

Iraq opposition calls for human rights monitors

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>> By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

>> LONDON, Jan 31 (Reuters) - The main opponents of President Saddam Hussein appealed to the international community on Friday to station human rights monitors in Iraq to ensure the end of repression in the country if he were deposed.

>> Opposition groups across the board, which have been trying to shift the focus on Iraq beyond weapons of mass destruction, joined an independent Arab campaign to send Arab League and U.N. monitors to Iraq.

>> The monitors would oversee a peaceful transition to democratic rule, even if the United States occupied the country.

>> The campaign, which was launched earlier this month from Beirut, includes Palestinian professor Edward Said, Lebanese lawyer Chibli Mallat and Syrian intellectual Sadeq al-Azm.

>> They also aim to exercise pressure on Arab governments to join in the isolation of Saddam, which could help convince him to leave office in exchange for amnesty -- avoiding war and the potential death of thousands of Iraqis.

>> "Human rights monitors must be stationed all over Iraq. Work is overdue on the mechanism and the strong U.N. resolutions necessary," said Nabil al-Mousawi, spokesman for the Iraqi National Congress, which is based in London.

>> Mousawi said the opposition was under no illusion that the possibility of Saddam leaving power voluntarily was small, but Arab countries that have political and economic dealings with the Iraqi leader should boycott him.

>> "It is time to shake the impotence of Arab governments. Some are afraid of Iraq changing to a democracy in record time. They would love the United States to install a military dictator to replace Saddam," Mousawi told Reuters.

>> U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said earlier this month that Washington would not want to run Iraq for long after an "appropriate" form of government was established in the country.

>> He declined to say how long U.S. troops could stay after any war against Iraq to rid it of its alleged weapons of mass destruction, for which U.N. inspectors resumed searching in November.

>> Many in the opposition are sceptical that the United States favours democracy in Iraq, although the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act supported a transition to pluralism and authorised financing for some opposition groups.

>> Hamid al-Bayati, a senior official of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, said his Tehran-based group was also behind the campaign.

>> "Human rights is fundamental to the future Iraq. Any move that could help depose Saddam and spares the lives of the Iraqi people is positive," Bayati said.

>> Sadiq al-Mousawi, spokesman for the Constitutional Monarchist Movement, said: "We want to avoid a repeat of the history of Iraq under

>> Saddam."
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