



## **Iraq – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 20 June 2013**

### **Iraq: Situation of Iranian Kurdish Refugees in Al-Tash refugee camp: their status, living conditions and civic-social-political rights.**

A September 2000 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on Al-Tash refugee camp refers to information obtained from a newsletter published by the Iranian Refugee's Alliance as follows:

“Reports from the Al-tash camp, which is located outside Iraqi Kurdistan and controlled by the Baghdad government, further indicate the general gravity of living conditions for refugees anywhere in Iraq. Independent reporters who visited the Al-Tash camp in 1996 found the refugees living in squalor in a slum-like conditions. In the summer of 1995 UNHCR's representative in Iraq, Abdallah Saied, told Reuters: With U.N's food stocks in Iraq running out UNHCR could no longer provide them [Al-tash refugees] with a full food basket. World Food Programme representative in Iraq, Lucielo Ramirez, added that the situation of the refugees is getting bad. Because of our supply shortages, they are not getting enough. In Al-tash, refugees are not permitted to work, and their movement is also severely restricted. The outlook for these refugees is so grim that in June 1996 some 150 Al-Tash refugees, mostly women and children, who could not stand it any more, fled to Kurdish-held Northern Iraq because there was hardly any water, food or health care. Some of them were offered dilapidated houses by Iraqi Kurdish villagers, but many sought shelter in abandoned poultry shacks and sought help from relief organizations.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (25 September 2000) *Iraq: Ramady camp (1995 to September 2000)*)

An article published by the online magazine Salon states:

“The Kurds say they've barely been living since they were forced into exile in 1980, during the first year of the Iran-Iraq war. Most of them were civilians living in the Iranian border areas occupied by Iraq in the war. They say Iranian bombs drove them into Iraq's interior. Others were members of anti-Khomeini political parties who arrived in Iraq to escape government repression. In 1982, the Iraqi government rounded up the Iranian Kurds and put them in the al-Tash refugee camp, 150 kilometers west of Baghdad, near the town of al-Ramadi, which, until the war, was administered by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). First they lived in tents, but when those were destroyed by the wind, the Kurds built mud houses. The al-Tash Kurds say they didn't have access to jobs or higher education. By the beginning of 2003, they numbered 12,000. Although they say they had little contact with other Kurdish communities in Iraq, the Iranian Kurds say they suffered reprisals for Iraqi Kurdish uprisings. Forty-year-old Malek Mohamed carries a worn piece of lined paper in his pocket with the names of 13 people from al-Tash, and the dates when they disappeared after leaving the camp on

ordinary errands. The refugees believe they were kidnapped and killed by Saddam Hussein's regime." (Salon (13 May 2003) *Deliverance or death*)

A document published on the Mission Free Iran website states:

"Over the years, from the 1980s until 2005, this group of more than 10,000 Iranian Kurds seeking refuge suffered a 50 percent mortality rate as they fought a war of attrition against suffering, injustice, and homelessness. These were years of hunger and sickness during which fathers and mothers witnessed their children perish. These children are among the estimated 5,000 refugees who lie in marked and unmarked graves in a burial ground near the al-Tash Camp." (Mission Free Iran (15 July 2011) *Abandoned to the Burning Sands: Surviving Iranian Refugees in al-Waleed Camp, Iraq, Call Out from the Desert*)

An Associated Press report states:

"Khatoon Abdullahi, her husband and three daughters fled on foot into Iraq from their home across the border. Iraqi army buses transported the refugees to a Kurdish town in northern Iraq. In 1982, her family settled in Al Tash. 'There was nothing here - no water, no electricity. We lived in tents in the dust and dirt,' said Abdullahi, 50, speaking in Kurdish." (Associated Press (29 April 2003) *Regime collapse brings opportunity for Iranian Kurdish refugees in Iraq*)

An Inter Press Service report states:

"Sadr, an Iranian Kurd refugee who successfully made it to Jordan in 2003, recalled life in the Al-Tash camp: "There population of the camp was more than 10,000 people, and the camp was surrounded by barbed wire. The Iraqi government gave us ID cards on which was written, you don't have the right to go outside Ramadi city. During all these years we had no facilities, formal schools or health services. And unfortunately no organization helped us."" (Inter Press Service (20 June 2006) *World Refugee Day: Iraqi Kurds Stuck in Desert No-Man's Land*)

An article published by World Magazine states:

"'Al Tash is not home. It is prison,' says a man who identifies himself only as Khalid. Like many others in no man's land, he still fears the spies of the Iranian regime, though he's perhaps 1,000 miles from Tehran. An intense, bearded man in a white ski jacket interrupts with a tirade in Kurdish. Khalid interprets: His friend is 30 years old and has never been to school. Saddam wouldn't allow education, he says. For 23 years he has been a refugee. The Al Tash camp is all he can remember, but it was never home. Conditions there were terrible, even worse than no man's land. He'll never go back, he vows." (World Magazine (10 May 2003) *Pitching the tent cities?*)

A Human Rights Watch report, in a section headed "Iranian Kurds" states:

