



## Defend Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers

With the start of the USA-led war against Iraq on Thursday 20 March, we have been witnessing the unfolding of a human tragedy. Everyone knows that the first victims of this war are and will be the innocent people of Iraq. Many are becoming displaced and will be forced to flee. It is estimated that the war will result in one and a half to two million refugees and 3 million displaced persons. But where will they go to? Countries neighbouring Iraq, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, have closed their borders. Also Western countries with the

support of the UNHCR are freezing Iraqi asylum applications in order to facilitate deportations once the bombings have stopped. The UNHCR, which has the direct responsibility of protection and providing assistance, has not prepared itself for the unfolding disaster.

Defending the lives and rights of those fleeing this war is the task of the anti-war movement and progressive people everywhere. The only hope of the people of Iraq and Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers is the worldwide protest and the pressure exerted by millions. This

force and movement must demand the following:

1. Stop the war and slaughter of the Iraqi people immediately.
2. Open all borders to Iraqi refugees. Closing of borders by any government is a crime. No group or government can prevent the movement of refugees.
3. Recognise the right to asylum for all Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers.
4. Stop all deportations to Iraq and the region.
5. Provide necessary food,

shelter, health care and sanitation to Iraqis, refugees and internally displaced via non-governmental agencies.

6. Transfer 100,000 refugees in Iraq, including Iranians, to safe places.

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) calls on groups and individuals to defend Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers and demand the above. IFIR has set up an Emergency Unit on Iraqi Refugees headed by Farshad Hoseini. For more information on the Unit, contact Farshad Hoseini, farshadhoseini@yahoo.com, +31 613940534.

Sign petition defending Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers. To sign, go to <http://www.petitiononline.com/IFIR/petition.html>.



31 March 2003

Mr. Ruud Lubbers  
UNHCR  
Geneva, Switzerland

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has once again revealed its obvious disregard for the lives and rights of the Iraqi people, including

## You should be ashamed!

### Maryam Namazie's Open Letter to Mr. Ruud Lubbers, UNHCR

Dear Mr. Lubbers:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has once again revealed its obvious disregard for the lives and rights of the Iraqi people, including

refugees and asylum seekers. While the UNHCR's main focus over the past two decades has been one of assisting governments in migration control, since September 11, it has further regressed into overtly promoting USA-led policies, which disregard rights and

norms; these are becoming the hallmark of the new world order.

The current war on Iraq is a good case in point. Even before the USA-led war on Iraq, the UNHCR's role in support of it became blatantly

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clear. While you yourself professed concern about the humanitarian consequences of a war, you urged Saddam Hussein to step down to avoid a conflict rather than urge the USA and Britain to stop war efforts against the people of Iraq. On March 18, you told the UN Human Rights Commission: ‘Even at this very last moment, like many others I have no other option but to pray that Saddam Hussein understands that it is time now for him and his sons to go’. ‘As high commissioner for refugees, I am obliged to speak out’. Though Saddam Hussein’s despotic rule, among many others, is known to everyone, the fact is that the humanitarian consequences you were ‘concerned’ about and the catastrophe we are witnessing today are the direct results of the USA-led war. Were your obligations to the people of Iraq and Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers, you would have rather urged the USA and Britain to cease their war efforts against Iraq. We are still waiting for you to fulfil your obligation in calling for an urgent end to the war on Iraq.

With regards to Iraqi refugees

and asylum seekers, again, your office has only revealed its negligence towards and disrespect of Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers and their rights. Even though it is estimated that the war will create one and a half to two million refugees, your office has only made contingency plans for 600,000. Furthermore, your agency continues to fund regimes like the Islamic Republic of Iran for Iraqi refugee assistance when you know full well that they have refused entry to Iraqis and have closed their borders shut. Were your agency’s main concern refugee protection, a proper contingency plan would have been drawn up and serious pressure exerted to ensure that borders were opened and remained open. You have even pulled back your working units from Iraqi Kurdistan, where a new refugee catastrophe is unfolding besides that which has been ongoing since 1991.

