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Iraq: Iranian opposition group supporters must not be forcibly evicted

The Iraqi authorities must not forcibly relocate about 3,400 members of an Iranian opposition group from a settlement north of Baghdad where they have lived since the mid-1980's, Amnesty International said today.

Sources have told Amnesty International that residents of Camp Ashraf, which is 60km north of Baghdad, have been given a deadline of 15 December 2009 to leave or they will be forcibly removed and relocated elsewhere in Iraq. Some may also be at risk of being forcibly returned to Iran.

Camp Ashraf is home to over three thousand members and supporters of the Iranian opposition group, the People's Mojaheddin Organization of Iran (PMOI). The group have been living there for more than 20 years and it is now a small town with shops, medical and other facilities.

"Whatever measures the Iraqi authorities decide to take with regard to the future of Camp Ashraf, the rights of all its residents must be protected and guaranteed at all times," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International.

"Further no Iranian national in Iraq who is at risk of serious human rights violations in Iran should be forcibly returned there."

Government officials in Iraq have been quoted as saying plans are in place to forcibly remove people from the camp to other sites within Iraq in the coming days.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has reportedly announced that Camp Ashraf's residents will be moved to the southern province of Muthanna.

Amnesty International fears that forced removals of the residents of Camp Ashraf would put them at risk of arbitrary arrest, torture or other forms of ill-treatment, and unlawful killing.

Since mid-2008 the Iraqi government has repeatedly indicated that it wanted to close Camp Ashraf, and that its residents should leave Iraq or face being forcibly expelled from the country.

On 28-29 July 2009 Iraqi security forces stormed the camp and at least nine residents were killed and many more injured. Another 36 who had been detained were reported to have been tortured and beaten. They were released on 7 October in poor health after maintaining a hunger strike throughout their period of detention.

No investigations are known to have been carried out by the Iraqi authorities into their alleged torture and other ill-treatment or into allegations that Iraqi security forces used excessive, lethal force when taking

control of Camp Ashraf last July.