

ParsBrief

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UN welcomes Germany's offer to resettle residents of Camp Hurriya

UN News Centre - April 20, 2013

The top United Nations officials in Iraq today welcomed a generous offer by Germany of humanitarian admission for approximately 100 residents from Camp Hurriya, located near the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, and urged the camp residents to cooperate with the UN for a speedy and safe resettlement.

"Germany's offer follows a similar one by the Albanian government to relocate 210 residents in Albania, and I am very grateful to both countries for having offered durable solutions for the residents of Camp Hurriya," said Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Martin Kobler.

Camp Hurriya serves as a transit facility for more than 3,000 exiles, most of them members of a group known as the People's Mojahedeen of Iran, where a process to determine their refugee status is being carried out by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). With the latest offer, 10 per cent of the camp's residents now have offers to relocate to third countries.

Mr. Kobler added that "this announcement also follows the Secretary-General's repeated public and bilateral appeals to Member States to offer residents resettlement opportunities."

In the same statement, UNHCR Representative in Iraq, Claire Bourgeois, encouraged other countries to follow Albania and Germany's lead, "This generous offer by Germany is a demonstration of international solidarity and burden-sharing for a vulnerable population."

Last month, following the offer by Albania Government, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he "unequivocally supports" Mr. Kobler's efforts "to courageously and creatively, in exceptionally difficult circumstances, help resolve this situation."

In addition, in his recent report about the situation in Iraq, Mr. Ban urged those who express support for the residents of Camp Hurriya and the remaining residents of another camp, New Iraq, to stop spreading insults and falsehoods about Mr. Kobler, who heads the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), and instead help to promote a durable solution.

Also today, Mr. Kobler expressed his deep concern that Iraq continues to implement the death penalty. The most recent execution of 21 prisoners took place on 16 April, according to UNAMI.

“I regret that repeated calls of the United Nations to suspend the implementation of death sentences were not heard,” Mr. Kobler said.

“I urge once again the Iraqi government to immediately suspend all pending death sentences and to apply without delay the moratorium on the death penalty, in conformity with General Assembly Resolutions 62/149 (2007), 63/168 (2009), 65/205 (2010) and 67/176 (2012),” he added.

Meanwhile, final preparations are underway in parts of Iraq for the 20 April Governorate Council Elections.

Mr. Kobler today urged eligible Iraqis to actively participate for the success of the poll, “I am calling on all women and men to cast their ballots for a better future for them and their children.”

“My appeal goes particularly to the young Iraqis, because you are the future of this country,” he added.

Stressing that it is the duty of all political leaders to safeguard the integrity of the democratic process, Mr. Kobler underlined that “consolidation of democracy will depend on the willingness of Iraq’s political leaders to collectively ensure a transparent and peaceful election, free of intimidation or political interference”.

“Of equal importance is my appeal to the Iraqi security forces to remain on heightened alert and to enable voters to reach polling centres and cast their vote in a safe environment, without fear of violence,” he concluded.

At least 15.5 million Iraqis are eligible to vote in upcoming polls, according to official estimates, where more than 8,000 candidates are reportedly vying for 378 seats.

EU welcomes Albanian offer, Fully supports Martin Kobler efforts

Office of Catherine Ashton, European Union, consilium.europa.eu

March 21 2013

EUROPEA/ U/IO/ Brussels, 20 March 2013

A 153/13

Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the decision by Albania to offer resettlement to 210 former residents of Camp Ashraf

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission issued the following statement today: "I welcome the decision by the Government of Albania to resettle 210 former residents of Camp Ashraf, now temporarily located in Camp Hurriya. I have followed this issue very closely, lending my full support to the work of the United [n]ations Assistance Mission for Iraq, and in particular the Secretary General's Special Representative Martin Kobler, towards a peaceful and durable solution to this humanitarian issue. Permanent resettlement outside Iraq is the only such solution.

The attacks of 9 February on Camp Hurriya have reminded us that all efforts must now be made to ensure that the process of resettlement to third countries moves forward without delay.

I therefore call on the MEK leadership and the residents to respond positively to the offer made by the Government of Albania and to cooperate constructively with the United Nations, including by resuming the interviews with the UNHCR. I understand that this does not represent a complete answer to the problem the residents are facing, but I am convinced that this is a first step in the right direction, which deserves everybody's support. I also recall the responsibility of the Government of Iraq to ensure the safety and security of residents of both Camp Ashraf and Camp Hurriya, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 25 December 2011 with the United Nations."