To make matters still worse, your agency has recently distributed new guidelines to governments advising a freeze on Iraqi asylum claims for three months, during which Iraqis will instead be

granted temporary ‘protection’. Rather than condemn and exert pressure on the Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and United Kingdom governments for freezing all decisions on Iraqi claims, your agency has recommended that all governments do this. It is clear that temporary ‘protection’ is the code word for denying Iraqis asylum and long-term protection by keeping them in limbo so that when deemed ‘safe’, they can be returned to Iraq without delay just as has been done with Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. These guidelines may be helpful to Western governments that are focused on reducing numbers rather than protecting refugees and asylum seekers (Iraqis were the top group applying for asylum in 2002 in Western countries) and will get the UNHCR brownie points in this new order. But from our point of view and that of millions of refugees and people worldwide, your policies and actions only reveal the extent to which your agency has degenerated from one that assists in migration control in the post cold war era to an agency that is directly violating people’s rights and helping to

change refugee rights norms and standards for the USA’s New World Order.

Needless to say, until your agency’s mandate states that it promotes refugee protection, we at IFIR expect you to do so. We will organise public opinion to exert pressure on your office to ensure that you protect Iraqi refugees and refugees in Iraq. Our demands are as follows:

1. Stop the war and slaughter of the Iraqi people immediately.
2. Open all borders to Iraqi refugees. Closing of borders by any government is a crime. No group or government can prevent the movement of refugees.
3. Recognise the right to asylum for all Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers.
4. Stop all deportations to Iraq and the region.
5. Provide necessary food, shelter, health care and sanitation to Iraqis, refugees and internally displaced via non-governmental agencies.
6. Transfer 100,000 refugees in Iraq, including Iranians, to safe places.

Sincerely,  
Maryam Namazie  
Executive Director



**Mansoor Hekmat (1951-2002)**

With the bloody suppression of the revolution in Iran and the imposition of an ultra-reactionary life on the people, tens of thousands of human beings, alone and without organisation, fled the Islamic Republic of Iran in search of security and tranquillity. Organising this vast human mass around the most modern and humane advances of humanity, unconditionally defending their right to asylum, and creating an international organisation without taking into consideration people’s nationality, religion, sex and or political affiliation became an immediate necessity. Creating the International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) was Mansoor Hekmat’s response to these conditions. As he said: ‘Our entire life story is changing the lives of human beings.’

# IFIR Emergency Unit on Iraqi Refugees

The IFIR Emergency Unit on Iraqi Refugees headed by Farshad Hoseini has issued 15 press releases to date. Here is a summary of the first 13 press releases:

PR 2, 20 March 2003: According to the Turkish media, 30,000 Iraqi refugees from Northern Iraq are on the move towards the Iranian and Turkish borders. The Islamic regime of Iran has announced that its borders will remain closed. They have also announced that no refugees have attempted to cross over to Iran. The International Red Cross announced that 250 Iraqis entered Jordan yesterday. Other reports state that last night shots have been fired at cars attempting to leave. A UNHCR representative announced that three camps are being erected near the Iranian border.

PR 3, 24 March 2003: According to the UNHCR on Sunday, 450 thousand people living in Northern Iraq have left their homes in search of safety. Many of the people of Erbil, Kirkuk, Dohuk and Soleimaniyeh have fled to the mountains. In the city of Dohuk alone, 68 percent of the population of 120 thousand have fled the city. On Sunday, USA officials stated that they had bombed 1500 targets; Iraqi officials stated that 366 civilians were wounded and 77 were killed. Most of the victims were women and children. According to the Red Cross, the cutting off of

water and electricity supplies will place the 1 million population at serious risk.

\* PR 4, 24 March 2003: According to media reports, 24,000 Iranian refugees are currently in Iraq. They are mainly political opponents of the Islamic regime of Iran. These refugees are housed in camps in Northern Iraq and Ramadia camp in Iraq. Until now, the UNHCR has made no effort to transfer them to safe places. Other reports show that the Islamic regime is striving to have these opponents returned to Iran. Yesterday, an official of the regime stated that they are willing to accept some of these refugees. However, they said they will not take in 'Monafeqin' (hypocrites) and will only accept those who were 'deceived' and 'have repented'. These comments show the level of enmity of the regime with the Iranian refugees in Iraq and the persecution they will face if returned. This is a clear threat to the lives and security of those in Iraq. IFIR is concerned about the safety of these refugees.

