

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



**JUSTICE FOR IRAQI KURDS**

*It's time to recognise the truth*

## **UK Parliament formally recognizes Kurdish genocide in Iraq**

- **More than 27,000 signatures on Government e-petition calls for recognition of the genocide**
- **Recognition marks ten year anniversary of the invasion in Iraq and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the chemical attacks on the people of Halabja**
- **Spokespeople available today include: Nadhim Zahawi MP, Robert Halfon MP, KRG High Representative to the UK, Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, KRG Minister of Martyrs and Anfal (Genocide) Affairs Aram Ahmed**

**28<sup>th</sup> February 2013:** Today, in a historic move, the UK Parliament formally recognised the mass murder of Kurdish people in Iraq as genocide. The decision to recognise the genocide was reached at the end of a Parliamentary debate in the main House of Commons chamber, secured by Nadhim Zahawi MP and other members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region.

Formal recognition of the genocide comes in response to a tireless campaign, supported by more than 27,600 British citizens, who have all signed an e-petition demanding justice for the murdered Kurds. The e-petition, sponsored by Nadhim Zahawi MP, was launched in March 2012 and has since been supported throughout the year by the Kurdish community, the Kurdistan Regional Government UK Representation, and British MPs from all political parties, especially those who are members of the highly supportive All Party Parliamentary Group for Kurdistan including Robert Halfon MP, and Meg Munn MP.

Kurdish survivors of the chemical weapons attack in Halabja, who are now British citizens, were in the gallery to listen to the debate. Joining them, were the KRG Anfal minister, Aram Ahmed, KRG High Representative to the UK, Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman and the Iraqi embassy's chief of mission. All three sat together in the gallery - illustrating the new Iraq.

**Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK, Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman says:**

“We thank our parliamentary supporters in Britain and all who have signed the petition. We believe that this historic recognition will accelerate fruitful links between our peoples and will help the survivors of the genocide and victims' families to realise that the UK does indeed take a stand against the mass murder of innocent people.”

Speaking during the debate, **Iraqi-born Conservative MP and Co-Chair of the APPG on Kurdistan, Nadhim Zahawi, said:**

“Saddam unleashed all the resources of a modern, industrialised state on the Kurdish population of his own country. His forces used chemical weapons, concentration camps and aerial bombardment, all methods that were last seen during the Second World War. If it was not genocide then one has to ask what would be?”

**Robert Halfon MP and Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Kurdistan** spoke about the horror of the torture prisons in Iraq and the countless mass graves which have been found. He said: “When I visited Kurdistan, I was told that ‘there is another Iraq buried under Iraq’.”

He went on to say: "If you define genocide as scientifically planned mass murder then the Kurds suffered genocide. First they were demonized, then marginalized, persecuted and massacred – all the stages of genocide."

Parliamentary recognition of the genocide marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Iraq invasion, or as the Kurds call it, 'the liberation'. It also comes 25 years after the notorious 1988 chemical gas attacks on Halabja by Saddam Hussein. Here five thousand civilians died in incredible agony and estimates suggest a further 12,000 were injured. Many still suffer from their injuries and poison-gas related illnesses.

During the preceding years, untold numbers of Iraqis 'disappeared', most presumed dead, murdered by Saddam Hussein's forces. In its final stages alone, during the 1988 'Al Anfal Campaign' over 182,000 Kurds are believed to have died. Thousands of men, women and children systematically murdered. From 1976 to the late 1980s, about 4,500 Kurdish villages and towns were destroyed including the town of Qla Dizeh which along with its 70,000 inhabitants was literally wiped off the map.

"Recognition is the first step towards justice for those who died and those who survived with the emotional and physical scars," says Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman. "We hope it will also protect innocents from suffering a similar horror again."

The Parliamentary motion was passed with no opposition.

## Ends

### Notes to Editors:

For further information or photos, please contact Stephanie Blott or Helen Ayres at [KRG@luther.co.uk](mailto:KRG@luther.co.uk) or call 0207 618 9193.

The Government response to the e-petition: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31014>

The e-petition can be found here: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31014>

Campaign website: <http://www.justice4genocide.com/index.php>

### The motion to debated was as follows:

The 25th anniversary of the Kurdish genocide and its contemporary relevance

That this House formally recognises the Genocide against the people of Iraqi Kurdistan and encourages governments, the EU and UN to do likewise; believes that this will enable Kurdish people, many in the UK, to achieve justice for their considerable loss; further believes that it would also enable Britain, the home of democracy and freedom, to send out a message of support for international conventions and human rights, which is made even more pressing by the slaughter in Syria and the possible use of chemical arsenals.

### Some key facts about the genocide

- The genocide of Kurdish people in Iraq began in the 1960s and continued until the late 1980s.
- In 2006, the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) estimated there being 270 mass graves in Iraq containing between 10 and 10,000 bodies in each grave.

- An estimated 180,000 Kurdish people were killed between 1987 and 1988 alone during Saddam Hussein's genocidal campaign called Anfal. The true scale of the killing from the 1960s to 1990 is not yet known.
- In the 1980s, the Kurdish population was also attacked with chemical weapons. During the most vicious assault, Saddam Hussein dropped bombs containing chemical weapons on the Kurdish city of Halabja gassing as many as 5,000 men, women and children to death indiscriminately and leaving tens of thousands of people injured. They died slowly, in unimaginable pain from chemical burns. Of those who survived, many still live with painful injuries and many children are born with birth defects.
- In 1983, 8,000 men and boys of 'battle age' from the Kurdish Barzani tribe were rounded up on trucks and vanished. The bodies are now being discovered in mass graves. From then on, men and boys as young as 13 were targeted, driven far away from their homes in trucks and executed en masse. Many victims were tied together, made to stand on the lip of pre-dug graves and shot in the back so they would fall forward into them. Others were made to lie down in pairs, sardine-style, next to mounds of fresh corpses before being killed. Some, who didn't die from gun shots were then buried alive.
- Of the total Kurdish victims, an estimated 70% were men, according to Human Rights Watch
- 90% of Kurdish villages and more than 20 small towns and cities were completely destroyed during the campaign to wipe out the Kurdish population in Iraq.
- In 1993, US-based Human Rights Watch launched an extensive investigation into the attack on the Kurds by Saddam Hussein's regime and concluded that it was genocide.
- In 2005, the court in the Hague established that the chemical bombing in Kurdistan constituted genocide in a landmark case in 2005 - the Frans Van Anraat Trial. During the Appeal, it was later referred to as 'war crimes'.
- 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.
- The research institute Swiss Peace recognized the genocide in 2008.
- 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.