

RTRS-Arab intellectuals seek Saddam resignation

By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

Thursday, 02 January 2003 17:59:33

LONDON, Jan 2 (Reuters) - About a dozen Arab writers and lawyers plan to appeal to the Arab world to put pressure on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to step down to avert a war.

"We call upon public opinion in the Arab world to exercise pressure for the dismissal from power of Saddam Hussein and his close aides in order to stop a war that threatens catastrophe for the people of the region," said a copy of the appeal, obtained by Reuters and set to be published later this week.

"The immediate resignation of Saddam, whose rule over three decades has been a nightmare for Iraq and the Arab world, is the only way around further violence," it reads.

The appeal -- made by lawyers and writers fed up with their governments' opposition to U.S. policy on Iraq without presenting an alternative -- also calls for the stationing across Iraq of international human rights monitors to oversee a transition to democratic rule.

The idea of asylum for Saddam in return for his resignation was put forward late last year in an open letter to Saddam by Ghassan Tueini, a former Lebanese statesman and publisher of Beirut's influential An-Nahar daily.

The letter was entitled "resignation is more honourable".

About a dozen Arab thinkers, including Lebanese lawyer Chibli Mallat and Egyptian writer Yussri Nasrallah and Elias al-Khoury, an editor of An-Nahar, have seized on the proposal and were set to make their appeal.

They included their appeal in a draft blueprint for democracy in the Middle East and were trying to get Iraqi opposition leaders in London to sign it.

"The seriousness with which the Iraqi dictator is dealt with must one day be applied by a just American government to those Israeli leaders who similarly advocate the practice of unfettered violence," said a copy of the blueprint, which is in the drafting stage.

"The sense Arab Middle Easterners have of being consistently abandoned or lied to by American policymakers also rests on the more nuanced but no less tolerant American support for long-standing autocratic governments across the region, particularly U.S.-friendly governments in the Arab Gulf and the Levant."

The draft appeal came as Iran's Entekhab daily said the United States wanted to remove Saddam from power without the bloodshed or the billions of dollars required for a second Gulf war.

The German foreign ministry denied Entekhab's report that Germany's foreign minister told his Iranian counterpart by telephone that Washington sought a peaceful

change with the help of Russian President Vladimir Putin.
(London newsroom +44 20 7542 4087)