UN High Commissioner for Refugees welcomes Albanian offer of humanitarian admission for 210 residents of Camp Hurriya, Iraq

UNHCR, Press Releases, March 18, 2013

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, today welcomed a generous offer by the Albanian Government of humanitarian admission for 210 residents from Camp Hurriya in Iraq to Albania.

"I am very grateful that the Albanian Government has offered solutions for 210 people from Camp Hurriya," said Mr. Guterres. "The residents of Camp Hurriya urgently need solutions to relocate out of Iraq. We hope they welcome this offer and cooperate to ensure the departure of this important number of people."

The camp has seen a recent deterioration of the security situation of its residents, with a mortar attack on the camp on February 9th killing eight and wounding dozens with subsequent threats made against the residents.

"This generous offer is an demonstration of international solidarity and burden sharing for a vulnerable population", said Mr Guterres. "I strongly encourage other countries to follow Albania's lead and offer solutions for the camp residents that enable them to relocate outside of Iraq."

Camp Hurriya, also known as Camp Liberty, has over 3000 residents.

U.S. pushes Mojahedin Khalq to accept Albanian asylum offer

Ashish Kumar Sen, Washington Times- March 18, 2013

The Obama administration said Monday that an Iranian dissident group must immediately accept an offer of asylum from Albania for some its members being housed at a camp in Iraq.

Albania has agreed to take in 210 members of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MeK), a dissident group that seeks to overthrow Iran's theocratic regime.

The MeK has rejected the offer.

The U.S. wants the MeK leadership to "accept the government of Albania's humanitarian offer immediately, and urges the residents of Camp [Liberty] to resume participation in resettlement interviews to ensure that individuals avail themselves of safe and secure relocation opportunities outside Iraq," said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland.

The dissidents are housed at Camp Liberty, a temporary location near Baghdad's international airport.

"We further urge the MeK leadership to place the highest priority on the safety and security of the former residents of [Camp] Ashraf through full and unconditional cooperation with the resettlement process," Mrs. Nuland said.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has been interviewing Camp Liberty residents to determine their eligibility for refugee status.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki wants the Iranians out of his country.

The Iraqi government is "working closely with the U.N. and the international community to find a permanent place for the residents of the Camp Hurriya outside Iraq," an Iraqi official said on background.

The Obama administration welcomed the Albanian offer, which it described as "generous," and thanked Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha "for the humanitarian gesture to provide a safe haven" for the Iranians, said Mrs. Nuland.

"We believe the permanent resettlement of former Ashraf residents outside Iraq is the only sustainable solution and remain committed to assisting [U.N. Assistance Mission in Iraq, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees] and the government of Iraq in this endeavor," she said.

Saddam Hussein gave the MeK refuge in Iraq in the 1980s. The dissidents established a paramilitary base, Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad. After the Iraqi strongman was overthrown in a U.S. invasion in 2003, U.S. military forces disarmed the dissidents, who had renounced violence in 2001.

Meanwhile, Martin Kobler, the special representative of the U.N. secretary-general in Iraq, met Deputy Secretary of State William Burns at the State Department on Monday morning. Mrs. Nuland said the U.S. "strongly supports" Mr. Kobler, the UNHCR and UNAMI.

The Clinton administration designated the MeK as a foreign terrorist group in 1997 while it sought to open negotiations with Iran. The designation had proved to be an obstacle to finding other countries willing to give asylum to the Iranians.

The Obama administration took the MeK off the terrorism list in September.

Camp Ashraf's 3,100 residents were transferred to Camp Liberty under a deal brokered by the U.N. in December.

US rejects moving Iranian exiles back to old camp

AFP – Feb13, 2013

THE US has rejected calls for Iranian exiles housed in a camp near Baghdad that came under mortar and rocket attack to be sent back to their former base near the Iranian border.

The death toll from Saturday's assault on Camp Liberty, which houses about 3000 members of the opposition People's Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK), has risen to seven, the group said.

Iraqi authorities are now investigating who was behind the attack, but the MEK and its supporters have called for the group to be allowed to return to their old base dating back to the 1980s - Camp Ashraf near the Iranian border.

"The answer for the individuals at (Camp Liberty) is not to relocate back to Ashraf, in our view," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said.

"The only peaceful and durable solution for these individuals is resettlement outside Iraq, and that should continue to be the focus of everybody involved in this effort."

The camp residents were reluctantly and finally moved from Camp Ashraf last year, on Iraq's insistence, as part of deal negotiated via the United Nations.