PR 5, 24 March 2003: According to reports, up till now 14 Iraqi missiles have been fired at Kuwait. Many Iranians working in Kuwait are fearful for their lives and want to leave Kuwait and return to Iran. In opposition to the Islamic regime's refusal to address their needs, Iranians demonstrated at the Iranian embassy in Kuwait and broke some of its

windows.

PR 6, 25 March 2003: As a result of severe attacks in the region of Fau, refugees attempting to flee USA-led and Iraqi government attacks and enter Iran were denied entry. This is a crime and contradictory to all international norms.

PR 7, 25 March 2003: Following the missile attacks and bombings of Iraqi cities, 7 missiles have fallen in Iran and according to the Islamic regime's reports, injured 2 civilians. The threat of war has made the residents of Iranian cities bordering Iraq fearful. According to reports, 30 percent of the people of Abadan and Khorramshahr have fled these cities. The Islamic regime has not only not taken any measures to support these internally displaced but is also attempting to prevent them from leaving the Iranian border cities. According to reports received by IFIR, a large number of people demonstrated in front of the offices of the Governate of these two cities against the regime's attempts to prevent people from leaving the cities as well as because of the lack of safety measures to protect people from attacks.

PR 8, 25 March 2003: The International Red Cross has announced that Basra will soon face a humanitarian catastrophe. Electricity and water have been cut off. 60 percent of the 2 million population of this city have



no access to clean drinking water. Other reports state that the war has stopped food and medicines from reaching the population. The USA and Britain are preventing food stored in Jordan from reaching the population. While this is unfolding, Claire Short and Kofi Annan are only stating that food needs to reach these populations.

PR 9, 26 March 2003: While the bombing of Iraq continues, thousands of Iraqi refugees are at the borders of Iran and Turkey. Because they have been denied entry, they are in limbo. The numbers are increasing as US-led troops parachute into Northern Iraq. Thousands from Dohuk, Zakho, Erbil and so on are on the move. It has been reported that the USA has asked US reporters in the area not to broadcast this news so as not to give the Turkish government an excuse to enter Northern Iraq. The Turkish government has sent in troops to prevent the flow of refugees. Closing borders to refugees is like bombing them and using weapons of mass destruction against people. It kills innocent civilians and must be stopped immediately.

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million will soon be in immediate need of food.

According to media reports, as a result of the bombings and missile attacks, 39 percent of the people of Iraq have no access to clean water and 5 million have none to medical care and medicine. A ship carrying food has been stopped because of mines found in waters near Um Qasr. While weapons are readily transported and nothing can obstruct their transportation, when it comes to food and medicines, mines are found that prevent it from reaching the people. If the ship was carrying weapons, all obstructions would have immediately been pushed

aside.

PR 11, 27 March 2003: In view of current developments in Iraq, the UN refugee agency has advised governments to suspend, for an initial period of three months, the processing of asylum claims from individual Iraqi citizens and to grant them temporary protection instead. This is an outrage. Rather than provide Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers with permanent protection, the UNHCR is facilitating their return when it is deemed 'safe'.

PR 12, 29 March 2003: Children are the first victims



of this war. According to UNICEF, one and a half million Iraqi children have stopped attending school as a result of the war. Also, half a million children are at risk of psychological trauma. Instead of being in school, they are in shelters and basements or on the move facing fear, hunger and disease. The anti-war movement must also intervene in defence of human demands and to

reduce the suffering of people, particularly children.

PR 13, 29 March 2003: The USA has established a new policy which mandatorily detains asylum seekers from Iraq, Iran and over 30 other countries deemed terrorist who arrive in the USA and seek asylum at the point of entry. The policy, entitled 'Operation Liberty Shield', is an outrage.

Sign petition  
defending Iraqi  
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<http://>

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