe zone, you are sent back to

your country.

Many people have difficulty proving that they come from the unsafe zone, even if they really come from there.

Here is a story about someone who we can call M.

M tried to apply for asylum in one of the Schengen countries—let's call the country "X." He was not aware that the city he came from was in the safe zone, according to the UN. He waited five years for a positive answer from country X, but unfortunately he got one negative answer after another, until he received the final rejection from X and was set to be deported back to his country. Back then, his country was still ruled by a dictator. As a deserter from the army, returning to his country was the worst ending he could imagine. After a while he managed to cross the border of X without legal papers and enter another country—let's call it XX—to apply for refugee status

again. From that moment he was a new person.

Before going for the interview, he spent weeks with people from a town in the unsafe zone. Let's call that town J. During this period he started to draw a map of J, which he had never visited before. He wanted to know every corner of it—the names of all the streets, the schools, the major buildings, and even the minor buildings. The people from J taught him everything and helped him draw the map of their town, all the while asking him questions to confirm that he had mastered everything about J.

When M finally had his refugee interview, the official was quite surprised, even impressed. He asked M questions about the geography of the town, and compared M's answers to a map. M's answers demonstrated knowledge of J as it was seen from above.

It took only twenty minutes for the official to grant M refugee status. Meanwhile,

thousands of people who were actually from J and other cities in the unsafe zone waited as long as ten to fifteen years for the same thing, because their answers only demonstrated knowledge of their towns from the ground.

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