



INTERRELIGIOUS COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF PROTECTED PERSONS IN ASHRAF, IRAQ

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Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

On behalf of the ICSPPAI, I write this letter with grave concern. The fate of the Protected Persons at Camp Ashraf is now a matter of some urgency. On 26 December it was reported that Iraqi forces attacked a clinic at Camp Ashraf and beat some of the residents and patients. A number of them were forcibly expelled from the location and others were injured. Iraqi forces are now using the hospital as a lever and turning it into a center of containment and torture.

Since the 2009 US departure from Iraq, the citizens of Ashraf have been existing under increasingly serious psychological and physical pressures at the hands of Iraq. Their food and supplies have been severely restricted or denied, family members of residents have not been permitted to enter the camp, and patients in the hospital for serious medical conditions have been denied treatment and access to medical specialists. This has led to the decline and death of a number of patients in need of urgent medical care. The escalating confrontations and attacks upon the unarmed residents, including psychological torture of loudspeakers blaring threats at all hours of the day and night, have continued despite calls from the United Nations and the international community to cease these direct Human Rights abuses. These acts represent a systematic violation of all the commitments of the Iraqi government and pose a real humanitarian threat. Within Iran, the hangings of family members of Ashraf residents is a heightened form of psychological torture and serves to give lie to Iran's promise that MEK members from Ashraf will be guaranteed safety if they return to Iran.

During a House Foreign Affairs Committee meeting on 18 November 2010, Congress members provided ample and substantial documentation and individual testimonies of the inhumane treatment of Camp Ashraf residents. They have repeatedly requested more proactive intervention in upholding the humanitarian protections promised to these people. The Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, has confirmed that the committee working on this issue is in full agreement that the situation is unacceptable, but he can only repeat that the situation is being "monitored extremely closely". Clearly, our monitoring and simple declarations of support of international law and condemnation of Iranian and Iraqi actions in respect to Ashraf have not been and are not enough.

At a 17 December 2010 Washington symposium on US policy in Iran, top level officials in the former US administration underscored the need for adopting a firm policy against the religious fascism ruling Iran, regime change in Iran, and the protection and support of Ashraf residents and the delisting of the MEK.

The United States' attempts to engage the regime in any substantive way have been unsuccessful. A theocratic regime that makes repeated reference to us as "the Great Satan" is NOT one that is willing to sit down and 'make a deal with the devil'. Our continued terrorist classification of the MEK as a gesture towards constructive dialogue only rewards that government by disabling one of its most legitimate threats. The MEK is the ONLY organization of Iranians both inside and outside of Iran that opposes the current regime and favors a government in Iran that is democratic, secular, and non-nuclear.

Madam Secretary, we have done a lot of talking; our commissions and committees have done a lot of talking; NOW is the time for action. The US needs to do more than remind Iran and Iraq that 'the world is watching'. If we cannot make changes from within the framework of Iraqi sovereignty, perhaps it is time to force change from without. The United States can take action through our own government to improve the standing of these persons in the global community by removing the MEK from the United States' list of foreign terrorist organizations. The members of the MEK within Iran have been and continue to be of help to the West in clarifying Tehran's programs and secret initiatives in their goal of becoming a nuclear power. If our government will not provide its promised protection to the citizens of Ashraf, we must at least provide the means by which other allied countries in the EU and Middle East can assume that duty. Removal from the list will give them the freedom to peacefully migrate to places where their safety and wellbeing will be assured, and where their leaders may speak to the rest of the world about the atrocities and Human Rights abuses that are taking place. They will be empowered to be their own advocates.

For two previous administrations, the United States has upheld its terrorist listing of the MEK – this, in spite of the recent 2010 judiciary ruling by the DC circuit to review this designation, and the existing documentation from the Pentagon's own thorough investigation of Camp Ashraf's residents at the time they disarmed finding no evidence that any member had ever been involved in any act of terrorism. Under the new administration that campaigned for Change, those in our government have the opportunity and the means to grant that same chance to others who wish for change in their own country.

We join with international parliamentarians and call for the delisting of the MEK/PMOI by the US; the transfer of Iraqi forces outside the camp's perimeters; and the return of water, electricity and hospital facilities – currently occupied by Iraqi forces –to the residents. We further call for the Fourth Geneva Convention to be observed with respect to these persons: 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. UN SCR 1325 – observed by US forces while in Ashraf – must be respected by Iraqi forces, and a UN monitoring team should be stationed inside the camp. (for more information on SCR 1325 as it applies to Ashraf: http://www.peacewomen.org/portal_resources_resource.php?id=984)

Sincerely,

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