



A demonstrator lights candles to commemorate the 14 Iranians killed during the raid on Camp Ashraf. SAMIRA BOUAOU/EPOCH TIMES

## Ottawa hunger strikers protest Camp Ashraf attacks

**Demonstrators appeal to the U.S. embassy to protect camp residents**

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OTTAWA—To protest attacks by Iraqi forces on Iranian exiles at Camp Ashraf in Iraq, ten Iranian expatriates have been holding a hunger strike in front of the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa.

The ten, all of whom have family and friends at the camp, have been joined daily by about 100 other Iranians since they began their hunger strike on July 29.

The attacks at Camp Ashraf, home to the People's Mujahideen Organization of Iran (PMOI) dissident group, has left 14 residents dead and about 500 injured, according to camp residents.

On July 28, Iraqi security forces entered the camp, located an hour north of Baghdad, armed with guns, clubs, tear gas, water cannons, and batons.

The residents in the camp tried to stop the army trucks by forming a human chain. But the Iraqi troops

waded into the crowd, hitting people in the head and body with wooden clubs. Shots were also fired.

Numerous videos and still shots have been posted on the Internet showing the residents being clubbed by the troops. The residents did not appear to fight back. Thirty six were arrested. The attack resumed on July 29.

The hunger strikers in Ottawa are waiting for a response to their request that the U.S. government reinstate protection of camp residents and work toward getting the Iraqi government to abandon plans to send them back to Iran or to another country.

They also want the 36 arrested, many of whom were injured in the attacks, to be given medical care and released. U.S. embassy staff has so far not met with the demonstrators or accepted a letter outlining their requests.

"If protection by the U.S. is not given, the people in Ashraf are facing genocide. That is why we will stay here day in and day out, no matter what, to protect them from the genocide," said Vahideh Khorram-Roudi, one of the hunger strikers.

Supporters have also undertaken hunger strikes in Washington D.C. outside the White House and opposite U.S. embassies in London and Berlin. News reports say some of the hunger

strikers are in a poor state of health and have been hospitalized.

Iraqi officials have disputed the details surrounding the attack, blaming rioting and snipers within the camp. According to Human Rights Watch, an Iraqi security commander wounded in the raid told the media that camp residents resisted security forces with stones, knives, and sharp tools.

The PMOI have been designated a terrorist group by the U.S., Iraq and Iran. Camp residents surrendered their weapons to U.S. forces in 2003. The U.S. protected Camp Ashraf from 2003 until it handed over responsibility for the camp and its 3,500 residents to the Iraqi government in January as part of an initiative to have Baghdad look after Iraq's security needs.

"The July 29 attack proves that there is no protection for the people in Ashraf and the Iraqi government can't be trusted to keep their promise to not harm the people," Khorram-Roudi said.

The Iraqi government has prevented any external agencies from providing aid for camp residents, 1,100 of whom are women. The authorities have also cut off the camp's water, electricity, and medical supplies.

Iraq wants to close the camp and

send the refugees to Iran or another country, although no date for the eviction has been announced. Iran wants them returned to Iran to face charges related to their dissident activities.

The demonstrators believe that repatriating camp residents to Iran would mean certain imprisonment for all and execution for some, given the fact that the PMOI opposes the Iranian theocracy.

Most of the residents in Camp Ashraf, which was established 25 years ago, were dissidents fighting for democracy in Iran under the PMOI. The PMOI was welcomed into Iraq in 1986 by then-leader Saddam Hussein and helped conduct operations against Iran in the Iran-Iraq War.

They also provided the U.S. government with information about Iran's nuclear arms.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who has closer ties with Tehran than did Hussein, met with Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei on February 28. They signed a bilateral agreement to repatriate the Iranians.

In addition to the U.S. embassy, the demonstrators have been spending some of their time in front of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). Other than accepting a statement, DFAIT has not

responded to the group.

At a rally in front of DFAIT on Friday, former MP David Kilgour said Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki "is ultimately responsible for the grim statistics" among Camp Ashraf's residents.

"This initiative complied with the wish of Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei and ignored the views of the many Iraqis who want Iraq to be a sovereign country and to conform to international standards," he said.

Camp Ashraf residents have been recognized as "protected persons" under the Fourth Geneva Convention since 2004.

The International Committee of Jurists, a group of hundreds of lawyers of which Kilgour is one of three Canadian members, has applied to the Iraqi Embassy and the Iraqi Foreign Minister for permission to enter the country in order to see firsthand the condition of the residents.

The committee also wants to press the Iraqi government to live up to its promise to protect the people in Ashraf and not repatriate them to Iran or any hostile country.

For now, the hunger strikers and their supporters vow to continue their vigil in front of the U.S. Embassy and DFAIT, hoping for justice for their family members at camp Ashraf.

**Government criticized over failure to aid citizen**

OTTAWA (Reuters)—The government was accused of racism and abandoning its citizens on Wednesday when it emerged that officials had falsely accused a Canadian woman in Kenya of being an impostor, an act that led to her arrest.

Critics rounded on the government with unusual ferocity over the bizarre case, which could damage the Conservative party's efforts to capture more votes from influential ethnic communities at the next election.

The story started in May when a passport officer at Nairobi airport refused to let Suaad Hagi Mohamud board a plane on the grounds that she did not look enough like her passport photo.

For reasons that are still unclear, the Canadian embassy annulled her passport and then told Kenyan authorities she was an impostor. Mohamud, 31, who spent a week in jail, took two months before she could persuade Ottawa to agree to a DNA test that proved her identity.

Mohamud is from Toronto, a key electoral battleground in Ontario, where the Conservatives have put in a major effort to win seats.

