

The People's Mojahedin of Iran: Facing Death for Their Cause

Written by Alison Assiter

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ALISON ASSITER, NOV 19 2013

I went on Sunday November 10th to visit the members of the PMOI – the People's Mojahedin of Iran – who have been on hunger strike, as of today, for 70 days. There are five women and two men and they have their beds outside the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square, in London. The London hunger strike was covered on ITV News on Friday 8th November. There are a further 700 people who have been on hunger strike in Camp Liberty in Iraq for the same period of time and there are hunger strikes by dissident Iranians as well in Geneva, Berlin, Ottawa and Melbourne in Australia. In Melbourne, an Australian pastor has joined them on hunger strike.

Why are they there? I spoke to one of the supporters of the hunger strikers, Jamshid and he said:

'On the 1st of September this year, 52 Mujahedin members were killed in Camp Ashraf in Iraq. Each one of them had protected status under the Geneva Convention. They were killed at close range; some of them were shot in the head. At the same time, seven more people were taken hostage in Iraq.'

Whoever was responsible for these deaths and for taking the people hostage, it is clear that the PMOI members were not properly protected by the UN and the USA (The USA had promised them protection when they left Iraq). The members of the group were unarmed and, given that they have been campaigning for many years against the Iranian regime, they are a target for the Iranian government.

Boumedra, chief of the Human Rights Office of United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), and adviser to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Camp Ashraf affairs from 2009 until 2012, has written: 'in the process (of the killings and abductions) they used explosives to blow up buildings and vehicles. The next day the Iraqi Prime Minister announced that his government knew nothing about what happened in Camp Ashraf. Those who know the security setting in and around Camp Ashraf would agree with me that it is impossible for an operation of this scale to take place without the direct involvement of the Iraqi security forces.'

He added (see here):

"The world silence on the fate of the seven hostages and the direct role of the Government of Iraq in the September 1st massacre cannot be explained except by political expediency. While politics may explain the silence of certain governments, such consideration by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is unacceptable. To salvage the UN integrity regarding the Iranian exiles in Iraq, it is imperative to establish a truly independent and impartial commission of inquiry to probe into the extra-judicial killings and abductions that took place in Ashraf".

The hunger strikers are demanding:

1. The release of the hostages; and
2. That the UN bring their blue helmets to the Camp – Camp Liberty – in Iraq where the remainder of the members of the PMOI live. The remaining members in Iraq need this level of protection if they are to avoid being attacked again.

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Many of those in Iraq are also on hunger strike.

This attack was the sixth on this group since 2009. A total of 99 people were killed outright in these attacks and many more were injured.

Whatever one's attitude towards the politics of the PMOI, it is beyond doubt that they have worked tirelessly for over forty years for democracy in Iran. This is not the first time they have faced death for their cause. In the 1980s thousands of their members and supporters were killed, some of them in the prisons of Iran. At the moment, they are the forgotten victims of the desire on the part of the US to improve relations with the Iranian regime which is still engaged, despite the different face it is presenting to the world, in hanging people on a regular basis in public.

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Alison Assiter is Professor of Feminist Theory at UWE, Bristol, the author of a number of books and articles, including *Kierkegaard, Eve and Metaphors of Birth*, and a member of the editorial collective of *Feminist Dissent*.