They are now in the process of being resettled, and it is understood the United States and several European countries have agreed to take them in.

Nuland said the United States has still not made any decisions on whether to accept any of the residents.

"We are now in the process of evaluating some of the referrals that UNHCR has sent our way, and we're strongly, as I said, encouraging others to do the same," Nuland said.

The MEK was founded in the 1960s to oppose the shah of Iran and took up arms against Iran's clerical rulers after the 1979 Islamic revolution that ousted the shah.

The group says it has now laid down its arms and is working to overthrow the Islamic regime in Tehran by peaceful means.

Britain struck the group off its terror list in June 2008, followed by the European Union in 2009 and the United States in September.

Rocket attack on Camp Liberty killed and wounded MKO and Iraqi policemen

Aljazeera, Baghdad - February 09, 2013

Five deaths reported after mortars and rockets hit new transit camp housing members of opposition MEK group.

Dozens of mortars and rockets fired on a camp housing Iranian dissidents near Baghdad have killed five members of the opposition group, Iraqi security officials say.

Five members of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) were killed in Saturday's attack involving the mortars and rockets, two Iraqi security officials said on condition of anonymity.

Between 39 and 40 members of the group were wounded, along with three Iraqi policemen.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack on the transit camp, a former American military base known as Camp Liberty.

The United Nations called for an immediate investigation and said monitors were following up on the deaths, the first confirmed fatalities as a result of violence at the group's new camp since they moved there last year.

The MEK, whose leadership is based in Paris, said in a statement that six people were killed and 50 wounded.

One Iraqi security official said around 40 rockets and mortars were fired into the camp, while the MEK said 35 were launched.

The UN said Martin Kobler, its special envoy, had asked Iraqi authorities to "promptly conduct an investigation into this," and added: "We have our monitors on the ground to follow up".

'Hospitalised immediately'

Eliana Nabaa, spokeswoman for the UN mission in the country, said Iraqi officials had told the UN that "all those who were injured were hospitalised immediately".

Camp Liberty is home to about 3,000 residents from the MEK who were moved last year, on Iraq's insistence, from their historic paramilitary camp of the 1980s - Camp Ashraf.

The MEK was founded in the 1960s to oppose the Shah of Iran, and after the 1979 Islamic revolution that overthrew him it took up arms against Iran's rulers.

It says it has now laid down its arms and is working to overthrow the government in Tehran through peaceful means.

Britain struck the group off its terror list in June 2008, followed by the European Union in 2009 and the US in September 2012.

The US state department holds the group responsible, however, for the deaths of Iranians as well as US soldiers and civilians from the 1970s into 2001.

The MEK has no support in Iran, and no connection to domestic opposition groups.

Debate over Camp Liberty in UK parliament

theyworkforyou.com, February 8, 2013

Iraq: Camp Liberty — Question

Lord Maginnis of Drumglass (Non-affiliated)

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent information they have concerning flooding by sewage and storm water at Camp Liberty, and whether they have made representations to the United Nations and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq about conditions at the camp.

Baroness Warsi (Conservative)

My Lords, we are aware that parts of Camp Liberty were flooded during a recent period of heavy rainfall, as were many parts of the Baghdad area. Fortunately, this did not affect residents' accommodation blocks. We continue to monitor the situation at Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty through the embassy in Baghdad and to raise issues with the Government of Iraq and the United Nations.

Lord Maginnis of Drumglass (Non-affiliated)

My Lords, is it not time that the Government made a judgment, based on first-hand evidence such as that produced by the ex-UNAMI chief Tahar Boumedra, and ignored the manipulation and dissembling by Martin Kobler on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations? If the United Kingdom is to maintain its integrity and influence in the Middle East, we should be pressing for the dismissal of Herr Kobler and, indeed, be asking ourselves, with our allies, whether the present Secretary-General of the United Nations has not outlived his usefulness.

Baroness Warsi (Conservative)

Before I answer the noble Lord's very important question, I am sure the rest of the House will want to join me in wishing him a very happy birthday.

The noble Lord raises an important point. The Secretary-General, whom I met with last week at the United Nations, is doing a very important job, with the support of the international community, in some very difficult circumstances. The specific situation in relation to Camp Liberty is that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, as part of the United Nations Assistance Mission, regularly reports about the situation in Camp Liberty and Camp Ashraf. Our own officials visited in July last year and the international community does not, at this stage, find any credible evidence to support the matters that have been raised by Mr Tahar Boumedra.