"Something is fundamentally wrong when we can't count on the Canadian government to stand up for Canadians. I'm not sure I can put it any more directly than that," an unhappy Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty told reporters on Wednesday.

The Toronto Star said the case was "a national scandal" while the Globe and Mail called it "shocking and unreasonable."

Critics noted that Mohamud was the latest in a line of foreign-born Canadian citizens who have run into trouble abroad and then found it hard to gain Ottawa's attention and help.

Government ministers have been silent about what happened. The Foreign Ministry said officials were working to help Mohamud return to Canada.

## Free speech quashed for Olympics, says BCCLA

CONTINUED FROM P1

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) estimates that restricted areas span more than 40 downtown residential and commercial blocks that include community centres, a school, public facilities, and public spaces such as sidewalks and parks.

"These are the areas, the residential areas, the businesses, that will be most affected by the new city bylaws that restrict freedom of speech," says BCCLA executive director David Eby.

"We're very concerned that the city will be closing large sections of the downtown to free speech and free assembly of citizens and other people who want to be critical of the Olympic Games, countries participating, or their sponsors."

The bylaws allow the removal of garbage bins and newspaper boxes from within 100 metres of some Olympic venues for fear that bombs could be planted in them. While free newspapers can be given out by hand, distributing other printed materials is prohibited. This is to keep litter down, the city says.

The bylaw changes also allow for airport-style security measures at the city sites, including closed circuit TV monitoring and body and bag searches, and prohibit any activity causing a disturbance that could affect people's enjoyment of an Olympic event on city land.

Because they are deemed a "nuisance and an eyesore," the lowest-cost posters found on construction hoardings and utility poles will be eliminated, according to the BCCLA. Only signs licensed by the city that are "celebratory in nature" are allowed at city sites.

Eby is concerned that, although the city removed a provision that said, "a sign that conveys an idea is illegal," the rules around "signs" and "creating a disturbance" remain ill-defined.

Commercial signs are prohibited in order to prevent "ambush marketing" by companies that aren't Olympic sponsors, says City Councillor Kerry Jang.



Bylaw changes for the 2010 Olympics prohibit newspaper boxes within 100 metres of some Olympic venues. JUSTINA WHEALE/THE EPOCH TIMES

"Coca Cola has paid a lot of money to advertise and we don't want people advertising Pepsi at the same time. It's not free speech—its controlling advertisers."

While there will be designated "free speech areas" near the venues, Jang says people are not limited to these and may protest "anywhere in the city" except in the security zones.

"There's only one place where you can't protest and that is in the security area around an Olympic venue. There are performances that happen within that security zone, so if you hold up a sign it will block somebody's view."

Eby says the contract the City of Vancouver signed with the International Olympic Committee in 2003 "gave away the constitutional rights of Canadians" and that the bylaw changes violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"It's just inexcusable for a sporting event to take precedence over Canadians' rights of free expression," he says.

City Councillor Geoff Meggs defends the bylaw changes, saying the city has been "very sensitive" to concerns around free speech and civil liberties.

"The city manager gave very clear undertakings about the ap-

plication of the bylaws and we worked hard with the Vancouver Police Department and the security planners to make sure that free speech is part of their consideration every step of the way," he says.

"The critics are inverting reality here. We will do everything we can do to support free speech. We will also do everything we can to ensure it's a safe and secure Games."

Rachel Marcuse, executive director of the Coalition of Progressive Electors which has two members on Vancouver City Council, says COPE has "a whole bunch of concerns" with the bylaw amendments.

These include vague language that "could in the process impact issues around freedom of speech," and the lack of public consultation in such changes as extending closing times for bars and restaurants.

In addition, says Marcuse, the bylaws give city manager Penny Ballam "pretty unprecedented power" to make any new rules she sees fit during the Games without approval from council.

"All of those decisions should be going through the elected representatives of council," she says.

## Airlines' shaky credit could cost consumers

CONTINUED FROM P1

Slawek said most of the remaining travel companies are very large and can handle the deposits, but the requirement is particularly difficult for smaller operators. And it could get worse.

While Conquest was the merchant of record for its operations, meaning it dealt with the credit card processor directly, in most cases it is the airlines that deal with the credit card processors.

Most travel agents and tour operators buy their tickets through the airlines transaction system, so as far as the credit card processing company is concerned, it was the airline that asked the credit card processor for the funds from the ticket sale.

"The credit card goes through the airlines' processing merchant account. So the travel agent is the third party," explains Slawek.

But that could all change if the

industry follows an experiment being tested by United Airlines in the U.S. United has issued a statement saying that it will require 20 or 30 travel agents in the U.S. to be their own merchants, meaning they will work directly with the credit card processing companies.

"That means that the travel agent has to hold hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars in reserve as well which is completely untenable for these small businesses," says Slawek.

If other airlines follow United's lead, Slawek predicts major changes in the industry. It also leaves companies selling secondary products responsible when a primary vendor goes under, she says.

"So the consumer has paid the travel agent through their credit card, the travel agent has paid the airline cash and should the airline go down, they've got their money

from the travel agent—they're free and clear. So the travel agent is then left holding the bag, but the travel agent is not the one who controls the product, they have nothing to do with the air carrier."

This passing of the buck, she says, is not the best solution and likely only a temporary fix.

"The only answer is that consumers need to pay what the product is worth, because you can't keep running airlines like Zoom and charging only \$90 to the U.K. It's untenable financially—you can't run a business that way."

Zoom Airlines, another Canadian air carrier, filed for bankruptcy protection in August 2008 when it ceased operations due to mounting losses.

"It's important for consumers to understand that this can come down to them paying more eventually."



Cheap travel is hurting airlines and tour operators. JOERG KOCH/AFP/GETTY IMAGES