

# ASHRAF AND LIBERTY CAMP RESIDENTS MUST BE PROTECTED

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Public Demonstration outside embassy of the United States of America

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The Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran and all of us protesting here today are increasingly worried about the safety of 3400 Iranian refugees at Camps Ashraf and Liberty in Iraq. Threats of imminent further bloodshed by the Iraqi security forces are real.

The UN Secretary General on July 20, 2011 highlighted Ashraf and urged U.N.-member states to find a solution that is acceptable to all, including Ashraf residents. He also demanded that humanitarian goods and services be provided for the residents. Iraq's government must lift its inhuman blockade of Ashraf and Liberty.

Any attempt to displace Ashraf-Liberty residents across Iraq would constitute yet another humanitarian outrage. It would also be contrary to international law and the peace-keeping role of the U.N. Security Council.

It cannot be repeated too often that the purpose of banning the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK) by numerous governments was solely to appease the Tehran regime, which regards the National Council of Resistance of Iran, of which the PMOI is the main component, as its chief rival. The mullahs in Iran have now turned their attention to the PMOI's last "safe havens" in the Middle East, Camps Ashraf and Liberty.

## **PMOI and Tehran**

How many Canadians and Americans know that PMOI supporters in Iran were responsible for exposing the mullahs' nuclear program? It was their intelligence that brought the regime's hidden agenda to world attention. Bizarrely, the PMOI is still on the U.S. and Canadian blacklists, although it has for rule of law reasons been removed from the list of terrorist organizations by all 27 EU governments. Tehran wants the PMOI camps shut down and their members arrested and handed over for trial. In other words, it wants their organization destroyed. Where is the rule of law in Washington and Ottawa on this important matter? As a Canadian, I'm ashamed that my government continues to list the PMOI, no doubt only because our neighbour still does so.

The residents of Ashraf, having given up their weapons in 2003, lived under a guarantee of US protection and the Fourth Geneva Convention. But three years ago, the Americans handed over that "protection" to the Iraqi government, which has since brought every kind of pressure to close down Ashraf/Liberty. All

inhabitants have been denied supplies, medical attention, contact with the outside world, and are terrified that they will be handed over to Tehran to be tortured or executed as tens of thousands of PMOI supporters were in the past.

The Iranian regime has never been more powerful inside Iraq. Its supreme leader Ali Khameni, on his visit to Iraq in February, made it clear he expects Iraq to close the camp. Iran also wants a list of wanted PMOI members to be handed over for trial. Since his public remarks, the residents of Ashraf say new and inhuman restrictions have been placed on them.

Ashraf/Liberty residents cannot leave their camps and have no access to Iraqi hospitals; they meet their medical needs either themselves or by inviting Iraqi doctors to Ashraf. Under these circumstances, preventing doctors from entering the camp is simply inhuman.

### **Europe Leads on Ashraf /Liberty; Canada and U.S. should follow**

Struan Stevensen, MEP, President of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iraq, recently (July 25) made some important points which all of us here today share:

- “The developments of the past few days with respect to Ashraf and Liberty require the direct involvement of the UN Secretary General, the US President, US Secretary of State and EU leaders to secure the humanitarian needs of the residents and to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe”.
- “The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the UN in its recent report declared: ‘ The situation of the residents of Camp Liberty is tantamount to that of detainees or prisoners.... The Working Group considers...that such detention is not in conformity with the standards and principles of international human rights law, and more specifically violates article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and articles 9 and 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’ ”.
- “Ambassador Kobler, the Special Representative of UN Secretary General (SRSG), while being fully cognizant of the above, in a flawed report to the UN Security Council on July 19, tried to ignore the deplorable situation in Camp Liberty and attempted to blame Ashraf residents for the impasse in the relocation. On July 24, he and UNAMI provided the Iraqi government with a road map and called upon the residents “to start the preparations for the next move without delay... Squeezing all the Ashraf residents into the tiny 1/2 square km area of Camp Liberty fulfils only the desire of the Iraqi government and the Iranian regime. “
- “If someone wants to prevent a third massacre... (t)he correct way... is to emphasize and enforce the international humanitarian laws, refugee laws and international human rights laws, to pressure the government of Iraq to meet its international obligations and commitments...”

Finally, the U.S. Department of State has again been making irresponsible remarks against the unarmed men and women in Ashraf. In a press briefing on July 6, two senior diplomats, Dan Fried and Dan Benjamin, said that “patience of the Iraqi government is wearing thin!” These are the same words used by Martin Kobler when he addressed the Security Council on July 19. Whom do the three of them seek to represent? Already 49 refugees, including 8 women were killed in two separate attacks by Iraq’s soldiers in July 2009 and April 2011.

Thank you.

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Link to June 24 letter of Ashraf and Liberty residents to UN Sec Gen:

<http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/iran-resistance/12135-letters-of-residents-of-ashraf-and-liberty-to-the-un-secretary-general>