Lord Avebury (Liberal Democrat)

My Lords, considering that many of the complaints that are made by the residents of Camp Liberty and, indeed, Camp Ashraf, against the Iraqi authorities and UNAMI could be easily verified or refuted and that some have been confirmed not only by Mr Tahar Boumedra but by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, will the Government press for an inspector to be appointed by the UN Secretary-General to look into the serious allegations of ill treatment, such as denial of access to urgently needed medical treatment, which has led to the deaths of two inmates of Camp Liberty? Since we have been aware for some time that 52 residents of Camp Liberty were formerly refugees in the United Kingdom, will my noble friend press for their immediate transfer to the UK?

Baroness Warsi (Conservative)

As my noble friend is aware, the situation in Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty is in many ways much better than that of residents in Baghdad. For example, electricity is available

for 24 hours a day, as opposed to the three hours for which it is available in some parts of Baghdad. About 200 litres of water are available to residents there, when about 90 litres are available in some parts of Baghdad. My noble friend raises the very important issue of the recent death of a resident there. We share those concerns about the death of Behrooz Rahimian and have made inquiries specifically in relation to the medical assistance that he received. We are aware that there is a doctor and medical facilities on site 24 hours a day; there is also the opportunity to receive medical assistance from doctors in Baghdad. We understand that Mr Rahimian was afforded medical assistance in relation to his illness.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Labour)

My Lords, will the Minister confirm that the new Parliament in Baghdad will be built to a British design, that UK parliamentarians, including the noble Lord, Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope, are out there helping to develop democracy and that the development of a democratic Government in Iraq to deal with the kind of issues raised by the noble Lord, Lord Maginnis, is the number one priority and will be supported fully by the British Government?

Baroness Warsi (Conservative)

I agree with much of what the noble Lord said. He will also be aware that this situation goes back many years. The group that lives in Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty is an organisation that originally left Iran after the Iranian revolution. Mujaheddin e Khalq, the group that is predominantly part of Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty, has its own history and record, and we must be incredibly careful about which members of that group we readmit to the United Kingdom.

Lord Dholakia (Liberal Democrat)

My Lords, does my noble friend agree that one of the problems we have is that the United Nations has not granted Camp Liberty the status of a refugee camp? If that were granted, would it not be possible to have adequate medical facilities and for water, sewerage et cetera to be resolved? At the same time, the status of Camp Ashraf could be looked at because the property of individuals is systematically being looted there, and the information the Minister has is not the information that we receive from residents of those camps.

Baroness Warsi (Conservative)

I can assure my noble friend that about 3,000 residents of Camp Ashraf have moved to Camp Liberty. It is not a refugee camp as such; it is a place where individuals are being assessed as to the countries to which they could be relocated. Four have already come to the United Kingdom, a fifth who was offered that has decided not to come and about 52 others are being considered for coming to the United Kingdom. In relation to property at Camp Ashraf, I can assure my noble friend that about 100 residents of this group remain in Camp Ashraf specifically to sell off their property.

For former Iranian 'terrorists,' a warm Washington welcome

By Howard LaFranchi, csmonitor.com Staff writer - April 11, 2013

With Washington luminaries in attendance, the Iranian dissident group NCRI and its formerly armed wing MEK inaugurated their sleek new offices Thursday, within sight of the White House.

An Iranian dissident group that languished on the US list of terrorist organizations for more than a decade under both Democratic and Republican administrations marked its full rehabilitation Thursday when it opened sleek new offices – complete with floors covered by plush Persian carpets – within sight of the White House.

Just how stunning the reversal of fortunes has been for the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and its formerly armed wing, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, was underscored by the long list of Washington luminaries who attended the office inauguration.

From prominent former members of Congress to former national security officials and high-profile diplomats, the caliber of the American advocates on hand for the ribbon-cutting demonstrated how effective the Iranian opposition organization has been at transforming its image – from that of a fringe group with a violent past to one in which it is the embodiment of the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people.

Referring to the NCRI's platform, which states as its goal the fall of the ayatollahs' regime and the establishment of "a free, secular, democratic, and non-nuclear Iran," Gen. James Jones, who served as President Obama's first national security adviser, described the objectives as "completely in sync with our core [American] values."

That is a remarkable turnaround for a group that President Clinton placed on the list of terrorist organizations in 1997 – ostensibly as a result of the one-time Marxist group's violent acts, including against Americans, but by some theories as part of a campaign to pave the way to negotiations with the Iranian regime.

