

Remarks of Steven M. Schneebaum
Counsel to the U.S. Families and Friends of the People of Camp Ashraf
Stockholm, Sweden
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My friends:

Thank you for inviting me to come from the United States to be with you today, as we gather to reaffirm the rights, the dignity, and the integrity of the People of Camp Ashraf. I bring greetings from American friends and family members of the People of Ashraf, and gratitude and respect for those who join today to demonstrate commitment to their well-being.

It is a special privilege to know that, as I speak to you here today in Stockholm, where the temperature hovers below zero degrees Centigrade, my words are being broadcast to my friends in an oasis in the desert at Ashraf, in Diyala Province, Iraq. I am especially proud to be able to use the words "my friends" when I speak of them. I have visited Ashraf, and I have met with the women and men whose courage we salute today. I have seen first-hand the quality of their commitment, and the depth of their dedication. I have witnessed the cooperative principles by which they govern their own lives, under very trying circumstances. And I have certainly observed their conviction regarding the role of women among their number, and in the secular Iran of the future that they envisage.

I am here today because I want to express, as I did when I was with them in January 2004, my personal solidarity with the People of Ashraf.

I think that it is perfectly reasonable for anyone who has not visited Ashraf to wonder what in the world would motivate a perfectly normal, educated, and articulate person to put off the chance for worldly success in favor of a life of seclusion, hardship, and deprivation. But having been to Ashraf, I know the answer. The People of Ashraf are not some cult of self-denying ascetics. They have created a wonderful life and society. They have a vision for the great nation to which they long to return. And that vision motivates them. That vision is of an Iran that lives in peace with its neighbors, that is not fundamentalist, that does not support terrorism within or outside its borders, that does not abuse the rights of its citizens, that does not export deadly weapons or the fanatics who use them against innocents, that does not deny the Holocaust, and that has neither the need nor the ambition to build a nuclear weapon.

It is an unacceptable insult to the women and men of Ashraf to suggest that they are driven by anything other than this vision. While the success of their mission lies still in the future, they are encouraged by the knowledge that their very presence -- their very existence -- frightens the mullahs' regime to its core. It is for that reason that the disinformation engines fueled by Tehran find it necessary to defame the People of Ashraf at every opportunity.

Yet the truth is simple, as a matter of both law and fact. The truth is that the People of Ashraf are protected under the Fourth Geneva Convention. The truth is that they are entitled to respect for their rights guaranteed by international humanitarian law. The truth is that they may not be

defamed, they may not be deported, and they may not be disrespected. The truth is that, if we are looking for terrorists, the place to look for them is not Ashraf. It is Tehran, in the palaces of the clerics' power.

It is time for the charade to end. It is time for reality to be faced. It is time for the United States, the European Union, and other governments that claim a dedication to democracy to end their criminalization of political speech and beliefs. It is time for them to end their implicit support for the fundamentalist regime whose human rights abuses and whose nuclear ambitions they outwardly condemn. It is time for the terrorist designation of the PMOI, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, and all of their affiliated organizations to be withdrawn. It is time for the West to recognize the PMOI as a legitimate resistance group, which espouses democratic ideals and seeks change by peaceful means. It is time to permit the PMOI to enter the marketplace of ideas, where it will succeed, or fail, based on the merits of its arguments.

It is time too for the Government of Iraq officially to recognize the People of Ashraf as refugees, who cannot return to their country of origin because of a legitimate fear of persecution on the basis of their deeply-held political convictions.

These latest accusations against the PMOI, and the People of Ashraf, are absurd and outrageous. The idea that the women of Ashraf are there because they have been raped into submission is offensive to them, and even more offensive to those who are falsely alleged to have committed such dreadful crimes against their comrades, whom they obviously hold in such high esteem.

But at the same time, once again the supporters of the Iranian regime here show their true colors. They cannot conceive of a society in which women are empowered to make free choices, and use their freedom to elect lives of commitment to democratic change. They cannot imagine a world in which people act out of anything other than fear of violence, which is the exclusive currency of their oppressive regime. They cannot understand a society based on respect for the rights of all, including religious and cultural minorities. They cannot, in short, imagine Camp Ashraf.

But they are quite correct in one respect: the existence and resolve of the People of Ashraf do, in fact, pose a most serious threat to their plans to dominate the Middle East, to export their ideology throughout the region, to "wipe Israel off the map," and to become a nuclear power. And they are correct that they are locked in a life-and-death struggle, one that pits the ideology of extremism and fundamentalism against the energy, the enthusiasm, and the dedication of the People of Ashraf.

These, my friends, are the fundamental differences between the regime in Tehran and the men and women we salute today.

International law protects the People of Ashraf. International law recognizes their rights as humans: rights that are not dependent on the benevolence of any government, which are not granted or withheld by governments within their discretion or according to their whims, but which lie at the very core of the international legal system. Those rights must be honored even when nations and their leaders would betray them. International law must prevail against the assaults of extremists, fanatics, and demagogues of every description.

And if it does – and when it does – then the people of Ashraf will continue to be safe, will continue to thrive, and will continue to inspire us with their ever-more-successful work for a free, democratic, non-fundamentalist, and non-nuclear Iran.

Thank you.