



Remembering Halabja

Survivors, human rights experts, MPs and journalists mark 26th anniversary of chemical attacks in Iraq at Westminster seminar

From 14-16 March 1988, 5,000 men, women and children were murdered and thousands of people injured in a sustained chemical attack by Saddam Hussein on his own people. Today, we remember them.

Westminster, London 10 March 2014

London, UK (UK.KRG.org) - Today, UK MPs will join survivors, human rights experts and friends of Kurdistan as they gather in remembrance of the 5000 men, women and children who, 26 years ago, died in what remains the largest chemical weapons attack ever directed against a civilian population.

From 14-16 March 1988, the people of Halabja were subjected to a systematic campaign, driven by their own government, to cause them as much pain, suffering and devastation as possible.

The small town in eastern Iraqi Kurdistan was first targeted by an air raid, during which bombs were strategically dropped to shatter all windows and prevent those who survived this initial stage from escaping the shower of chemical weapons that would ensue.

Those who the fumes were unable to kill were left either severely burnt, blinded or maimed for life by the attack – with many going on to have children born with severe birth defects as a result.

For those who survived, however, it is the memory of the distress they felt as they lay surrounded by their loved ones slowly choking to death, which has left the biggest scar.

Ms Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK, says, 'Today we remember our brothers and sisters who were brutally attacked in their thousands and slaughtered like animals. Their murder was a clear act of genocide, part of an attempt by Saddam Hussein to wipe out the Kurdish population. On behalf of those who died and those who survived, we call on the

British Government and the international community to stand up for what is morally right and recognise this targeted mass murder of innocents as genocide. It is the very least we deserve.'

While Halabja continues to haunt the people of Kurdistan to this day, it is but one of the many atrocities suffered by the Kurdish people between 1963 and 1990, at the hands of Saddam Hussein's regime.

The story of the thousands of Kurds who were taken from their homes and either shot, tortured or buried alive, is only now being told.

In 2013, following a year-long campaign for justice for the thousands of Kurds who were murdered en masse in Iraq, the UK Parliament formally recognised the mass murder of Kurdish people in Iraq as genocide.

The fight to have the suffering of the Kurdistan people formally recognised by the UK Government and governments across the globe, as well as international community and organisations such as the United Nations Security Council, United Nations General Assembly, and the European Commission, however, continues.

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Notes to Editors:

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Relevant websites:

KRG UK Representation: <http://uk.krg.org/>

Justice for genocide campaign: <http://www.justice4genocide.com/>

Key facts about the genocide

- The genocide of Kurdish people in Iraq began in the 1960s and continued until the late 1980s, beginning with the arabisation of villages around Kirkuk in 1963.
- The genocide later involved the deportation and disappearances of Faylee Kurds in the 1970s-80s, the murder of 8,000 male Barzanis in 1983, the use of chemical weapons in the late 1980s, most notably Halabja, and finally the Anfal campaign of 1988.
- 4,500 villages were razed to the ground between 1976 and 1988 undermining the potential of Iraqi Kurdistan's agricultural resources and destroying its rural way of life and heritage.
- From February to September 1988, the regime implemented the Anfal campaign, which was a comprehensive plan to destroy all life in rural areas of Kurdistan through eight stages of military operations. The KRG estimates that 182,000 Kurdish people were killed during the Anfal campaign

alone. Independent sources estimate 100,000 to more than 150,000 deaths and as many as 100,000 widows and an even greater number of orphans.

- The true scale of the killing from the 1960s 1990 is not yet known.
- In 2006, the Iraq Human Rights Ministry estimated there to be 270 mass graves in Iraq containing between 10 and 10,000 bodies in each. However, the International Commission of Missing Persons (ICMP) believes that there are far more mass graves than this estimate from 2006. So far, 8 out of 10 mass graves excavated in South of Iraq have been Kurdish graves.
- **Gendercide:** Throughout the Kurdish Anfal, men and boys of 'battle age' were rounded up and 'disappeared' en masse. Most of these men and boys were captured, transported to mass graves and shot in mass executions. Of the total victims of Anfal, an estimated 70% were men, approximately aged 15 to 50. [*'Iraq's crime of genocide' by Human Rights Watch 1994, p.266 – 268*]

Recognition of the genocide to date: countries and groups

The UK Parliament: In February 2012, in a historic Parliamentary debate on the Kurdish genocide, the UK Parliament formally recognised the mass murder of Kurdish people in Iraq as an act of genocide. The debate was secured by Kurdish-born British Conservative MP and Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region Nadhim Zahawi MP and other members of the group.

Iraq

- **The Iraqi High Tribunal** recognised four crimes committed against the Kurdish people as acts of genocide: the Halabja chemical weapons attack of March 16, 1988, the Anfal campaign, February to September 1988, the deportations of Faylee Kurds during the 1980s, and the Barzani disappearances of 1983.
- **The Iraqi High Tribunal** found Sultan Hashim Ahmad, Hussein Rashid al-Tikriti, and Ali Hassan al-Majid (known as Chemical Ali) guilty of genocide in 2007.
- In 2008 the **Iraqi Presidential Council** approved Resolution 26 ratifying a parliamentary resolution condemning the crimes of Saddam Hussein's regime against the Kurds as acts of genocide. This resolution affirmed the previous parliamentary resolution that declared all acts committed against the Kurds in Iraqi-Kurdistan by the former regime were to be considered genocide.
- In March 2010, the **Iraqi Supreme Court** ruled that the 1988 attacks on the Kurdish population were indeed genocide.

Norway: In November 2012, the Norwegian government recognised the judgment of the Iraqi High Tribunal that the Anfal campaign and the chemical attack on Halabja were genocide.

Sweden: In December 2012, the Swedish Parliament recognized that the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein against the Iraqi Kurds constituted genocide. Swedish recognition was established following a vote organized by the Swedish Foreign Policy Committee on the subject. The proposal to recognize the genocide won unanimous support from the eight political parties which form the Parliament.

South Korea: In June 2013, the South Korean parliament also recognised the genocide.

United States: On 19 November 2013, US Representatives Chris Van Hollen and Marsha Blackburn, tabled a resolution in the Congress calling for the House of Representatives and the government to consider and recognise Kurdish Genocide. The resolution H.Res.422 deplores the genocide crimes committed against the Kurdish people and calls for the United States Government to examine the decades-long campaign aimed at exterminating the Kurds and to recognise the crimes as acts of genocide according to the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, to which the United States is a signatory.

Human Rights Watch: In 1993, US-based Human Rights Watch launched an extensive investigation into the Anfal campaign against the Kurds by Saddam Hussein's regime and concluded that it was genocide. The findings were published in a comprehensive report in 1993, titled *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds* (<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/>).

The Hague: In 2005, Franz Van Anraat, a Dutch trader, was found guilty by the Dutch national court in The Hague, of complicity in war crimes by selling chemical weapons to Saddam Hussein's regime. He was initially found guilty of genocide charges but those were reverted to war crimes by the Court of Appeals. However, all prosecutors in the Appeals case stated that the crimes constituted genocide.

Swiss Peace: The research institute Swiss Peace recognized the genocide in 2008.