

PUBLIC

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UA 111/03 Forcible return/Fear for safety

24 April 2003

JORDAN Around 1,000 asylum seekers

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of up to 1,000 individuals, including up to 500 women and children of various ages, who are currently being forced by the Jordanian authorities to remain in the "neutral zone" between Iraq and Jordan's al-Karama border crossing. Significant numbers of asylum seekers have been in the "neutral zone" for at least week.

The 1,000 individuals reportedly includes around 800 people who left the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) administered al-Tash Camp, which is located around 120 kilometres west of Baghdad, in the al-Anbar governorate of Iraq.

Around 60 of those in the "neutral zone" between Iraq and Jordan, many of whom have been recognized as refugees or have another status in a third country, are reportedly affiliated to the People's Mojahedin of Iran (PMOI). This is an armed political group opposed to the current Iranian government which was permitted by the former Iraqi government to operate from its territory. The PMOI, which concluded a cease-fire with US forces on 23 April, has been proscribed by the governments of the European Union and The United States of America as a "terrorist" organization.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Jordan is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, but is bound by the principle of *non-refoulement*. This is a norm of customary international law prohibiting the forced return of any individual to a territory where they would be at risk of grave human rights abuses.

The Jordanian government has prepared for a large-scale influx in connection with the armed conflict in Iraq. Since the beginning of the conflict, however, there have just been sporadic arrivals of Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers arriving in Jordan. The vast majority of those seeking protection in Jordan have instead been third country nationals residing in Iraq. More than 1000 third country nationals have been admitted to Jordan since 20 March, of which more than 800 have returned to their countries of origin with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Many were waiting for days in dire humanitarian conditions in the "neutral zone" between Iraq and Jordan before being admitted into Jordanian territory. One transit camp for third country nationals and one camp for Iraqi refugees have been set up near the town of Ruweished, around 50 km from the Iraqi border.

It is unclear what the exact reasons why the refugees left al-Tash Camp, which housed mainly Iranian refugees, usually of Kurdish ethnicity. Most of the inhabitants of the camp had been living in there for up to 20 years and a great many of those present in the camp were born there. Around 1000 of a total of 13 000 mainly Iranian refugees in the camp, have left to seek protection in Jordan the past weeks. Around 12 000 individuals reportedly remain in the camp where unsanitary and difficult living conditions are reportedly resulting in the deaths of many children. The UNHCR has however, not been able to visit the camp since the start of hostilities.

According to press reports between 22 and 23 April, around 300 individuals were admitted into Jordan.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, French, Arabic or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of up to 1,000 individuals, including up to 500 women and children, who remain in the "neutral zone" between Iraq and Jordan's al-Karama border crossing;
- recognizing that Jordan are already hosting a large number of Iraqi refugees;

- urging the Government of Jordan to keep its borders open;
- calling for Iraqis, Iranians and other nationals fleeing Iraq, to be allowed to seek protection in Jordan without discrimination;
- urging the Government of Jordan to cooperate fully with relevant agencies of the international community, notably the UNHCR, in providing protection and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers from Iraq.

APPEALS TO:

His Majesty King Abdallah bin Hussein
Office of H.M. the King
Royal Palace
Amman
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Telegram: King Abdallah bin Hussein, Amman, Jordan
Fax : + 962 6 462 7421
Email : info@nic.gov.jo
Salutation : Your Majesty

Dr Fayez Tarawneh
Chief of the Royal Court
PO Box 80
Amman
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Telegram: Chief of the Royal Court, Amman, Jordan
Fax: + 962 6 463 1452
Salutation: Dear Dr Tarawneh

Dr Marwan al-Muashir
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PO Box 35217
Amman
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Telegram: Foreign Affairs Minister, Amman, Jordan
Fax: 962 6 464 8825
Email : enquiry@mfa.gov.jo
Salutation : Your Excellency

Quftan al-Majali
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
PO Box 100
Amman
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Telegram: Interior Minister, Amman, Jordan
Fax: + 962 6 560 6908
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Her Majesty Queen Rania
President of the Royal Commission on Human Rights
Office of Her Majesty the Queen,
Royal Palace
Amman
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

and to diplomatic representatives of Jordan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 June 2003.