

Press Clippings on Iraq delegation:

The Independent. Blog by MEP Struan Stevenson

Source: <http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2011/05/11/solving-the-ashraf-crisis/>

Solving the Ashraf crisis

- By Struan Stevenson MP



On the 8th of April a vicious massacre took place in Camp Ashraf, Northern Iraq, home for the past 20 years to more than 3400 Iranian dissidents. Under relentless pressure from the Iranian government, the Iraqi military sent 5 Divisions of heavily armed troops with tanks and armoured vehicles to mow down unarmed men and women in a brutal assault that shocked the civilised world.

As Head of the European Parliament's official Delegation to Iraq, I led a small team of Euro MPs to Baghdad days after the massacre to express our horror and outrage to President Talabani and many senior Government ministers. We requested permission to visit Ashraf, to see for ourselves the aftermath of the tragedy, but our request was firmly rebuffed by Foreign Minister Zebari.

I remain deeply concerned that another bloody attack could take place at any time, leading to a Srebrenica-style annihilation of the unarmed refugees in the camp. It was clear from our discussions in Baghdad that an urgent solution had to be found to the Ashraf crisis. The UN Secretary General's representative in Iraq asked me to make contact with the leadership of the Ashraf refugees at their headquarters in Paris, to explore possible avenues for a long-term resolution. On my return to the EU from Iraq I travelled immediately to Paris and spent 5 hours in intense discussion with the leadership of the Iranian opposition. Together, we thrashed out a plan that provides the only viable alternative to violence and further bloodshed.

The plan requires the active involvement of the UN, the US and the EU. It recognises the Iraqi government's right of sovereignty over their own territory. But it also recognises the rights of the 3400 unarmed residents of Ashraf to protection under the 4th Geneva Convention. The plan lays the groundwork for negotiations involving the Iraqi Government and sets out a proposal to re-settle all of the refugees to the US, Canada, Australia, Norway, Switzerland and the 27 EU Member States, depending on where they have previous associations, connections or family contacts.

But I have made it clear in all discussions with the Iraqi Government that we are not willing to enter into any negotiations with them unless four key pre-conditions are met. Firstly, the military forces must be withdrawn from Camp Ashraf. Secondly, the siege of the camp which has gone on uninterrupted for more than two years, involving hundreds of loudspeakers blaring high decibel threats and propaganda 24 hours a day, plus interruptions to vital medical, energy and water supplies, must immediately stop. Thirdly, there must be an independent inquiry into the massacre of 8th April with the perpetrators identified and brought to justice. And fourthly, those critically injured during the 8th April attack must be given immediate access to proper hospital care. In other words, the Iraqi government must restore an environment as near to normality as possible in Ashraf, before negotiations can begin on the long-term resolution to this crisis.

Only if these conditions are met will we have confidence that the Iraqi authorities really do intend to bring this situation to a positive conclusion. But during this period of transition the UN will have to take control over the safety and security of the camp, ensuring the residents receive all necessary living and medical supplies. At the same time a committee will be set up to take the plan forward, consisting of key individuals from the EU, US, UN and Arab League as well as members of Iraq's government and parliament, Camp Ashraf residents and the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI).

Baroness Ashton and the EU Foreign Affairs Council, together with the US President and the UN Secretary General, must now back this solution and throw their weight behind it in order to ensure that the lives of 3,400 Iranians are saved and Iraq moves along a path upon which respect for human rights and the rule of law is prevalent, in a land which has been mired in violence for too long.

Struan Stevenson is a Conservative Euro MP from Scotland. He is President of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iraq and led a team to the country on a five day visit (25-30 April)

AFP

Source :

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gbUuRaOeEqDoI7MXI-9s_xA69IAw?docId=CNG.724821b4919bf06d1776d821791b2347.521

Threat of massacre at Ashraf camp in Iraq, warn Euro-MPs

(AFP) – 2 days ago

STRASBOURG, France — Urgent international action is needed to avert "a Srebrenica-style massacre" at the Iraqi Ashraf camp housing thousands of exiled Iranian opponents, a European parliament delegation said Tuesday after returning from Iraq.

"We've had so many threats from the Iraqi government... of what could happen if Ashraf is not cleared by the end of this year," said Scottish conservative MEP Struan Stevenson, who headed a parliamentary delegation in Iraq from April 25 to 29.

The visit took place two weeks after an Iraqi army raid in the camp housing 3,500 people left at least 35 dead.

