

24 April 2009

Humanitarian situation of Camp Ashraf residents

Ana Maria Gomes, author . – Mr President, some in this Chamber want to present the People's Mujahedin as heroes or a true alternative to the Iranian regime. They are neither.

In my trips to Iraq, I have heard Kurdish, Sunni, Shia, Christian, Turkman leaders and others complain about the role of the People's Mujahedin as a tool of Saddam Hussein in the 1988 Anfar campaign, which culminated in massacres such as Halabja. That is what the Iraqi delegation which was here this week also confirmed to us, while assuring us that the Iraqi constitution binds the Government of Iraq to fully respect the human rights of the residents of Camp Ashraf, who, with the help of UNHCR and ICRC, wish to leave for Iran or any other destination, or wish to stay as political refugees abiding by the laws of Iraq.

We must understand the reluctance of the Iraqi Government to let Camp Ashraf continue to be a nuisance to their good neighbourly relations with Iran. For Iraqis, Iran cannot be wished away. It is there. It is a powerful neighbour. It is true that the People's Mujahedin are no longer on the terrorist list, but they are still an opaque cult which brutalises those of its members who wish to defect. Above all, the people in Camp Ashraf are human beings whose human rights have to be respected, irrespective of the fate of the organisation itself or of its past. They are to be treated under the 1951 Refugee Convention and no one – I repeat, no one – should be forced to return to Iran.

But let us make one thing clear. This resolution is not about the Iranian regime, which has been repressing its people, mismanaging the country and destabilising the Middle East for decades. Anyone who presents a vote for the PSE and Green amendments, which aim to balance the tone of this resolution, as a vote for the Iranian regime, is either arguing in bad faith or has simply run out of arguments.

The spirit of our amendments is quite simple. We want to present the whole picture of human rights violations and threats in and around Camp Ashraf. For example, we request that all Camp Ashraf residents be allowed to be interviewed by the ICRC and UNHCR at a neutral location and without People's Mujahedin officials in attendance, in order to clarify their real wishes. Also we must call on the Mujahedin leadership to stop controlling the lives of the residents of Camp Ashraf, namely by not letting them leave the camp. Above all, we express our concern about the reported practices of mental and physical manipulation and severe human rights violations within the cult. In short, this is about the individual human rights of the people in Camp Ashraf. Let us have these people and their human rights in mind when we vote.