

Iraq War Vet Says Wife Kidnapped Children To Japan

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A young Iraq War veteran is in the fight of his life against his ex-wife to bring his children home.

Michael Elias, who is now a Bergen County sheriff, claims his wife kidnapped their two young children and took them to Japan.

America, the country he risked his life defending, is powerless to bring his children back.

At 26-years-old, Elias has already endured more pain than most people ever will.

As a young Marine, the New Jersey native was injured twice in Iraq – the first time when he'd only be in-country two weeks, CBS 2's Don Dahler reports.

"We were hit by an improvised explosive device around three o'clock in the morning, then we were ambushed by small arms fire," Elias told Dahler.

When he returned from Iraq three years ago, Elias was greeted by his wife, Mayumi, and his two young children, Jade and Michael, Jr. He was also met with the news that Mayumi had been having an affair while he was at war and she wanted a divorce.

A Bergen County judge granted the couple joint custody and ordered that the children's passports be surrendered, even though Elias had no idea what Mayumi was going to do.

A few months later, Elias and his mother were expecting Mayumi to drop the kids off. But they never showed.

"My mother went over there and the apartment was completely empty, like ready to be rented. The very next day," Elias said.

Mayumi, her alleged boyfriend and the children were on a plane to Japan.

Mayumi was able to obtain new passports for her children since she worked at the Japanese embassy processing visas and passports.

The question is, did anyone with the embassy help her?

The Japanese Consulate has yet to return any calls to CBS 2.

“I was horrified,” the children’s grandmother, Nancy Elias, said. “We just said, ‘Okay, she kidnapped them. She not only crossed state lines but she took them to another country. This is wrong, we’ll get them back.’”

In doing their research, they quickly learned a devastating fact: of the thousands of children from all over the world who’ve been abducted to Japan, not one has ever been returned home.

“It’s a haven for child abduction,” Nancy said.

The problem is Japan is not party to the Hague Convention on Parental Abduction, and despite pleas by the U.S. State Department, there are no legal means to bring the Elias children back home.

“It has destroyed me, my son, my whole family,” Nancy said. “We’re never going to be the same. Never.”

“When she took them, she took my soul with her,” she added.

This past May at a congressional hearing on abducted children in Japan, Elias described the last time he saw his children via Skype.

“My daughter Jade looked at her mother in heartache and said to her something ever so softly in Japanese. When I asked Mayumi what Jade had said, she replied, ‘She wants to be with you.’ The monitor immediately went blank. That was the last time I saw my daughter’s face.”

When Michael was in Iraq, it was clear who the enemy was, but not anymore. His most prized possession is now a photo of his daughter holding his hand the day he came home from war.

“It’s disgusting to me that this is allowed. We’re supposed to be the most powerful nation and these are our allies. These are not our enemies. I don’t understand what the problem is,” Elias said.

He vows to never give up but his only hope now, he says, is for the president himself to put direct pressure on Japan.

President Obama recently brought the issue of parental abduction up with the Japanese Prime Minister and urged him to resolve the hundreds of outstanding cases.