



## **Kurdistan – honouring the fallen and building a bright future**

**London, 10 April 2014**

London, UK ([UK.KRG.org](http://UK.KRG.org)) – This week, for the first time, a British foreign office minister joined survivors, eye-witnesses and the Kurdish community in London, to honour the victims of Anfal, a campaign which formed part of a wider, decades-long repression of Iraqi Kurds.

Due to ongoing calls from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), together with the Kurdish community in the UK and friends of Kurdistan, for the UK government to formally recognise the Kurdish genocide, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, the British Minister for the Middle East, offered to participate in this year's Anfal Remembrance Day, formally commemorated in Kurdistan on 14<sup>th</sup> April each year.

At the event, which marked Anfal's 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Mr Robertson said, 'I was particularly keen to come tonight and stand alongside you at this remembrance of the Anfal attacks.'

In recognition of the suffering of the Kurds, the Minister said, 'There is no doubt that Iraq's Kurds suffered a terrible injustice under Saddam Hussein. It is important that we reflect on the suffering caused, extend our sympathy to all those affected and reaffirm our belief that no group should be allowed to suffer that fate again.'

While the British government is sympathetic to the notion that Anfal should be recognised as genocide, it says that it is not for governments to decide whether genocide has been committed but it is a matter for international courts.

However, the presence of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister at the Anfal Day commemoration in London marks the new understanding of the seriousness of crimes that were committed.

At the event, Minister Robertson said that the UK should increase its recognition of what happened, 'Indeed, I believe that we should go further in recognizing that suffering, and I am pleased to be here tonight to do just that.'

He updated the audience on the activities of the British mission in Erbil with regards to the remembrance of genocide in the region. He said that so far this year, 'The British Ambassador to Iraq and our Consul General in Erbil visited Halabja in February where they paid their respects at one of the main cemeteries for the victims and also toured the memorial museum in the town.'

The Minister added, 'The Consul General also represented the UK at a recent special ceremony in Erbil attended by HE President Barzani to mark the return of the bodies of over 90 members of the Barzani tribe, who were part of a much larger number murdered and buried in southern Iraq on the orders of Saddam Hussein in 1983.

'The UK will continue to be represented at future ceremonies and to express our sympathy and remembrance of those terrible events.'

In response to Minister Robertson's speech, the KRG Minister Falah Mustafa, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations, thanked the Minister for his attendance and said, 'It is a compassionate gesture and one that carries huge significance for the people of Kurdistan as we continue in our struggle for recognition of the Kurdish genocide and the 182,000 lives lost to it.'

Minister Mustafa, who also spoke at the London event, added, 'We look forward to building an ever stronger relationship with the UK as Kurdistan continues to work towards putting in place the infrastructures we need in order to allow the talent of our people and the riches of our natural resources to secure us a better future.'

Bayan Sami Adbul Rahman, the KRG High Representative to the UK, made an opening speech in which she said, 'The world must learn the lesson of the Kurdish genocide which is that dictators have to be stopped.

Failing to tackle dictators only emboldens their greed and violence. Anfal didn't happen out of the blue in Iraq. There were many other atrocities that led up to it, but no one spoke out and the killing machine against the Kurds only got bigger. Today we remember those who fell and we honour their memory by calling for recognition of the genocide.'

Other guests spoke passionately and movingly about the need for the recognition of Kurdish genocide by the British government and the international community.

They included Faik Nerweyi, Iraqi Ambassador to the UK, Nadhim Zahawi and Meg Munn, MPs and Co-Chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Kurdistan, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, UK Trade Envoy to Iraq, Executive Chairman of the AMAR Foundation which works in Iraq and Kurdistan, and Executive Chairman of the Iraq Britain Business Council (IBBC), and Laween Atroshi, the first British-born Kurdish parliamentary candidate for Labour.

Ambassador Nerweyi said, 'Our sense of having been victims for so long, unfortunately still pervades our society and as a relatively new democratic country, still facing many challenges, we cannot carry this heavy burden alone. In addition to the essential full commitment of the state of Iraq, we need the recognition and support of all free nations and all of their free people.'

