

# **USCCAR Regrets Misrepresentations by State Department Officials on Humanitarian Situation of Camps Ashraf and Liberty in Iraq**

WASHINGTON, July 7, 2012 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- On behalf of thousands of Iranian-Americans whose loved ones are in camps Ashraf and Liberty in Iraq, the US Committee for Camp Ashraf Residents (USCCAR) regrets the misrepresentations by Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism; and Ambassador Daniel Fried, Special Advisor to the Secretary Hillary Clinton on Camp Ashraf, about the relocation process from Camp Ashraf to Camp Liberty.

On Friday June 6, 2012, during a special press briefing, Ambassadors Benjamin and Fried ignored the Iraqi government's systematic breaches of its commitments and agreements with the UN and residents of Camp Ashraf regarding the latter's minimal life support needs.

USCCAR believes it is unfortunate that they presented misinformation to the media in order to exert pressure on our loved ones in Iraq by mischaracterizing the legitimate reasons for the halt in relocation to Camp Liberty by the remaining residents of Camp Ashraf. These misrepresentations would no doubt further embolden the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maleki to continue to push the situation toward an impasse to the detriment of our loved ones there.

It must be noted that some 2,000 residents (two-thirds) have already relocated from Ashraf to Liberty even though minimum guarantees for their safety and security have yet to be provided by the Iraqi Government. Camp Ashraf has been home for the past 26 years to thousands of members of Iran's principal opposition group, the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK).

We should remind Ambassadors Benjamin and Fried that:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has formally recognized the residents of Ashraf as "asylum seekers" and "persons of concern," which entitles them to fundamental humanitarian protections and freedom of movement.

Since February 2012, the Iraqi Government has egregiously and systematically breached many of its commitments relating to 3,400 residents of Camp Ashraf based on the December 25, 2011 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Secretary Clinton fully supported the MoU.

Contrary to the suggestion by Mr. Benjamin, the halt in relocation of Ashraf resident to Liberty was in early May, well before the June 1 ruling of US Court of Appeals.

Each and every request by the residents serves their humanitarian needs and none can be even remotely viewed as not being "central". For example the request to take along cars— one car per 40 residents – is intended to help the injured and disabled residents to walk from their living quarters to the dining hall, about half a mile away.

There has been no "shifting of demands". The majority of these legitimate requests have been part of negotiations between the residents, the UN, and Iraqi government at the onset of relocation process.

The Iraqi Government is the responsible party for stalling the relocation process by denying residents their basic requests, including linking Camp Liberty to Baghdad's water network and power grid.

Five months since the first convoy of residents relocated to Camp Liberty, not even a single resident has been resettled in third countries through the UN. In violation of their rights, none of the residents has been allowed visits with their families or lawyers.

The misrepresentations by Ambassadors Benjamin and Fried on Friday raise questions about the motives behind the ambassadors' self-described "humanitarian" intentions. We are concerned about another crackdown on Ashraf and liberty residents by the Iraqi government on or before July 20. Regrettably, and the United States is moving to preemptively place the blame on the defenseless residents of Liberty and Ashraf.

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/usccar-regrets-misrepresentations-by-state-department-officials-on-humanitarian-situation-of-camps-ashraf-and-liberty-in-iraq-161687195.html>