Whatever the reason, the terrorist designation stuck through the Bush administration and was only lifted by former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton last September after a long court battle.

Others on hand to fete the Iranians' new status included former US ambassador to the United Nations and Bush administration diplomat John Bolton, former Sen. Robert Torricelli (D) of New Jersey and former US Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D) of Rhode Island, and P.J. Crowley, a former assistant secretary of State for public affairs who served under Hillary Clinton.

Several Republican members of Congress who have lobbied on the group's behalf sent their regrets at being unable to attend but sought to mark the occasion through letters or by dispatching staff to the opening.

Mr. Crowley, now a teacher of diplomacy and global communications at George Washington University, hailed the NCRI as the "better option" for "democratic change" in Iran when stacked up against the alternatives.

"When change comes to Iran," Crowley said, "it will be the NCRI that brings in that change."

Yet despite the group's Washington makeover, not everyone is convinced that the Paris-based organization, which some critics slam as a cult enthralled with leader Maryam Rajavi, is the opposition that many Iranians see as the ideal alternative to the Islamic revolution.

The MEK's fighters are still hated by many Iranians for living in exile in Iraq under the protection of Saddam Hussein – and for having allegedly fought on Iraq's side in the Iran-Iraq war. Hundreds of those fighters still live precariously in camps in Iraq, with their security and well-being a passionate issue for prominent advocates like General Jones.

Some US critics of the NCRI say there are no grounds for believing the group has anything of a positive image, let alone actual support, in Iran. Going further, they point to the high speaking and lobbying fees that some of the group's prominent American advocates have reportedly been paid as evidence of Washington support that is only dollars-and-cents deep.

But the dignitaries at Thursday's inauguration – described by Ambassador Bolton as "a distinguished bipartisan group, a rare occasion in Washington these days" – said they were on the NCRI's side because they see it as Iran's best hope for attaining freedom.

Senator Torricelli compared the NCRI in 2013 to when the "Free French" opened an office in London in 1940. "Maybe a lot of people didn't notice," he said, but the French resistance would go on to play a crucial role in France's liberation.

The NCRI, with a new office in Washington, can start down that same path, he said, adding, "I'm proud to be a soldier in that struggle."

The "Rehabilitation" of the MEK

By Daniel Larison, The American Conservative, April 16, 2013

The Christian Science Monitor reported on the opening of the MEK's office in Washington last week:

An Iranian dissident group that languished on the US list of terrorist organizations for more than a decade under both Democratic and Republican administrations marked its full rehabilitation Thursday when it opened sleek new offices – complete with floors covered by plush Persian carpets – within sight of the White House.

The article doesn't explain that the de-listing of the MEK was mostly a quid pro quo to get most of the group's members in Iraq to relocate from its old base at Camp Ashraf. It also fails to mention that many of the people at Camp Ashraf were being held there against their will. Taken together with the many disgraceful displays of support by members of Congress and various former officials, all of this creates the impression that the group's "rehabilitation" is much more meaningful than it is.

The group remains hated in Iran for its long period of collusion with Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war and afterwards, and it remains in its own organization a totalitarian quasi-Marxist cult, so the idea that it represents the aspirations of most Iranians is absurd on its face. If reports on the assassinations of Iranian scientists are to be believed, the group continues to engage in acts of terrorism inside Iran, but as far as some Iran hawks are concerned this is "useful" terrorism and therefore not something that needs to worry us. Few things better express the hostility that some Iran hawks have for the country and people of Iran than the warm embrace they have given the MEK.

The MEK is an awful group all on its own, but what makes it potentially so dangerous is that it has been embraced by so many prominent foolish Americans that want to treat it as a leading opposition group. Of course, the de-listing campaign was always just the beginning of a lobbying effort to try to get U.S. support for the MEK in the future. One passage from the Monitor article reveals just how deluded the group's American supporters can be:

Senator Torricelli compared the NCRI in 2013 to when the “Free French” opened an office in London in 1940. “Maybe a lot of people didn’t notice,” he said, but the French resistance would go on to play a crucial role in France’s liberation.

The NCRI, with a new office in Washington, can start down that same path, he said, adding, “I’m proud to be a soldier in that struggle.”

There’s something especially perverse about likening the MEK to the Free French. The MEK was a group that collaborated with the invader of their own country, and they wanted to impose themselves on Iran with the backing of that invader. If the MEK had succeeded in its goals in the 1980s, it would have been the puppet leadership installed by Hussein to replace the Iranian leadership of the time.