

US officials Call for Urgent Action to Protect Residents of Camp Ashraf; Urge Removal of MEK, from FTO List

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PRNewswire-USNewswire/ — In a Symposium on Tuesday, April 26, 2011, former top U.S. government officials called for urgent U.S. government and United Nations action to protect 3,400 Iranian dissidents in Camp Ashraf, Iraq and urged the removal of Iran's main opposition movement, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), from the U.S. list of terrorist organizations.

The speakers were in consensus in condemning the deadly April 8, 2011 attack on Ashraf by the Iraqi forces, which left 35 residents dead, including 8 women, and more than 300 wounded, as a crime against humanity whose perpetrators had to be brought to justice.

Andrew Card, White House Chief of Staff (2001-2006); Howard Dean, former DNC Chairman; Mayor Rudy Giuliani; Tom Ridge, Homeland Security Secretary (2003-2005); Philip Zelikow, Senior Counselor to the State Department (2005-2007); Michael Sheehan, State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism (1998-2000); and Col. Gary Morsch, M.D. (USAR), President, Heart to Heart International, were among the speakers at the symposium. The event was organized by Near East Human Rights Initiative (NEHRI) and chaired by Amb. Mitchell Reiss, State Department Policy Planning Director (2003-2005).

"In addition to the thousands of American troops who have given their lives in Iraq, now thousands of innocent civilians are giving their lives. Because, the truth is, the Prime Minister of Iraq is a mass murderer," said Governor Dean while referring to Nouri al-Maliki, adding, "Iraqis are using the fact that the MEK is on the terrorist list to justify this massacre of the people in Ashraf."

"It is time for the MEK to be recognized for what it really is: a place where freedoms are practiced, opportunities are realized, hopes are more than just hope; where seeds of democracy have taken root, and they are looking to be transplanted in a country that desperately needs those roots to be able to grow... I hope that the U.S. will stand up and say that the MEK is the example that others can follow in the entire region of the Middle East," Andrew Card remarked.

In part of his remarks, Mayor Giuliani said, "We can certainly delist the MEK, and then go further than that. We shouldn't just delist the MEK. We should applaud them. We should thank them. We should thank them for the help they have given us in getting realistic about national intelligence estimate telling us that they had stopped the development of nuclear" weapons.

Professor Philip Zelikow recommended that the U.S. "delist the MEK as an FTO... It's the right thing to do in principle..., but it's also the absolute prerequisite to everything else you want to do." Former Senior Counselor to Secretary Condoleezza Rice added, "have the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq, called UNAMI, inform the government of Iraq that it is going to deploy a detachment to Ashraf City immediately."

"The U.S. made a commitment to protect the people in Ashraf. The facts are there," said Secretary Ridge. "Once we delist them [MEK], it will not be enough. We have to continue to guarantee their safety and security until we get them out of harm's way."

Ambassador Sheehan noted that the continued designation of the MEK "is a political judgment right now" though "it shouldn't be."

NEHRI founder Dr. Morsch said, "Maliki, stop the siege of Ashraf... allow medical teams to go in and care for the wounded and injured... I ask for the United Nations to set up a permanent presence there, to set up a permanent presence to protect the people of Ashraf, and for the United States military to send a force back to do what they were supposed to be doing all along and which I did...Delist the MEK."

Ambassador Reiss noted that the bipartisan panel, "agree that the Iraqi regime has betrayed its promises to the U.S. military and can't be trusted. We agree that the U.S. government is betraying its solemn promise to the residents of Camp Ashraf, betraying our own national security interests to promote regime change in Iran, and our own values of democracy, freedom, and human rights." "After 232 days [since the U.S. Court of Appeals ordered the State Department to review the MEK designation], "the time for waiting is over. We need to tell the State Department we will wait no longer. Immediately delist the MEK," he said.

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