



Iraq: Need to ensure the protection of the residents of Camp Ashraf

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Geneva, 11 November 2011. The OMCT calls on the authorities of Iraq to ensure the full respect for the rights of the residents of Camp Ashraf located in Iraq and on the international community to step up its efforts to prevent serious human rights violations and the forcible return of its residents to Iran in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

"The deadline set by the Iraqi government to close Camp Ashraf by the end of 2011 without a safe solution for its residents, causes an acute risk of grave and serious human rights violations", said Gerald Staberock, Secretary General of the OMCT.

The Iraqi government has repeatedly stated that the camp should be closed and its residents expelled from Iraq. Recent statements by Iraq's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to close down the camp by the end of 2011 without a safe solution for its residents are all the more alarming. The OMCT recalls that Iraq has clear obligations under international human rights law to ensure the safety of the camps residents' and that it is prohibited to forcibly return them to Iran, where they may face torture, ill-treatment and other serious human rights violations.

"We enter a period that requires extreme vigilance and concerted efforts by the international community, including the UN Secretary General, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Mission in Iraq to ensure the safety of the camps residents until a lasting solution has been found", said Gerald Staberock.

In a letter to the European Union's Special Representative on Camp Ashraf, who was recently appointed by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union, OMCT expressed its concern about the safety of Camp Ashraf's residents.

On 13 September 2011, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared in a statement that the residents of Camp Ashraf are "formally asylum seekers" and called on the government of Iraq to extend "the deadline for the closure of the camp" in view of examining the request for refugee status in a timely and proper manner. However, the Iraqi government remains determined to proceed with the closure of the camp by the end of the year. The OMCT considers that it is absolutely central that this process can now go forward in an environment of safety and with all the necessary guarantees and unhindered and unimpeded access by the UNHCR.

Camp Ashraf, which is located in Diyala province, 90 km north-east of Baghdad, is home to 3,400 unarmed civilians, members of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI), an Iranian opposition group. In July 2004, its residents were entitled as "protected persons" to the protections provided in the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949). The United States of America (USA) administration also signed an agreement with each resident to protect them until their final disposition. In January 2009, the USA handed the protection of Camp Ashraf over to the authorities of Iraq. However, despite guarantees by the Iraqi government, the camp has been raided on two occasions by the Iraqi security forces since 2009 in view of expelling its residents and closing the

camp. The attacks led to the deaths of 47 residents and hundreds of injured. The residents have also been subjected to numerous acts of harassment, among others, family members or lawyers being prevented from entering the camp and the use by Iraqi security forces of powerful loudspeakers to psychologically harass them.

The OMCT calls on the Iraqi authorities:

- to guarantee, in all circumstances, the physical and psychological integrity of Camp Ashraf residents, including by not forcibly returning any resident to Iran, where she/he would be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment, in line with Iraq's obligations to ensure the protection of human rights to all those under its jurisdiction;
- to lift the self-proclaimed deadline to close Camp Ashraf and ensure that the UNHRC can carry out individual interviews in a safe, neutral and confidential location;
- to allow the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to monitor the human rights situation in Camp Ashraf.

We equally request the international community, including the Secretary General of the United Nations, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq to use their influence and good office to prevent further human rights violations. We also believe that this is the time of Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- to urge the Iraqi government to extend or lift the deadline to close Camp Ashraf until all its residents have been safely resettled and reject any forcible relocation;
- to urge the Iraqi government to fully respect the human rights of Camp Ashraf residents and to put an end to all harassment faced by the residents;
- to formally request to monitor the human rights situation in Camp Ashraf until all its residents have been safely resettled by dispatching observers to the camp.