

URGENT ACTION

IRANIAN ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN IRAQ AT RISK

Over 3,000 Iranian asylum-seekers living in a camp in Iraq are at serious risk of egregious human rights violations, including forcible return to Iran. The Iraqi authorities plan to close down the camp, which has previously been attacked several times by Iraqi security forces resulting in the death and injury of dozens of people.

The Iraqi authorities have publicly announced their plans to close Camp New Iraq, formerly known as Camp Ashraf, 60 kilometres north of Baghdad, on 31 December this year. The camp is home to some 3,250 Iranian asylum-seekers who have lived in Iraq for some 25 years. The Iraqi government has repeatedly stated its opposition to the continued existence of the camp. 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. Camp residents are concerned that excessive force will be used again if plans to close the camp go ahead.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced in a statement on 13 September 2011 that it had received a high number of asylum requests from the camp residents and was putting in place a process to determine them on an individual basis. In the same statement the UN Refugee Agency highlighted the importance of conducting asylum interviews with the camp residents in a neutral, safe and confidential location.

Amnesty International is urging the Iraqi government to extend the deadline for the closure of the camp in order to allow adequate time for UNHCR to determine all asylum claims it has received from Camp New Iraq residents.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Urging the Iraqi authorities to refrain from any further violent incursion into the camp and from committing human rights violations against the camp residents, including by forcibly returning them to Iran;
- Urging the Iraqi authorities to extend the deadline arranged to close Camp New Iraq;
- Urging the Iraqi authorities to find a suitable location where asylum interviews can be carried out in a safe manner, including by guaranteeing the protection of camp residents while they are transported to and from the location where the interview is to take place;
- Urging the Iraqi authorities to make public the results of the investigation into attacks on camp residents in April 2011.

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

e-mail: 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

e-mail: hrdep@iraqmfamail.com

Salutation: Your Excellency

Send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Notwithstanding the fact that the camp residents have been living in Iraq for some 25 years, the Iraqi government has made clear its wish 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 deaths of dozens of residents and injuries to others. Most recently, Iraqi troops stormed into the camp on 8 April 2011 using grossly excessive force and live fire against residents who tried to resist them. 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 incursion were held for more than two months and reportedly tortured before being released on 7 October 2009.

Camp Ashraf, as it was then, 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 People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (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. As well, 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 incursion into 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: n/a

Gender m/f: both

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