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– G. K. Chesterton

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April 24, 2004

Fallujah Residents Report US Forces Engaged in Collective Punishment

by Dahr Jamail

Three families of refugees from the besieged city of Fallujah who are seeking refuge in the Al-Adhamiya neighborhood of Baghdad, described the conditions in the embattled city of Fallujah as "a horrible disaster." A man called Khaled Abu Mujahed, speaking from Fallujah on behalf of the Islamic Party, stated that while some relief supplies are getting inside the city, a great number of families remain trapped in their homes, and the stench of dead bodies has become overpowering.

Refugees streamed out of Fallujah when fighting began after United States Marines placed the city under siege, cut off power supplies and began an invasion of the city. Resistance forces referred to by locals as mujahideen fought back, killing scores of US troops. Americans killed hundreds of Iraqi civilians, plus an unknown number of Iraqi fighters.

Crowded inside an empty house in the Al-Adhamiya district of Baghdad, Abu Muher, patriarch of one family that left Fallujah last Saturday, told of a harrowing journey out of his home city. "We were nearly bombed by the Americans when we tried to leave on Friday," he said. "Bombs fell in front and behind us, so we had to turn back. Saturday we were lucky to escape."

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Dahr Jamail is the Baghdad correspondent for *The NewStandard*. Originally from Anchorage, Alaska, Dahr writes about the effects of the US occupation on the people of Iraq, since the mainstream media in the US has in large part, he believes, failed to do so.

To find out more about Dahr's coverage of Iraq, visit [Dahr's support pages](#).

To read Dahr's weblog, [click here](#).

Estimates of total refugees vary, but most reports suggest at least 60,000 Fallujans – or about a quarter of the city's population – have fled Fallujah for Baghdad and other cities.

Abu Muher said US warplanes were bombing the city heavily last Saturday prior to his departure, and that Marine snipers continued to take their toll, shot after shot, on residents of the besieged city. "There were so many snipers, anyone leaving their house was killed," he recalled.

Abu Muher, along with two other men from Fallujah who arrived in Baghdad last weekend, said American warplanes had dropped cluster bombs on a road behind their houses in Fallujah. One of the men was too afraid to permit his name to be used in this article. "My neighbors saw the bomblets," he said, "and I heard the horrible sound that only the cluster bombs make when they are dropped on us. My home was hit by their shrapnel. I was too afraid to leave my home to look for myself because of the snipers."

Abdul Aziz, the 15 year-old son of Abu Muher, stated, "I saw two of my neighbors shot by US snipers when I went outside one time. I also saw some of the small cluster bombs on the ground that were dropped by the warplanes of the Americans. Most times, we were too afraid even to look out of our windows."

Another refugee, speaking on condition of anonymity, angrily asked, "This is the way the Americans are freeing Iraq? America's freedom is killing Iraqis. Fallujah is becoming another Palestine. How long will we have to live like this?"

The three men stated that the city remains without electricity, and although they had running water, they used a generator most of the time.

Abu Muher's neighbor, a man named Abdel Salam, said medical relief was being delayed or prevented from reaching the people of Fallujah. "Sunday when we left the city, we saw an ambulance from the United Arab

Emirates turned around from the main checkpoint by the Americans. Why are they not allowing ambulances into Fallujah?"

According to official US military statements, ambulances are being escorted into Fallujah on a regular basis. Reached for comment earlier this week, Christy Clemmons of the Coalition Provisional Authority press center for Iraq's Ministry of Health insisted emergency vehicles were reaching the city. "We are working with the Ministry of Health and have so far permitted 46 ambulances to Fallujah," she said. "The US military are escorting the ambulances since in the past they have been commandeered by insurgents and used to attack US soldiers."

Iraq Red Crescent Secretary General Faris Hamed told *The NewStandard* on Monday that no Red Crescent ambulances had been allowed into Fallujah since April 13, during the peak of fighting in the city. Hamed has been unreachable for an updated report.

A resident of Al-Adhamiya willingly cleared his home for these refugees and is housing them, free of charge. He donated food to them as well.

Speaking by phone today from inside Fallujah, Islamic Party spokesman Abu Mujahed, who is assisting in the distribution of aid as well as negotiations with the US military, said there is still a large number of civilians in Fallujah who cannot get out of the besieged city.

"So many people are lacking water, electricity and medical services," he said. "Most of the time nobody can get in or out of Fallujah."

Mujahed stated that yesterday the US military broke the supposed ceasefire by staging an incursion into the Julan neighborhood as well as the Industrial sector of Fallujah. He added, "This is a disaster! Only a few people can get to the main hospital because the Americans are controlling it. Snipers are firing into Julan and killing so many civilians."

US military reports said the assault on Julan was in response to attacks by insurgents. Battalion commander Lt. Colonel Brennan Byrne told the Associated Press he considered the insurgent activity to be a "major breach" of the agreement the US military says it brokered with resistance forces. The AP further reported that 20 Iraqis and no Americans were killed in the overnight skirmishes.

Mujahed said that supplies from throughout Iraq were being sent to Fallujah. He said they had even received aid shipments from the followers of the rebellious Shi'ite cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr, and he felt the situation was uniting all Iraqis.

"Women are bringing their gold from Baquba, a man in a wheelchair from Kirkuk brought his wheelchair, then used crutches to leave after he donated it, and supplies are coming from Mosul, Adhamiya, Tikrit, Nasariyah, Baquba, everywhere in Iraq you can think of," Mujahed said.

The party official also reported that while 50 families were allowed to return to Fallujah Tuesday, only seven were permitted Wednesday. Many refugees report having found nowhere suitable to go outside their hometown.

The lockdown was ordered despite reports from Fallujah residents that many of the mujahideen have turned their weapons over to Iraqi Police as a condition of the ceasefire edict. Lt. Col. Byrne told the AP most of the weapons turned over in accordance with US demands were unusable and did not comply with the Marines' insistence on acquiring all of Fallujah's heavy weaponry.

In retaliation for the fighters' noncompliance, Byrne said the Marines would not permit any of the hundreds of Iraqis lined up at a nearby checkpoint to return to their homes, at least for the time being.

"We have at least 700 dead from the fighting," Mujahed reported from inside Fallujah. "So many of them are

children and women. The stench from the dead bodies in parts of the city is unbearable."

He said US aircraft had bombed five houses in Julan the previous night, and the mujahideen have now taken positions and are waiting for the Marines to return for the full scale invasion the US has threatened.

Coalition spokesman Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt said that US Marines continue "aggressive patrols and offensive operations," in the Fallujah area, "as well as providing humanitarian assistance to the citizens of Fallujah." Iraqis interviewed for this story said they had only witnessed the former aspect of the dual role.

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