

Camp Ashraf Breakthrough

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**European Parliament
Delegation for relations with Iraq**

PRESS RELEASE

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In an apparent breakthrough over the crisis in Camp Ashraf in Northern Iraq, home to 3400 Iranian dissidents, Baroness Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, has announced the appointment of Ambassador Jean De Ruyt as her personal envoy on the Camp Ashraf issue.

Speaking in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, Conservative Euro MP Struan Stevenson, Chair of the Delegation for Relations with Iraq, said:

“I have received a letter from Baroness Ashton confirming the appointment of Ambassador De Ruyt and stating that his role will be “to work with the Government of Iraq, the United Nations and other partners to help solve the situation in Camp Ashraf in line with humanitarian and human rights principles”. Baroness Ashton goes on to say that “Ambassador De Ruyt knows the importance I attach to this issue. I expect him to liaise with all relevant Iraqi interlocutors, with the leaders and residents of Camp Ashraf and with international humanitarian organisations. I have asked him to meet with you and other concerned Members of the European Parliament as well, immediately after taking up his duties.”

“I must thank Lady Ashton warmly for this decisive and significant move. Ambassador De Ruyt is a leading diplomat of international renown. He has just completed his term as Belgian Ambassador to the EU, having previously been a diplomat at the UN in New York. I can think of no-one better able to tackle this complex and sensitive issue.

“I and my colleagues in the European Parliament strongly believe that Ambassador De Ruyt should visit Ashraf as soon as possible. This would be a major step towards solving the crisis. If the Iraqi authorities attempt to prevent such a visit, it will be a clear indication of their ominous intentions towards the Ashraf residents.

“The unarmed, civilian residents of Camp Ashraf have suffered years of psychological torture and harassment at the hands of the Iraqi government, aided and abetted by their sponsors in Tehran. There have been two horrific attacks on the camp by the Iraqi military, culminating this year in a massacre on 8th April which left 36 dead and 300 seriously injured. The camp is still under siege with limited access for fuel, food and medical supplies.

“To make matters worse, the Iraqi Prime Minister has set a ludicrous deadline of 31st December this year to clear the camp of its residents, threatening another violent confrontation which will sow the seeds of a humanitarian catastrophe.

“Meanwhile, with the help of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, all 3400 residents are in the process of being individually interviewed and assessed for refugee status, having each applied for asylum. This process will take several months to complete and it is then the intention to re-settle these refugees in the 27 EU Member States and in other third countries outside the EU. But this major operation cannot be completed within the timescale set by Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, who must realise that the time has come to cease the threats and harassment directed at these people and start cooperating with the UN and EU to resolve this crisis.

“The appointment of Ambassador De Ruyt by Baroness Ashton has underlined the seriousness of this issue. I look forward to working closely with him to ensure that we can avoid a Srebrenica-style catastrophe occurring at Ashraf.”

Struan Stevenson MEP

President of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iraq
Strasbourg