



# INTERRELIGIOUS COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF PROTECTED PERSONS IN ASHRAF, IRAQ

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Interreligious Committee in Support of  
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H.E. Ad Melkert  
Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq  
UNAMI  
Baghdad, Iraq  
**By email: [melkert@un.org](mailto:melkert@un.org), [arikat@un.org](mailto:arikat@un.org)**

Dear Mr Melkert,

I am writing on behalf of the Interreligious Committee in Support of Protected Persons in Ashraf, Iraq, a group of concerned persons of all faiths who support Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions, and their implementation in Iraq for the protection of the People's Mujahedin, currently headquartered at Camp Ashraf, north-east Iraq. We wish to express our grave concern for the welfare of these Iranian refugees in the wake of the recent violent attacks on the civilian population in Ashraf by Iraq's armed forces on July 28 and 29. The unprovoked and brutal assault left 11 killed, over 500 wounded, and a further 36 detained – an action which has since been ruled illegal by Iraq's criminal court.

We also ask for your intervention in bringing about a peaceable end to the widespread hunger strikes that have resulted from the Iraqi authorities' refusal to free the captives and to cease the military forces' continued violence and threats against the roughly 1,000 women residing at Ashraf.

Legally, the 36 arrested people can be regarded more as hostages rather than detainees, because none were arrested for committing a crime or an offense and there were no prior warrants issued against any of them. Iraqi authorities did not even know their names or identities at the time they were taken into custody. Credible legal charges have not been filed against the detainees, even after more than two weeks in detention. They have not received adequate legal counsel, having been provided with Iraqi attorneys who are Arabic speakers – a language that Ashraf residents do not speak. Some of the 36 hostages have very bad injuries and all of them are in their sixth week of a hunger strike and are fast approaching the point of no return.

The duty of the international community to safeguard these protected persons is clear and requires action by the United Nations and relevant government agencies in the US and Iraq. The UN's silence on this matter may have encouraged the Iraqi government to believe it can act with impunity and repeat its violence against Ashraf residents.

Iranian exiles in Washington and five European capitals, in solidarity with the Ashraf citizens and detainees, have been holding 24/7 hunger strikes and sit-ins in front of the White House and at US embassies throughout the world, in protest against the July attack and in an attempt to regain the protection of the US which has handed over responsibility for that protection to the Iraqis. Six protesters – relatives of Ashraf residents – have been on hunger strike for 40 days, three now so seriously ill that they were taken to the hospital.

**Someone** must give the Ashraf residents and hunger protestors a reliable sign that they should stop their strike; currently they continue because they don't see any change in the policies of the Iraqis, nor do they find any encouragement in the response of governmental bodies. Failure to act in some symbolic way will only result in more deaths in this already difficult and tragic aftermath of the bloody attacks in July.

First and foremost, it is essential that UNAMI and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights **firmly and publicly reassure** the Ashraf residents and protestors by stating and repeating their position publicly, emphasizing the recognized rights of Ashraf residents according to International Conventions and International Humanitarian Law which UNAMI had declared in their previous reports. Issuing such a statement would surely encourage people to end their hunger strikes and would prevent more loss of life.

We also insist that the following actions be taken:

1. We demand the immediate release of 36 Ashraf Residents who were taken hostage by the Iraqi forces during their July 28 and 29 attacks.
2. We insist that US soldiers be directed to prevent any further violence against the PMOI by the Iraqi forces. Article 45 of the 4th Geneva Convention clearly lays upon the US authorities the duty to take back control of Camp Ashraf from the Iraqi forces in order to guarantee the safety and security of its residents. This is not a matter of Iraq's national sovereignty, which is not at question, but rather one of international commitments to those whom the US has disarmed and promised to protect.
3. UNAMI must make clear that the Fourth Geneva Convention is to be observed with respect to these dissidents: Any sort of violence and threats by Iraqi forces against women in Ashraf, or calls for the forced displacement of Ashraf residents within Iraq should be expressly forbidden and strongly condemned. It would be most effective if a UNAMI monitoring team were stationed at Ashraf to prevent any further attacks on the residents.
4. We call upon UNAMI to use all their influence to pressure the United States to remove Ashraf residents from the Proscribed Groups List, and issue visas to the United States for any Ashraf residents who choose to emigrate to the USA or to some third party nation.

We urge you to act quickly to insure the continued health and safety of the residents of Camp Ashraf and to halt further harm to those supporters worldwide who are protesting.

Sincerely,

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