

**Statement  
Of  
Dr. Pary Karadaghi  
Kurdish Human Rights Watch  
On  
FY 2011 Refugee Admissions  
Iraqi & Iranian Refugees  
To  
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration  
U.S. Department of State**

**May 4, 2010**

I would like to start by thanking the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration for calling this public hearing. I will focus my remarks primarily on the situation of Iraqi and Iranian refugees. My name is Pary Karadaghi, president of Kurdish Human Rights Watch, (KHRW).

Over the past 30 years large numbers of people have become internally displaced within Iraq for a variety of reasons, including the policies of the previous government as well as, Turkish incursions and the wars with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kuwait. Since the fall of the previous regime, a new wave of displacement occurred, particularly after the Samara Shrine bombing in February 2006. UNHCR directly engages in sectors where gaps have been identified, namely protection, emergency shelter and camp management coordination. UNHCR's program targets about 1.55 million who were displaced following the Samara bombing. About half a million individuals are displaced in settlements or camp-like situations in extremely poor conditions and are priority for protection and advocacy interventions.

The terrorist incident of Monday May 4<sup>th</sup> against Christian students en route to school near Mosul resulted in at least one casualty and a number of injuries. The terrorists in Iraq aim to disrupt the ages-long diversity of Nineveh which is home to a number of different religious, such as Yezidis and ethnic groups.

In Iraq, individuals with ties to US permanent residents citizens of Iraqi dissent are targets for kidnappings and ransom demands, torture, rape, killings, beheading and other gross human rights violations. There is a need for expanding in-country processing of such individuals with US ties for Special Immigrant Visas and refugees processing.

### **Iraqi Refugees:**

It is estimated that at least 1.2 million to 1.5 million Iraqis have in the past 7 years fled Iraq and sought refuge in the neighboring country of Syria and an additional 750,000 Iraqis in Jordan as a result of the US invasion, almost two-thirds of the post-invasion Diaspora. According to UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) monitoring of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), over 2.7 women, men and children are displaced inside Iraq. According to a recent UNHCR report over 5 million Iraqis were displaced in the past years. The situation of the Iraqi refugees in those countries continues to be problematic and desperate. We understand that these governments have reassured UNHCR that they will not pursue the policy of forcibly returning Iraqi refugees. However, there is no system in place to monitor the situation of these returnees. We urge the US government to continue advocating with these governments, the government of Iraq and UNHCR for a comprehensive solution to the situation of Iraqi refugees in the Middle East.

### **Syria:**

Large numbers of Iraqi refugees arrived in Syria after the sectarian violence ravaged Iraq in 2006 and 2007. Since the start of the war in Iraq, UNHCR has registered over 260,000 Iraqis. Some have since been resettled to third countries, or have departed to third countries by other means; while some have returned to Iraq, mostly spontaneously and in a few cases with limited

assistance from UNHCR. The majority, however, remain in Syria, living alongside the host population in cities across the country, mainly in Damascus and its suburbs. As of March 2010, UNHCR had 165,000 Iraqi individuals actively registered in Syria. Many are living in Syria but are not registered with UNHCR.

Difficulties experienced by refugees due to their uncertain legal status in Syria, have steadily increased, generally due to their worsening economic situations. The most vulnerable refugees require assistance to cover their basic needs in food, medical services and, in some cases, accommodation. Among them are women living alone, or women whose husbands are missing, accompanied by young children; older refugees; refugees with disabilities or other serious health conditions. Moreover, the lack of legal access to work opportunities in Syria has forced many to turn to informal work, in spite of the qualifications and education they had in Iraq, thus becoming exposed to the risk of exploitation and abuse in Syria. Most refugees have depleted their savings and they are now in financial distress. Because they can't work legally, they are unable to secure an adequate income, and with a significant rise in the cost of living in Syria.

Refugees are increasingly becoming more vulnerable, economically, socially and psychologically.

The extended uncertainty is further aggravating the psychological state of people who have already experienced or witnessed traumatic events in Iraq. UNHCR attends to some 150 to 200 new refugees with psychosocial and mental health concerns every month. In 2009 alone, more than 1,600 families received related support and half were referred for specialized mental health treatment.

### **Jordan:**

In addition to Iraqis, over 1,500 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly from Somalia and Sudan, are registered with UNHCR.

Neither Jordan nor Syria are signatories of the 1951 UN Convention on refugees. Neither government refers to the Iraqis in their country as “refugees,” but rather as “guests.” Syria has been more flexible in accommodating Iraqis than Jordan, which probably accounts in part for the larger number of refugees in Syria.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Jordanian Government and UNHCR sets the parameters for cooperation on refugee issues. The MOU contains the refugee definition, confirms the principle of non-*refoulement*, provides the legal basis for the stay of asylum-seekers in Jordan pending refugee determination undertaken by UNHCR, and allows refugees a maximum stay of 6 months after recognition during which a durable solution must be found. However, within the current operating context and given the numbers of asylum-seekers in Jordan of mostly Iraqi origin, UNHCR cannot conduct individual status determination on every asylum-seeker nor can they make status determinations in the 6 months period.

