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JUSTICE FOR IRAQI KURDS

It's time to recognise the truth

Campaigners win a Parliamentary debate on the Kurdish genocide in Iraq, following more than 27,000 signatures on Government e-petition

13th February 2013: It has been announced today that the British Parliament will debate a motion calling for formal recognition of the mass murder of Kurdish people in Iraq as genocide. The news follows a tireless campaign for recognition, supported by more than 27,500 British citizens, who have all signed an e-petition demanding justice for the murdered Kurds.

The debate will take place in the main chamber at 1:30pm on the 28th February. It will be based on a votable motion, the successful end result of which is that Parliament will have recognised the genocide.

The debate itself represents a significant victory for the campaign e-petition, sponsored by Nadhim Zahawi MP, which was launched in March last year in a bid to urge the British Government to debate the mass killings and recognize the truth. The campaign 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. Together, they recently made a successful presentation to the Business Committee which allocates time for debates in Parliament.

During the presentation, Nadhim Zahawi MP told the Committee that his father was forced to flee Iraq simply because he was Kurdish and he was not willing to join the Baath party. He said that Britain has been heavily involved with the Kurdish people going back to Sykes-Picot, but more recently with Sir John Major who saved the Kurdish people with the no-fly zone and Tony Blair who is seen as the liberator of the Kurds.

Robert Halfon MP said that unless the genocide is recognised internationally, people cannot be brought to justice. Meanwhile, Meg Munn MP said that the debate would have a wider resonance given events in Syria, and Fabian Hamilton MP cited good cross-party support for a debate. Jason McCartney MP, who served as a Royal Air Force officer in the no-fly zone in Zakho, said it would be a fitting tribute to have the debate on the 25th anniversary of the chemical weapons attack on Halabja.

The Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK, Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman said: "The genocide brought unimaginable suffering to our people: families were torn apart, sons and fathers killed en masse or simply buried alive, women and children bombed with poison gas. We believe that

this suffering needs to be acknowledged, not just by us Kurds and Iraqis, but by our friends too, so that the victims' families and the survivors can reach closure and a message is sent out to any other regime oppressing its people or considering using chemical weapons. Imagine how heartened the survivors who are now British citizens would feel to be in the chamber, listening to such a debate."

Ms. Rahman also told the committee how the Swedish and Norwegian parliaments recently debated the genocide and the Kurdish community is wondering why Britain had not yet done the same.

In January, the British Government issued a response to the e-petition which acknowledged that no group suffered more than the Iraqi Kurds. However, the Government response went on to say that it remains the Government's view that it is not for governments to decide whether a genocide has been committed in this case, as this is a complex legal question.

The debate on the 28th February may encourage the Government to change its position.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

For further information or photos, please contact Stephanie Blott or Helen Ayres at 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 be debated is 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.