

TO: HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
FROM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

APPEAL FOR ACTION

RE: MEDICAL RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON IRANIAN EXILES, INCLUDING REFUGEES

Hundreds of Iranian exiles, including refugees, resident in Camp Ashraf in Iraq, north of Baghdad, are reported to have suffered serious complications from medical restrictions imposed on them by the Iraqi authorities. In the past five months the already appalling medical conditions at the camp have deteriorated even further. Many residents are reportedly suffering from cancer, heart problems, loss of vision, gallstones, orthopaedic problems, kidney stones and other diseases that without prompt and adequate treatment can result in irreversible health damage.

Camp Ashraf, 60 Km north of Baghdad, is home to around 3,400 members and supporters of the Iranian opposition group, the People's Mojaheddin Organization of Iran (PMOI). The residents have been living there for almost 25 years and it is now a small town with shops and other amenities.

Camp Ashraf was held under US control from April 2003 until mid-2009 when the Iraqi government took over control, in accordance with provisions contained in the SOFA, a security agreement signed by Iraqi and US governments in November 2008, which stipulated the withdrawal of US troops from towns and cities. Since the transfer occurred, residents needing medical care have found it extremely difficult to have access to medical treatment in and out of the camp because the camp is surrounded by Iraqi security forces. An Iraqi security committee, responsible for all matters relating to the camp, is now said to be responsible for making decisions regarding medical treatment. The committee members decide who can travel outside the camp for specialist treatment, and they control the influx of supplies into the camp. Moreover, Iraqi security forces are increasingly making life difficult for the residents, including by using loudspeakers to broadcast messages and play loud music at them.

Due to lack of adequate treatment for certain illnesses in the hospital next to the camp, some residents need to seek treatment in specialised hospitals in Baghdad and in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. However, Amnesty International has received reports confirming that patients with appointments in hospitals in Baghdad could not attend their appointments because the Iraqi forces apparently refused to allow others to accompany them, including interpreters. Most of the patients at the camp do not speak Arabic as Farsi is their native language and therefore without an interpreter they can not communicate with doctors in Iraq. It is reported that patients who have travelled to other facilities for treatment have returned without a diagnosis or treatment because of the lack of an interpreter. It has also been reported that patients with mobility issues have been barred from travelling due to the lack of wheel chairs or special beds. The Iraqi authorities have refused to provide such equipment.

The delay in treatment has caused serious long-term consequences for many people. It has been reported that Elham Fardipour, a female patient with thyroid cancer, could not receive the treatment she needs in Baghdad because she was not allowed to be accompanied by a nurse or interpreter; consequently, leading her to remain in the camp rather than travel alone to keep her appointment. Her current outlook is unknown but without prompt treatment her cancer is likely to spread. Additionally, about 60 residents are in need of assessment by a cardiologist for diagnosis and treatment of various heart conditions. Several need surgery to prevent or reduce damage caused by heart attacks.

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Ill-treatment of patients by the Iraqi forces has also been reported. Soldiers have forcibly removed patients from hospitals or entered patients' rooms against their will, in some cases verbally harassing them. In one case a soldier allegedly beat a patient who had just had surgery causing him to go into a seizure.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY:

- Explaining that you are a health professional concerned about human rights;
- Calling for the Iraqi government to immediately end medical restrictions on Camp Ashraf;
- Calling on the Iraqi authorities to ensure that all residents in need of specialist medical care are allowed to leave the Camp immediately to receive medical treatment at an appropriate facility;
- Urging the authorities to allow patients to choose their own interpreters and to allow interpreters to travel with patients to assist in communicating with health professionals during consultations;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that health professionals are able to practice with clinical independence and without fear of reprisals by the Iraqi forces;
- Calling on the Iraqi forces to end abuse and ill-treatment of patients and allow patients to privately visit with their doctors

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10/01/2011 TO: The Iraqi embassy in your country and address them to:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Nuri Kamil al-Maliki
Prime Minister
Convention Centre (Qasr al-Ma'aridh)
Baghdad, Iraq
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior:

His Excellency Jawad al-Bulani
Minister of Interior
Convention Centre (Qasr al-Ma'aridh)
Baghdad, Iraq
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Health

His Excellency Salih M. al-Sahnawi
Minister of Health
Convention Center (Qasr al-Ma'aradih)
Baghdad, Iraq
Salutation: Your Excellency

IF YOU RECEIVE NO REPLY WITHIN SIX WEEKS OF SENDING YOUR LETTER, PLEASE SEND A FOLLOW-UP LETTER SEEKING A RESPONSE. PLEASE SEND COPIES OF ANY LETTERS YOU RECEIVE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, ATTENTION OF THE HEALTH TEAM, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW OR E-MAIL: health@amnesty.org

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Camp Ashraf is home to around 3,400 Iranian refugees, who are members and supporters of the PMOI, an opposition group to the current government of Iran, which is banned in Iran. Some have been recognized as refugees. Since mid-2008 the Iraqi government has repeatedly indicated that it wanted to close Camp Ashraf, and that its residents should leave Iraq or face being forcibly expelled from the country. The PMOI, which was allowed by the previous Iraqi government under Saddam Hussain to establish a base in the governorate of Diyala in 1986, is accused by the Iraqi government of supporting Saddam Hussain's government.

On 28-29 July 2009 Iraqi security forces stormed the camp and at least nine residents were killed and many more injured. Around 36 residents were detained without trial, tortured and beaten before they were eventually released following an international outcry.

