

USCCAR Deplores Reckless Decisions by UNAMI's Chief on Camp Ashraf

WASHINGTON, Feb. 2, 2012 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The US Committee for Camp Ashraf Residents (USCCAR), representing thousands of Iran-Americans whose loved-ones reside in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, condemns the reckless and potentially harmful assertions made in the January 31 statement issued by Ambassador Martin Kobler, head of United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Iraq.

USCCAR warns that Mr. Kobler should not become a part and parcel of a despicable joint Iranian-Iraqi "working plan" aimed at dismantling Iran's principal organized opposition, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (PMOI/MEK) whose 3,400 members and their families currently reside in Ashraf.

Mr. Kobler must be reminded that last September, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) formally recognized the residents of Ashraf as "asylum seekers," a status which, according to UNHCR, entitles them to certain rights and protections based on international humanitarian standards. In its February 1, 2012 statement, UNHCR once again described all residents of Ashraf as "persons of concern."

While Ambassador Kobler has made a great deal about the number of toilets and faucets at Camp Liberty, he has failed to mention that humanitarian standards at the Camp - including the right to freedom of movement and access to lawyers and medical services - are effectively non-existent.

In addition, the Camp Liberty is encircled with thick 12-foot high concrete walls and surrounded by the Iraqi military forces. The residents will not have in-person round-the-clock access to UN observers, who will be stationed outside the Camp perimeter while Iraqi police will be inside. The residents are not even permitted to take their vehicles and moveable belongings.

In its February 1st statement, UNHCR attached "utmost importance to peaceful solutions being found." The UN Refugee Agency further emphasized that any relocation outside Camp Ashraf must proceed on a voluntary basis, "with freedom of movement the most desirable state at the site of relocation." UNHCR did not certify Camp Liberty in its statement but said it only "has been advising on the technicalities of improving the camp infrastructure."

Mr. Kobler's impartiality is a must when dealing with the lives of 3,400 defenseless asylum seekers. However, his actions have made a fait accompli situation designed to force the residents of Ashraf into "voluntarily" accepting the relocation terms crafted by Tehran and set forward by the Iraqi government.

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