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Iraq Must Accept Camp Ashraf Residents' Minimum Guarantees For Relocation

The Bar Human Rights Committee (BHRC) expresses deep concern at the decision of the Iraqi government to transform Camp Liberty, a former US base in Baghdad into a temporary prison to house Camp Ashraf residents. The residents of Camp Ashraf, situated 60km North of Baghdad in the Diyala province of Iraq, are Iranian refugees, all of whom have been recognised as Protected Persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Only after receiving guarantees for their safety and security, did residents of Camp Ashraf agree to relocate to Camp Liberty. The first group of residents were ready to leave at the end of December with their vehicles and belongings. However, whereas American and UN officials had earlier stated that a 40 sq km area of Camp Liberty with adequate facilities and infrastructure would be allocated to residents, the Iraqi government is now preparing to house the 3,400 residents in a 1 sq km area surrounded by 4 metre high concrete walls.

Basic facilities such as functioning toilets are not available at Camp Liberty and residents are being denied the right to transfer their belongings. The BHRC notes that the UNHCR has recognized the residents of Camp Ashraf as "asylum-seekers under international law". This recognition affords the residents well-defined rights under international law. It is therefore wholly unacceptable that residents have been informed that they will not be allowed to leave Camp Liberty or to visit their lawyers.

Under these circumstances, the residents cannot be expected to relocate to Camp Liberty. The BHRC supports the call by Mrs Maryam Rajavi, the President-elect of the Iranian Resistance for the following basic guarantees before the relocation of Camp Ashraf residents:

- * A small group of residents must be permitted to visit Camp Liberty to inspect the site in order to determine whether it is inhabitable;
- * There must be permanent and independent US and UN monitoring at Camp Liberty as a refugee camp with the UN flag and guaranteeing the safety of each and every one of the residents without exception from Camp Ashraf to Camp Liberty and from Camp Liberty to third countries;
- * The siege against the residents must be halted, together with any persecution and harassment of them and their access to medical services and the right to visitation by their families and lawyers inside Camp Liberty;
- * Iraqi forces must not be present inside the Camp's fenced area, since otherwise the security and tranquillity of the Camp, particularly for nearly 1,000 Muslim women, cannot be assured; and they must not interfere with the residents' daily life; and
- * Ashraf residents must be transferred to Camp Liberty with their vehicles and moveable property under UN, US and EU monitoring; and the sale of their fixed properties must be reimbursed to the residents to pay for their expenses.

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The Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales is the international human rights arm of the Bar of England and Wales. It is an independent body concerned with defending the rule of law and internationally recognised legal standards relating to human rights and the right to a fair trial.

For more information please contact BHRC in London, UK, on email: bhrc@compuserve.com.