



Iraq: Al-Maliki must act over camp Ashraf raid - new letter

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Hunger strikes in Iraq, London and elsewhere as concerns for residents mount

Amnesty International has written to the Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki expressing its deep concern about killings and other abuses committed by Iraqi security forces at Camp Ashraf this summer.

On 28-29 July a large number of Iraqi security personnel seized control of Camp Ashraf in Iraq's Diyala province, north of Baghdad, a settlement that has been home to some 3,400 Iranian exiles for over 20 years. At least nine camp residents were shot dead and others sustained serious injuries during the storming of the camp, during which vehicles were driven into crowds of protesting residents and live ammunition used, apparently without adequate justification. Since July, 36 camp residents have been held without charge or trial.

In response, fears for the thousands of Iranian nationals - many with a long history of political opposition to the government of neighbouring Iran - have been raised by numerous supporters around the world. There have been protests around the world, including a long-running vigil and hunger strike outside the US embassy in London. Protestors say the withdrawal of US forces to military bases in Iraq earlier this year has left Camp Ashraf residents newly vulnerable to Iraqi security forces, a concern shared by Amnesty.

Amnesty International UK Director Kate Allen said:

'There are numerous reports - including shocking images - of the Iraq security forces using what appears to be grossly excessive force in their seizure of Camp Ashraf and this must be properly investigated. So must reports that detainees have been abused in detention

'The fear now is that Iraq may force Camp Ashraf residents to return to Iran, where they could face imprisonment or torture. No vulnerable residents of Camp Ashraf must face this fate.'

Amnesty has made clear to both the Iraqi and US governments that it strongly opposes any forcible returns, either of those at Camp Ashraf or of other Iranian nationals who currently reside in Iraq having left Iran for political reasons or to escape persecution. In its letter to prime minister al-Maliki, Amnesty urges him to immediately establish a full and independent investigation into the methods used by Iraqi security forces during the Camp Ashraf operation, making its findings public as soon as possible. Amnesty also urged him to ensure that members of the security forces and other officials found responsible for using excessive force and of committing serious human rights violations are immediately suspended from duty and promptly brought to justice.

Meanwhile Amnesty has expressed particular concern over the fate of the 36 detained men, not least as there are allegations that they have been beaten and otherwise ill-treated. They are currently held at a police station in al-Khalis - a town some 15 miles from Camp Ashraf - where they are reported to be in poor health and to be maintaining a hunger strike in protest at their detention and ill-treatment.

On 24 August an Iraqi investigative judge ordered the release of the 36 on the grounds that they had no charges to answer, but local police refused to release them, in breach of Iraqi law. A public prosecutor in Baquba, Diyala province, is then reported to have appealed against the investigative judge's release order, apparently as a means of justifying their continued detention, and the appeal is now awaiting determination by the Court of Cassation.

In its letter Amnesty urged the Iraq prime minister to intervene and ensure that the 36 detainees are released immediately and unconditionally unless they are to face recognisably criminal charges and brought to trial fairly and promptly. Amnesty also urged Mr al-Maliki to order an investigation into the failure by police at al-Khalis to comply with the judge's order for the release of the 36 and to ensure that any police officers responsible for unlawful detentions are held to account.