"One spokesperson for the camp residents and a KDPI member, Abdullah Hassan Zadeh, told Human Rights Watch: 'We are refugees in name but in reality we are hostages. The Iraqis took us from our homes and brought us here. We have been in this camp for twenty-three years and no one has come to see us before.' He went on to say that since the end of the war, the

refugees in the camp have been very apprehensive about their security and welfare, given that there was no state control over law and order. Abdullah continued:

Since this war ended, we have been afraid of armed gangs who come from other provinces to loot. The tribes in this area are also armed. Both during and since the war, we have received verbal messages like 'We are coming for you.' The tribes here do not attack us but there are armed gangs. We went to some of the tribal leaders to ask for their help in protecting us. They said they would do what was in their power. The Iraqi police who used to guard this camp told us, after Baghdad was surrounded, that armed looters would be coming for us. Over the past two weeks, about 1,000 families have left the camp for Jordan. Today seven families left. There is no official authority left to secure our situation here. We are afraid for the safety of our families, and we are also afraid that we will be forgotten and end up staying here for another ten years." (Human Rights Watch (9 May 2003) *Flight From Iraq: Attacks on Refugees and other Foreigners and their Treatment in Jordan*, p.8)

This section of the report also states:

"Fears over the security situation was the major reason cited by most refugees for their flight out of al-Tash camp. However, they also expressed concern about their economic situation and their dwindling food and water supplies. They told Human Rights Watch that they used to receive twenty-five dinars per person from the Iraqi government, but that since 1991, the general decline in the economy had made this sum worthless. Consequently, they generated income by buying goods in al-Ramadi and selling them on the black market, and that this economic activity was no longer possible since many of the refugees felt unsafe to leave the camp. A member of the camp committee, Muhammad Reza'i, told Human Rights Watch that a delegation representing the refugees had gone to Baghdad on April 22 to seek help from the ICRC, principally because of the dire humanitarian situation in the camp. He said that their food supplies were running out and they had no medical staff to run the clinic." (ibid, p.9)

A report from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states:

"Things went from bad to worse for the Iranian refugees at the Al Tash camp outside Baghdad the day the government of Saddam Hussein fell in April. The refugees of Kurdish descent remained dependent upon UN food handouts. There was little water and electricity in the ensuing months. And day and night gunfire and grenade blasts echoed through the camp." (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (8 July 2003) *Iranian refugees flee Al Tash camp*)

See also UNHCR report which states:

"Located around 60 km from Fallujah and 12 km from Ramadi, Al Tash was badly affected by the heavy fighting in the area in the autumn of 2004. In November 2004, the police station located inside the camp was attacked. The previously well-provisioned camp was also suffering sporadic cuts in its electricity and water supplies, medical care and educational activities. The

chronic insecurity in this part of Iraq has also meant that UNHCR, its partners and the government authorities have been limited in their ability to respond to the refugees' needs. As a result, by February of this year its population had dwindled to under 5,000." (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (10 November 2005) *Last group of Iranian Kurd refugees starts relocation from endangered Iraq camp*)

An Associated Press report states:

"Nearly 3,000 Iranian Kurds at a decades-old refugee camp in western Iraq have been left without police protection as residents and local security forces flee fighting in the area, the U.N. refugee agency said Friday. About 1,400 refugees fled the Al-Tash camp, about 30 miles from Fallujah, earlier this week because of the violence, including an attack by armed men on a police post inside the camp, said Jennifer Pagonis, spokeswoman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. 'The police station is now empty, and there is no one to provide security for the remaining 2,800 refugees we think are still in Al-Tash,' Pagonis said in Geneva. Aid workers have been unable to gain access because of the fighting, and the refugee agency is concerned that delivery of monthly food rations has been stopped because of the violence." (Associated Press (26 November 2004) *U.N.: Violence leaves 3,000 Iranian Kurd refugees in western Iraq cut off from aid, left without protection*)

An article published on the official website of the US Marine Corps states:

"The Kurdish refugees living here have little potable water, virtually no sanitation system, no electricity and limited access to medical equipment." (US Marine Corps (11 May 2004) *Marines reach out to refugee camp*)

The US Department of State country report on Iraq for the events of 2005, in a section headed "Protection of Refugees", states:

"Iranian Kurds in the Al Tash Camp near Ramadi in Al-Anbar and Turkish Kurds in the Makhmour Camp in Ninewah became increasingly vulnerable due to the deteriorating infrastructure and security in both locations. Groups not affiliated with the government harassed, threatened, and abused residents of both camps." (US Department of State (8 March 2006) *2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*)

A UNHCR report, in a section headed "Iranian Kurdish refugees", comments on conditions for refugees in Al-Tash in 2005 as follows:

"Those refugees who have remained in the Al-Tash Camp have become increasingly vulnerable to deteriorating living conditions and are faced with a chronic lack of electricity, water supplies, medical care and educational activities. In addition, the local population is increasingly growing hostile towards the refugees and insurgent groups may be seeking to recruit dissatisfied and desperate camp inhabitants. UNHCR is aware of the arrest of 18 Iranian Kurds from Al-Tash by the MNF since November 2004. The chronic insecurity in this part of Iraq has also meant that UNHCR, its partners and the government authorities have been limited in their ability to respond to the refugees' needs." (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (3 October 2005) *Country of Origin Information: Iraq*, p.26)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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