

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Iraq: concerns regarding the future of Camp Ashraf residents

Amnesty International has written directly to the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki about recent developments relating to the more than 3,000 Iranian exiles currently living in Camp Ashraf, northeast of Baghdad, who Iraqi officials have said should leave the country. The Iranians are members or supporters of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI).

In particular, Amnesty International expressed concern at a recent statement reportedly made in an interview with al-Forat, an Iraqi TV channel, by National Security Advisor Dr Muwaffaq al-Rubaie, in which he said that the authorities intend gradually to make the continued presence of the Camp Ashraf residents "intolerable". Shortly after this, possibly in a related development, a team of medical doctors were denied access to the Camp for several days. One purpose of their visit was reportedly to provide treatment to a woman in the Camp in need of surgery for an internal cancerous tumour. The doctors were later allowed into the camp.

In its letter, Amnesty International urged the Iraqi Prime Minister to ensure that no action is taken by the Iraqi authorities that violates the human rights of the Camp Ashraf residents and to clarify the government's intentions towards them in the light of Dr al-Rubaie's reported threat to make their lives "intolerable." Amnesty International has previously called on the Iraqi government to ensure that none of the Camp Ashraf residents or other Iranian dissidents are forcibly returned to Iran in view of fears that they would be at risk of torture or other serious human rights violations there.

Background:

The PMOI is an Iranian opposition organization and many of its members have been resident in Iraq for many years. Until recently the organization was listed as a "terrorist" organization by the European Union (EU) and governments of non-EU states, but in most cases this designation has now been lifted on the grounds that the PMOI no longer advocates or engages in armed opposition to the government of Iran. Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 the US forces provided protection for the Ashraf Camp residents, who were designated as "protected persons" under the Geneva Conventions. This situation has apparently been discontinued following the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the US and Iraqi governments which came into force on 1 January 2009, although the SOFA does not make any reference to Camp Ashraf or its residents. The Iranian government is said to be putting pressure on Iraq to expel the PMOI members and supporters from Iraq.

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