Both countries—but especially Jordan—are concerned that the Iraqi refugees may become permanent, long term presence like the Palestinian refugees.

We know that women and girls in war are among the most vulnerable groups. It's seen in many occasions that women and girls are targeted for sexual violence, abuse and exploitation. An increasing problem is the growing practice of prostitution by Iraqi refugee women and girls. Given the deteriorating economic situation of those refugees, a United Nations report found in 2008, that many Iraqi women in "severe need" for funds and food are resorting to prostitution, in secret, or even with the knowledge or involvement of family members. KHRW staff and other NGO workers say thousands of Iraqi women have no way or supporting themselves and their families in Jordan and Syria and point out that as violence in Iraq has increased, the refugee population in Jordan and Syria has come to include more female-headed households and unaccompanied women.

## **Iranian Refugees**

After the elections in Iran there has been a marked increase in violence and human rights abuses against opposition and ethnic minorities in Iran. Since June of last year the security forces of the Islamic republic shoots indiscriminately farmers, shepherds, students, and other injured during demonstration and riots. Post election violence in Iran especially in Kurdish areas, two Kurdish political prisoners have been put on death row and there are currently 21 Kurdish political activists awaiting their execution. The number prior to the election unrest was at 16. During the last 6 months at least 65 people have been detained, others killed by security forces and injured, Sunni Muslims and Yarsans, Baluchi, Kurdish, Ahwazi Arab students were detained and interrogated, 68 NGO workers, journalists and human rights activists are condemned to jail, from 1 year to life time in prison.

Ethnic minorities remain faced with gross human rights violations. Recent shelling of villages on the Iran-Iraq boarder, arrests of political opponents in Iran has led many to leave their homes in Iran and become refugees.

We are appreciative to the US Refugee Admissions Program and the Government of Austria for providing Iranian religious minorities with a route to freedom through Vienna to the United States. However, given that this program only resettles religiously persecuted refugees, we urge PRM to process cases persecuted Iranian ethnic minorities such as Kurds, Balochis, Ahwazi Arabs, Azeris and other ethnic minorities persecuted in Iran to apply in Vienna, Austria or elsewhere to the US refugee admissions program.

## **Iranian Kurdish refugees stranded in Al-Waleed Camp.**

Iranian Kurdish refugees in Al-Waleed Camp number 180 men, women and children, or 28 families and 8 singles. All of these refugees fled Iran for fear of persecution. Before their arrival to Al-Waleed camp they lived in Al-Tash camp in Rumadya. After Iraq liberation Islamic terrorist groups controlled Fallujah and Rumadya area. They started attacking and killing some refugees. For this reason they had to leave the camp and move towards the northern part of Iraq. Some went to Jordan others were resettled by Scandinavian countries to Sweden and Norway. These refugees initially went to Al-Rushedy camp in Jordan in 2003 and some fled the country. They were registered with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) while they lived in a refugee camp in Iraq and are currently also under UNHCR protection. It's my

understanding that some of these cases are referred for resettlement to the US refugee admissions program.

These Kurdish refugees need to find durable solutions to their long struggle. They are at crossroads and in dire need of assistance.

The low number of Iranian Kurdish refugees accepted by the United States is particularly troubling in light of the limited resettlement capacity of countries in the region. These refugees have no opportunity of local integration or resettlement in Jordan or Syria. We are deeply concerned that the response of the United States to the resettlement needs of these individuals remains inadequate. For particularly vulnerable segments of this population resettlement is the only viable option.

### **Resettlement Recommendations:**

We support the expansion of resettlement of Iraqi and Iranian refugees in FY 2011 to 35,000. Some possible groups for consideration include:

#### 1. Nationals of Iraq:

- Who were employed by the United States Government, United States companies and contractors, media, and nongovernmental organizations
- Iraqis who are members of particularly vulnerable refugee populations, including Iraqis from ethnically mixed families and Iraqis who are members of religious or other minority groups, including Chaldo Assyrian Christians, Sabian/Mandaens, Yazidis, Jews, and Baha'is;
- Iraqis with ties to US citizens, permanent residents, refugees and asylees.
- Women heads of household or/and victims of SGBV and sex trafficking

#### 2. Iranian persecuted ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups such as women and elderly:

- Iranian nationals with ties to US citizens, permanent residents and refugees in the US
- Iranian refugees in Al-Waleed camp

Lastly let me mention that we continue to be concerned for the situation of women heads of household and girls in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and elsewhere. We urge PRM to pay special attention to women and girls in their consideration for protection, durable solutions and resettlement to the US.