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Iraq / Camp Ashraf

Iraq must protect the rights of Camp Ashraf residents

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) condemns the violence occurred during the storming by the Iraqi forces on July 28th 2009, of Camp Ashraf, where reside thousands of members of the People's Mojahedeen Organization of Iran (PMOI), an opposition group to the Iranian regime. FIDH calls upon the authorities of Iraq to respect the physical and mental integrity of the residents of Camp Ashraf and rule out officially and unequivocally the risk of extradition and expulsion to Iran where they may face torture and persecution.

According to information received, on July 28th 2009, following the decision of the Iraqi Government to assure the internal security of Camp Ashraf and allegedly set up a police station inside the camp, the Iraqi army entered by force. Several sources confirm that 11 residents are dead and more than 450 have been injured during the violent clashes between the security forces and the residents. 50 residents have been arrested but no information is available on their whereabouts. There are allegedly several injured among the Iraqi forces as well.

FIDH condemns the violent entry of Iraqi forces and calls upon the authorities to re-establish the calm inside the camp and guarantee the security of the residents. The authors of excessive use of violence should be held accountable before independent and impartial tribunals. An independent investigation should shed light on this attack and establish the responsibilities.

FIDH also reminds that Camp Ashraf residents are «protected persons» under the Fourth Geneva Convention and their rights under international law should be respected. In addition, the UN Convention against torture clearly prohibits State Parties to "expel, return ("refouler") or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a danger of being subjected to torture" (Article 3). FIDH fears that if Camp Ashraf residents are expelled to the Islamic Republic of Iran, in blatant violation of international human rights and humanitarian law, they risk arbitrary detention, torture and other forms of persecution. Even though Iraq has not yet ratified this core human rights treaty, the principle of "non - refoulement" has a binding character as part of international customary law.

Background information

Camp Ashraf, located in Iraq's Diyala province, north of Baghdad, was established in the 1980's. It currently hosts around 3.400 members of the People's Mojahedeen Organization of Iran (PMOI), the main armed opposition group to the Iranian regime. The organization was disarmed by the US forces after the fall of Baghdad in 2003 and its members received the status of "protected people".

However, on June 17th 2008, the Iraqi Council of Ministers adopted a directive stating that members of the People's Mojahedeen Organization of Iran will be expelled from Iraq. On December 21st 2008, the Iraqi government announced that it planned to close Camp Ashraf. On January 1st 2009, the U.S. officially transferred the control of Camp Ashraf to the Iraqi authorities. Since then, Camp Ashraf had been under the threat of closure from the authorities as stated in a statement issued, in March 2009, by the office of National Security Adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie. "The Iraqi government's position is clear and there is no retreat from its decision to close Camp Ashraf".

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