"Having seen the massacre that took place on April 8th, I can only anticipate that if we do not resolve the situation... there will be a Srebrenica style massacre," he added.

The People's Mujahedeen of Iran (PMOI) who have lived there for some 30 years, "are deeply reluctant to abandon Ashraf, which they regard as their home," he added.

"However they recognise the seriousness of this problem and the potential threat of a Srebrenica-style bloodbath if nothing is done."

Iraqi security forces raided the camp in April as tensions between the opponents of Iran's clerical regime and the Iraqi authorities reached new heights.

Iraq, which denied the military carried out the killings, said after the raid that the PMOI must leave the country by the end of the year.

The Euro-MPs, who were not able to visit the camp, want the refugees to be resettled in Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States.

Associated Press

Source:

http://www.taiwannews.com.tw/etn/news_content.php?id=1593657

EU delegation: Iranians in Iraq enclave in danger

A EU parliament official is warning that Iranian opposition members living in Iraq are in danger and will propose they all be relocated to other countries.

An attack April 8 by Iraqi forces on the residents of an enclave known Camp Ashraf killed 35 people and injured hundreds.

In e-mails to EU foreign ministers and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, Struan Stevenson, who is president of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with Iraq, says the crisis must be resolved "before another and perhaps even more catastrophic massacre takes place."

At a press conference in Luxembourg on Tuesday, Stevenson will propose moving all residents of the camp to other countries, including in Europe, [Australia](#) and North America

Canadian Press - Taken by Associated Press

Source: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/canadianpress/article/ALeqM5j-IQ7MG7Tr9kFSM3gDJFCNKpw9Xg?docId=6805957>

Head of EU group fears new killings of Iranians in Iraq, proposes they move to other countries

By Don Melvin, The Associated Press – 2 days ago

BRUSSELS — A EU parliament official warned Tuesday that members of the Iranian opposition living in Iraq remain in danger and said he will propose they all be relocated to other countries.

An Iraqi army attack last month on the 3,400 residents of an enclave known Camp Ashraf killed 35 people and injured hundreds.

In emails to EU foreign ministers and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, Struan Stevenson, who is president of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with Iraq, has warned that the crisis must be resolved "before another and perhaps even more catastrophic massacre takes place."

The residents of Ashraf are members of the People's Mujahedeen, an Iranian opposition group that is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States. The European Union removed the group from its terrorist list two years ago.

Former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein gave the exiles refuge at Camp Ashraf, seeing them as an ally against Iran. But the new Shiite-led government of Iraq wants them out of Iraq by year's-end as it seeks to improve ties with Iran.

At a press conference Tuesday in Luxembourg, Stevenson is proposing a solution to the crisis. It calls for the removal of Iraqi forces from the perimeter of the enclave, the granting of access to Ashraf by journalists, lawyers, and others; an independent inquiry into the attack in April, and the moving of all residents of Ashraf to other countries, including in Europe, Australia and North America.

In addition, Stevenson wrote a letter Monday to President Barack Obama, asking for his support.

"I believe that another humanitarian catastrophe at the hands of the Iraqi forces is imminent, aided and abetted by the Iranian regime who seek the annihilation of Ashraf and its residents as a useful distraction from their own plethora of internal and external crises," Stevenson wrote in the letter.

Copyright © 2011 The Canadian Press. All rights reserved.

Ashton Calls for a thorough and independent inquiry in to Camp Ashraf attack

Source: <http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/ashraf/10553-ashton-calls-for-a-thorough-and-independent-inquiry-in-to-camp-ashraf-attack>

Wednesday, 11 May 2011 18:24



EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission

Speech on main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence policy

European Parliament Strasbourg, 11 May 2011

Mr President, Honourable Members,

I will make three contributions to the Parliament today, but I want to start by giving you my vision of the issues that we face, and also to touch upon on some other important issues.

...

In Camp Ashraf in Iraq: what happened on 8th April in Camp Ashraf is deplorable, and has my strongest condemnation. I have been adamant that we need a strong and united EU response. I wrote to the Foreign Minister of Iraq, and spoke to him again yesterday. While I do not question Iraq's sovereignty over all its territory, it has a duty to protect the human rights of Ashraf residents.

