

Al-Ahwaz

From: <>
To: <arabistan@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, May 25, 2003 12:39 AM
Subject: An Urgent Appeal To Save the Lives of Ahwazi Arab Refugees in Iraq

Open Letter to:

The Honorable President of the United States George W. Bush; Prime Minister Tony Blair; United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Heads of State, European Nations.

CC: News Media, United Nations Agencies, International Human Rights Organizations

May 25, 2003

We are sending this letter to you to express our concern about the safety and security of tens of thousands of Ahwazi Arab political refugees and their families in Iraq. Ahwazi Arab refugees are from the Southwestern province of Khuzestan in Iran, who have escaped political repression and persecution by the Iranian government during the past two decades and have sought refuge in southern Iraq. They are being subject to revenge killing by the pro-Iranian armed militia groups (Badr Brigade), who have crossed into Iraq after the collapse of Hussein's regime on April 9. The lives of these refugees are in immediate danger.

The Ahwazi Arab refugees have been expelled from their camps in the Kut and Al-Amarah areas of southern Iraq; their homes and businesses were looted and burned. In the past few weeks, the Badr Brigade gunmen and thugs, among them Iranian security forces (Pasdaran), have been seen summarily executing Ahwazi Arab refugees and other unarmed Iranian opposition groups.

These refugees are members of the Arab ethnic nationality. They have been fighting for their political and cultural autonomy and self-rule for over 70 years - since their semi-autonomous, oil-rich province of Khuzestan came under the control of Iran in 1925. Historically, this province was referred to as Arabistan until its name was changed to Khuzestan by the Iranian government in 1936. The estimated population of Arabs in the Khuzestan province according to various sources ranges from 4-6 million (U.S. State Department 2002 Human Rights report puts their population at "over 4 million"). The Iranian government draws 90% of its income from Khuzestan's oil fields, where oil reserves rival those of Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Shortly after the fall of the Shah and the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Ahwazi Arab ethnic group of Khuzestan, like other ethnic groups in Iran, sought autonomy, self rule, and the right of national self-determination. The Iranian regime swiftly responded, denying these rights and closing and banning all Arab political and cultural organizations. In a series of bloody confrontations with the Iranian security forces in the summer of 1980, thousands of demonstrators and political activists were killed and injured and many more were arrested, especially in the border cities of Khuramshahr (Mohammara) and Abadan. This political repression and the mass arrests caused the first wave of refugees, in the tens of thousands, across the border into Iraq.

Others fled in the early 1990's after the Iranian government expropriated their land for use in the "Sugar Cane Project". In a program called "Persianization", the Iranian regime forcefully resettled non-Arab Iranians to the predominately Arab Khuzestan, aiming to dilute the Arab population there and to eradicate their ethnic identity, especially among Arab Iranians who inhabited the border with Iraq.

Thousands of other refugees are referred to as "Marsh Arabs". They are Ahwazi Arabs who lost their land and fled to Iraq after Saddam Hussein drained the marshes in Southern Iraq. These marshes straddle both Iraq and Iran, including Al Howaizeh Marshland, and are fed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Other refugees originate from the 8-year Iran-Iraq war, who fled to Iraq following the devastation of their towns and villages located immediately across the border in Khuzestan.

We urge you to protect the Ahwazi Arab refugees from the Badr and other Iranian inspired and supported armed militia groups whose purpose is to create an unsafe and insecure political and social climate in Iraq and promote religious fundamentalism.

Thank You

Respectfully yours,

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