

URGENT ACTION

RESIDENTS OF 'CAMP ASHRAF' IN IRAQ AT RISK

Between 400 and 800 Iranian nationals living in a camp in Iraq could be transferred to a new location at the end of this year. Their security could be at risk while they are being moved. Amnesty International is calling on the Iraqi authorities to ensure their protection.

Camp New Iraq, formerly known as Camp Ashraf, situated 60 kilometres north of Baghdad, is home to some 3,250 Iranian asylum-seekers who have lived in Iraq for some 25 years. They are associated with the Iranian opposition group, the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI). The camp has been attacked several times by Iraqi security forces, most recently in April 2011, causing the deaths of dozens of residents and injuries to others.

On 15 December, the Iraqi authorities publicly confirmed their plans to close the camp on 31 December this year. In an interview with press agency Agence France Presse (AFP), Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said that the decision to close the camp was "irreversible". On 21 December, Nuri al-Maliki announced that he had agreed to extend the deadline for closing the camp until April 2012, but wanted the camp's residents to have left Iraq by then. However between 400 and 800 residents could be temporarily moved to another camp, known as Camp Liberty, before the end of the year. Meanwhile the residents of Camp Ashraf have agreed that 400 residents can move to Camp Liberty, if certain safeguards are in place regarding their protection. PMOI representatives have announced they are ready to negotiate this with the Iraqi government as soon as possible as well as negotiating a peaceful solution for the rest of the residents.

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had previously announced in a statement that it had received a high number of asylum requests from the camp residents and was putting in place a process to assess such requests on an individual basis. This process has not yet started.

Please write immediately in Arabic or English:

- Urging the Iraqi authorities not to commit human rights violations against the camp residents;
- Urging the Iraqi authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of the residents of Camp New Iraq at all times, including during the planned transfer of at least some of them to Camp Liberty.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 DECEMBER 2011 TO THE IRAQI EMBASSY OR DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVE IN YOUR COUNTRY, ASKING FOR THEM TO BE FORWARDED TO:

Prime Minister and Acting Minister of

Interior

Nuri Kamil al-Maliki

Convention Centre (Qasr al-Ma'aridh)

Baghdad, Iraq

Email: info@pmo.iq

Salutation: Your Excellency

President

Jalal Talabani

Convention Centre (Qasr al-Ma'aridh)

Baghdad, Iraq

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hoshyar Zebari

Convention Centre (Qasr al-Ma'aridh)

Baghdad, Iraq

Email: hrdep@iraqmfamail.com

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 320/11. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE14/043/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Even though camp residents have been living in Iraq for some 25 years, the Iraqi government has made repeatedly clear its intention that they leave the country. In 2009 the government told the residents that they should leave Iraq by 15 December 2009 or else face forcible relocation within Iraq, but did not enforce this threat due apparently to international pressure, including from the USA and the UN.

The camp has previously been attacked several times by Iraqi security forces, causing the death of dozens of residents and injuries to others. Most recently, Iraqi troops stormed the camp on 8 April 2011 using grossly excessive force and live fire against residents. Some 36 residents, including eight women, were killed and more than 300 others were wounded. At least nine camp residents were killed and others injured in an earlier attack by Iraqi security forces on 28-29 July 2009. Some 36 camp residents who were detained in the context of the July 2009 assault were held for more than two months and reportedly tortured before being released on 7 October 2009.

Camp Ashraf, as it was then known, was formerly under the protection of the United States Force - Iraq (USF-I) until June 2009, when it was transferred to the control of the Iraqi government. Since then, the camp and its residents have been virtually besieged by Iraqi troops as the government intensified pressure on the residents, many of whom belong to the PMOI, to leave Iraq. The PMOI is an Iranian opposition organization that formerly engaged in armed attacks on Iran before deciding several years ago to renounce violence. Supporters of the PMOI were allowed to reside as exiles in Iraq by the former Iraqi President Saddam Hussain, overthrown in 2003.

Since the April 2011 assault, the Iraqi authorities have tightened controls on the camp residents to the extent that some of those injured and other residents suffering from chronic ailments have been prevented or obstructed from leaving the camp to obtain more specialized medical treatment than that available there. The security forces have also reportedly sought to impede the flow of phone and other communications between the camp residents and the outside world and have installed loudspeakers, prompting fears among residents that the Iraqi security forces are preparing to carry out a further violent attack on the camp.

In the face of international pressure following the April 2011 assault on the camp, the Iraqi government said it had set up a committee to investigate the attack and the killings; however, as in other cases where such investigations have been announced, no outcome has been reported and it remains unclear whether any serious investigation was ever conducted

Name: Residents of Camp Ashraf
Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 320/11 Index: MDE 14/047/2011 Issue Date: 22 December 2011