I have condemned the violence, and called for an inquiry - an inquiry that has to be as thorough as it is independent, and which should tell us exactly what happened. But, honourable members, there is no simple solution here - several options for a long term solution are being considered, with the UN in the lead. All present challenges. I am grateful for the European Parliament's contributions: and I will take this to the Foreign Affairs Council, and discuss it in detail with the UNHCR. Our Ambassador to Iraq arrives today, and she knows the importance I attach to this issue. We need to pursue and make sure that we find a correct course of action and inquiry, and our condemnation is absolute.

In Yemen too, where the Gulf Cooperation Council has put forward its proposals, and President Saleh has once again hesitated. I spoke to him not long ago - we talked about his discussions with the opposition, and the proposals on the table. I told him he knew what he had to do - in the interests of his country - and that he should do it. In my meetings in the Gulf, when I met with the King of Bahrain: we discussed the initiative for dialogue without preconditions that the Crown Prince has put forward, and I urged him to pursue that dialogue. The current course is not the answer - we need to see fair and civil trials, and that the death penalty is avoided in all circumstances.

In all of these cases it is about the direct engagement that we have, and the pressure we apply, and the directness of our approach. I am very clear with all the leaders I speak to about what needs to happen. I do this with the support of this house and 27 Member States.

...

For original click here

Stop Fundamentalism, Blog

Source:

http://www.stopfundamentalism.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1089:europa-meps-call-to-end-siege-on-camp-ashraf&catid=47:iraq&Itemid=14



Europe MEPs Call to End Siege on Camp Ashraf

Wednesday, 11 May 2011 16:01 |

News – Iraq

Stop Fundamentalism, May 11 – A delegation of European Parliament members who visited Baghdad at the end of April to discuss a solution to the faceoff at Camp Ashraf which claimed the lives of 35 residents of the camp, called for resettlement of the refugees to EU and North America in a press conference Tuesday.

Struan Stevenson, head of the delegation said to the press conference held at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, "We've had so many threats from the Iraqi government" about what can happen, "if Ashraf is not cleared by the end of this year."

Stevenson stressed that "a Srebrenica style massacre" could be in the horizon if international community does not respond soon enough.

Camp Ashraf in Iraq is the home of 3500 Iranian opposition members. The Iranian regime wants the camp removed from Iraq as it says it poses a danger to neighboring Iran.

The Iranian regime news websites have been running continuous propaganda against the Camp residents calling for their destruction and extradition to Iran since April 8, the day attacks began.

The delegation was not allowed to visit the camp. Stevenson said that the Iraqi Foreign Minister Zibary told him that visiting the camp is "out of the question."

Camp residents have repeatedly requested journalists and reporters to visit the camp to make a report of what has happened. No visitation has been granted to any reporter for two years.

The MEPs suggest that the refugees be resettled in Europe, Canada and the United States. But in order to reach agreements on such solution, they call on Iraqis to end the siege on the camp and pull military units out and let the injured to be cared for.

The residents complain that the bodies of those who died are yet to be buried since the Iraqi's would not allow the residents access to the camp's cemetery.

source: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/05/11/148749.html>

EU official proposes relocation of Camp Ashraf residents to other countries

Wednesday, 11 May 2011



Residents of Camp Ashraf demonstrate in front of media reporters touring in a bus, a day after their clashes with the Iraqi security forces at Camp Ashraf, an Iranian dissident camp, in Diyala province, north of Baghdad. (File Photo)

By AMMAR BEN AZIZ
AL ARABIYA WITH AGENCIES

A senior European Union official has proposed that members of the Iranian opposition living in Iraq be relocated to other countries as their lives were in danger, reported Associated Press.

In emails to EU foreign ministers and EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton, Struan Stevenson, who is president of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with Iraq, warned that the crisis must be resolved "before another and perhaps even more catastrophic massacre takes place."

The official was referring to Iraq's Camp Ashraf, a settlement of Iranian dissidents who say they will be killed if they are returned to Iran. The camp houses followers and members of the Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization (MEK). The United States considers the MEK to be a terrorist organization

In statement that was issued in Luxembourg, Mr. Stevenson proposed a solution which "calls for the removal of Iraqi forces from the perimeter of the enclave, the granting of access to Camp Ashraf by journalists, lawyers, and others; an independent inquiry into the attack in April, and the moving of all residents of the camp to other countries, including in Europe, Australia and North America."

Mr. Stevenson also wrote a letter Monday to President Barack Obama of the United States, asking for his support.

"I believe that another humanitarian catastrophe at the hands of the Iraqi forces is imminent, aided and abetted by the Iranian regime which seeks the annihilation of Ashraf and its residents as a useful distraction from their own plethora of internal and external crises," Mr. Stevenson said.