Nadhim Zahawi MP reflected on the consequences of inaction and the lessons that must be learnt for the future. 'History has shown that if we let human rights abuses go unchecked and ignored we sow the seeds for future instability, conflict and humanitarian crisis. We only have to cast our gaze to Syria to be reminded of that.'

Meg Munn MP drew parallels with the international community's inaction toward the atrocities being committed in Syria and invited the audience to consider whether in 10 years' time, the world would look back and wonder why so little has been done to prevent them.

Baroness Nicholson expressed strongly her stance that 'recognition would be a small act', and said, 'We had the knowledge, the law, and yet we didn't act. I feel humiliated before you.'

The commemoration also heard harrowing stories from young Kurds, who now live in the UK, but who, as children, witnessed horrific attacks committed against them and their families.

Anfal survivor Bahman Mahmood was born in a village on the outskirts of the city of Qaladiza which was destroyed three times and ultimately razed to the ground. Bahman recollected how his village was surrounded by tanks for days and nights. How the army was planning to 'anfali' them, and how they had a lucky escape because the soldiers realized they were surrounding the wrong village before going on to destroy another village. He concluded his testimony by saying, 'I have been back to Kurdistan since and I can't find my village, it's gone. It was flattened by their bulldozers.'

Genocide survivor, Taban Shoresh, escaped execution as a child. She spoke about soldiers coming to her family's house, to take away her father, a peshmerga. She described how, when they couldn't find him, they took her, her mother and her grandparents instead. She was four years old. They were driven away in buses, along with many others to be imprisoned and executed by being buried alive. Only an incredible act of kindness by fellow Kurds saved them.

Talib Omer was born in Barzan village, where, as a young boy, he lived with his family. He spoke of his memories and of how he survived the attacks against the Barzani clan in 1983 in which 8,000 men and boys disappeared. 'I was just four years old when soldiers attacked our house. I watched helplessly as my father and older brother were dragged from our home. We never saw them again.'

At this poignant and sombre event, everyone was given to wear a badge in a shape of a small white tulip. Created by Della Murad, the artistic director of Gulan, a charity promoting Kurdish culture, the badge is a symbol of Kurdish genocide remembrance. Mrs Murad's son, Basho Anvari, attended the event on her behalf to tell his mother's story. He spoke about her lucky escape as she happened to have

been away during the time of the chemical attack on Halabja, but also the guilt that she has been forced to live with ever since the attack, which killed so many of her family members and friends.

The carefully orchestrated, eight-staged Anfal campaign of 1988 marked the peak of a wider genocide which began decades earlier in which hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children were killed, and which destroyed 4,500 villages together with the region's agriculture and people's livelihoods.

The wider genocide includes the repeated use of chemical weapons, the largest being the chemical attack on the town of Halabja in 1988, the killing of Faylee Kurds throughout the 1970s and 1980s; and the disappearance of 8,000 Barzani boys and men in 1983.

The KRG, together with the Kurdish community, continues to call on the UK Government to follow the example of the House of Commons, which in February 2013 formally recognised Kurdish genocide.

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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**

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. The true scale of the killing from the 1960s to 1990 is not yet known.

6. 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 on Missing Persons (ICMP) believes that there are many more mass graves than this estimate. So far, eight out of 10 mass graves excavated in South of Iraq have been Kurdish graves.
7. In 2013, twenty Iraqi Kurds brought a claim under the French judicial system, against the companies that supplied chemicals to Iraq, facilitating attacks such as that carried out on Halabja in 1988.
8. 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 2013, 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.

**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. It is hoped that Congress will vote on the resolution this year.

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

**Sweden:** In December 2012, the Swedish Parliament recognised 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 recognise the genocide won unanimous support from the eight political parties which form the Parliament.

**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.

### **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.

**Swiss Peace:** The research institute Swiss Peace recognised the genocide in 2008.

**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.

**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/>).