

Iraq: Restraint urged at Camp Ashraf as government forces mass

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Amnesty International has warned Iraqi authorities against taking any unnecessary military action that would put civilian lives in danger, amid reports of a military build-up inside a camp for Iranian exiles north of Baghdad.

Amnesty International has received reports that new troop movements and military construction are taking place inside the camp, only days after an assault on the camp by Iraqi security forces on 8 April left over 30 camp residents dead and many others wounded.

“Camp Ashraf’s residents are looking on in fear and trepidation as Iraqi troops appear to be preparing for a new assault on them and their homes,” said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme.



“The Iraqi government must not allow a repeat of last week’s deadly attacks and ensure that Iraqi forces refrain from taking any military action that would further endanger civilian lives.”

“Iraqi forces are supposed to be stationed at the Camp to protect the residents, not to assault or intimidate them and restrict their movement.”

Camp Ashraf, located in Diyala province around 60 km north of Baghdad, is home to some 3,400 Iranian exiles and refugees, many of them members and supporters of the the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), an Iranian opposition group outlawed in Iran.

According to PMOI spokespeople, on 14 April, several Iraqi engineering battalions completed a 6-kilometre-long embankment on the northern edge of Camp Ashraf’s main road.

The embankment cuts across the camp from east to west and is reportedly wide enough for military vehicles to patrol along its length. Control towers have also been set up along the embankment.

“Given the nature and scope of these new military installations, we’re very concerned what Iraqi security forces may be planning,” said Malcolm Smart.

“Excessive force must not be used against Camp Ashraf’s residents, who are unarmed and include many women and children.”

On 8 April, 34 camp residents were killed when Iraqi security forces attempted to take greater control of the camp. Many of the dead, six women and 28 men, died of gunshot wounds inflicted by Iraqi security forces using live ammunition. Others appear to have been deliberately run over by military vehicles.

Iraqi officials maintain that their forces took action to put down a “riot” in the camp and deny that their troops opened fire despite the strong evidence to the contrary.

On 14 April, the Iraqi authorities released six men who they had detained during the 8 April military operation. Shortly after their release, the men told Amnesty International that they had been beaten and threatened with deportation to Iran during the course of their detention. Talking to Amnesty International from the camp on 14 April, one of the men said that Iraqi soldiers were then in the process of surrounding the camp.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on Iraqi authorities not to forcibly evict or repatriate Camp Ashraf’s residents, some of whom are refugees who would be at grave risk of torture and other serious human rights violations, including execution, if they were to be forcibly returned to Iran.

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