Last week, a senior US State Department official gave details of a proposed "humanitarian" solution to the standoff.

Under the plan, "3,400 residents of Camp Ashraf would be temporarily relocated within Iraq, farther from the border with Iran," the official said.

For decades, the MEK has been opposed to the Iranian government and the group was sheltered in that camp and other locations in Iraq during former President Saddam Hussein's regime.

Mr. Hussein used the group as part of his security apparatus and they had "a tense relationship with many Iraqis, especially Shia and Kurds," reports AP.

"The relocation would be temporary," the official said, "with final settlement of the inhabitants in other countries."

The US would not be one of those countries, as it does not allow anyone associated with a terrorist organization to settle there.

"The new location would be chosen and maintained and operated by Iraq and appropriate humanitarian conditions would have to be maintained in this camp," the official said.

In April 2011, 35 people were killed and more than 300 others wounded in a confrontation between Iraqi security forces Camp Ashraf residents. Both groups claimed they were attacked by the other and retaliated in self-defense.

(Ammar Ben Aziz, a senior editor at Al Arabiya, can be reached at: ammar.aziz@mbc.net)

CBS news (published on 8 April, before departure of Iraqi delegation)

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-20061464-503543.html

CBS/AP) A month after more than 30 Iranian dissidents were killed and several hundred wounded when Iraqi army forces entered Camp Ashraf, the fate of the 3,400 camp residents is still uncertain.

Camp Ashraf, located in Iraq's northeast Diyala province, is the home of the People's Mujahedeen Organization of Iran (PMOI), which seeks the overthrow of Iran's leaders and is considered a terrorist group by Iran, as well as the U.S. The group was given sanctuary by the Saddam Hussein, then protected by the American forces after the regime fell, and now falls under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi government.

The PMOI maintains that 35 people were killed and 345 wounded during fighting with Iraqi Army forces, and that 42 of the seriously injured still have not received adequate treatment.

The residents who were killed on April 8 have not yet been buried, according to Ali Safavi, a member of Iran's Parliament in Exile, National Council of Resistance of Iran, and president of the Near East Policy Research. He said that Iraqi forces have occupied the area of the camp where the cemetery is located, and have constructed a four-mile long embankment that divides the camp.

"Iraqi forces need to leave Camp Ashraf so that those who were killed can be buried," Safavi said. "In addition, wounded residents must get treatment; families and international delegations must be allowed to visit the camp, and all sides have to

resolve the issue peacefully. Unless those conditions are met, the threat of another attack is very real."

The U.S. and the United Nations have condemned the April 8, 2011 attack on Camp Ashraf.

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Chairman John Kerry called the raid a "massacre," saying the Iraqi government should "hold accountable the responsible parties and ensure that there will be no sequel to these horrific events."

"It now seems certain that at least 34 people were killed in Camp Ashraf, including seven or more women," U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said. "Most were shot, and some appear to have been crushed to death, presumably by vehicles."

"There is no possible excuse for this number of casualties," said Pillay. "There must be a full, independent and transparent inquiry, and any person found responsible for use of excessive force should be prosecuted."

The European Parliament met with Iraqi leaders at the end of April, and called for an independent inquiry, and call for the perpetrators being brought to international justice.

The main obstacle obstacle to resolving the situation is the terrorist designation accorded the PMOI by U.S., according to Safavi. "The onus is on the U.S. to protect these people," he said.

Retired Gen. James Jones, a former national security advisor to President Obama and Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and retired Gen. Peter Pace, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both advocate delisting PMOI as a terrorist organization.

"Some folks said to me this week if the United States government took the MEK [Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organization, another designation for PMOI] off the terrorist list it would be a signal to the Iranian regime that we had changed from a desire to see changes in regime behavior to a desire to see changes in regime. My response to that is: sounds good to me," Pace said in February 2011.

Reuters has reported that the U.S. is drafting a plan to move camp residents to a new location in Iraq, and then resettle them in other countries.

"We recognize that this is a humanitarian tragedy that is occurring and has great potential to be a humanitarian issue into the future," an official said on condition of anonymity.

Struan Stevenson, president of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iraq, believes that residents should not be moved from the camp they have inhabited for 20 years. "Forcible transfer of these 3400 unarmed refugees would be illegal and in violation of international standards and provisions of International Humanitarian Law," he said in a May 6 statement.

