



WORLD ORGANISATION AGAINST TORTURE

PRESS RELEASE

Iraq/ USA: New concerns for the 3,500 PMOI members living in Camp Ashraf

Geneva, 29 July 2009. The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) is deeply concerned about the latest information received that, on 28 July 2009, the Iraqi security forces entered Camp Ashraf with bulldozers. They reportedly further used grenades, teargas, water canons and pepper spray, injuring several people living in the camp.

OMCT had already raised its concern in April 2009 that around 3,500 members of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), an Iranian opposition group, living in Camp Ashraf, in Iraq, may be expelled from Iraq as, according to the information received, the Iraqi security forces had surrounded the Camp to prevent people from entering or exiting. This event had followed several statements by both Iranian and Iraqi officials that the PMOI should be expelled from Iraq and the camp closed¹.

OMCT considers that those living in Camp Ashraf, having left Iran for political reason, to escape persecution and to organise resistance against the Iranian regime, would be at grave risk of torture or other serious human rights violations if they were to be returned involuntarily to Iran. OMCT therefore reiterates its call upon the Iraqi authorities to strictly abide by the principle of non-refoulement that prohibits sending a person to a country where there are serious reasons for believing that he or she would be subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

OMCT also would like to recall that it has been recognised from the beginning of the conflict that PMOI members are not involved in the confrontation between Americans and Iraqis. In addition, since PMOI members living in the camp have been disarmed, they have been designated as "protected persons" under Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of which guarantees were clearly stipulated in various protocols signed with United States (US) forces.

From autumn 2008, and due to the rapprochement between some Iraqi governmental factions and Iranian authorities, fears were expressed regarding the guarantees provided to the PMOI members if the US were to transfer the protection of the camp to the Iraqi authorities without ensuring beforehand that the latter could indeed guarantee this protection.

On 1st January 2009, the US transferred to the Iraqi Government the responsibility for the protection of Ashraf, reportedly on the basis of guarantees it was said to have received from the Iraqi Government. Since then, fears have been reiterated both as a result of the pressures exerted by Iran upon the Iraqi Government and as a consequence of measures undertaken by the Iraqi authorities, in particular in the framework of the transfer of responsibility for controlling the persons who enter and exit the camp from the Mojahedin to Iraqi officials.

In view of these latest events, OMCT renews its call upon the US authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure the effective protection of Ashraf residents and the Iraqi authorities to ensure their physical and psychological integrity.

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¹ See OMCT press release issued on 2 April 2009.