



Gillian Walnes of the Anne Frank Trust UK speaks at international conference to mark 25th anniversary of genocide in Iraq

Walnes: "The Holocaust draws attention to more recent genocides around the world, reminding us that the human capacity for brutality does not diminish."

21 January 2012: Gillian Walnes, Executive Director of the Anne Frank Trust UK spoke at a conference on the Kurdish genocide in London last week to share her expertise on garnering support for a cause which may seem distant and remote to modern Brits.

The international conference marked the 25th anniversary of the chemical weapons attack on Halabja in Northern Iraq, where 5,000 civilians died and thousands more were injured. The attack was one of many in which more than 180,000 Kurdish people were brutally targeted and murdered, simply because they were Kurdish. Genocide experts, parliamentarians from Norway, Sweden, the UK, Iraq and Kurdistan, joined witnesses and survivors at the conference to expose the true horror of the mass murder of Kurdish people in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and previous regimes and called for international recognition that what happened was genocide.

Currently, only Norway, Sweden and Iraq recognize what happened to the Kurdish people as genocide. In a bid to change this, a government e-petition sponsored by Nadhim Zahawi MP, urging the British Government to recognize the genocide, was launched in March 2012. The petition now has over 27,000 signatures but far more are needed.

Ms Walnes told the conference how the Anne Frank Trust UK worked to raise awareness of genocide.

Ms Walnes said: "The Holocaust draws attention to more recent genocides around the world, reminding us that the human capacity for brutality does not diminish.

"While recognising that with any mass murder there are the common features of a hatred so profound that it enables indifference towards brutality and suffering, and how suspicion of the other and separateness can build over many generations, the unique features of any genocide must also be recognised. If not we can become misled into believing that any set of circumstances can occur anywhere at any time, and we will lose the will to do our utmost to ensure that they don't."

Ms Walnes also told the story of a Kurdish refugee, a teenage girl called Bnar Talabani who won the Anne Frank Award for Moral Courage in 2007.

Bnar Talabani was born into a Kurdish family in Northern Iraq. Several of her family members, including her father and grandfather, were prominent in the rebellion against Saddam Hussein's regime. In 1991, to escape Saddam's bombing of Kurdish villages, Bnar's mother decided to run away with her children.

The family walked for days trying desperately to avoid the continual bombing around them. Because of the lack of food and clean water, Bnar's baby brother became very ill and died within two days of the family crossing over into Iran.

In 1998, Bnar, her mother and sister were granted refugee status and came to England. Bnar was determined not to waste the opportunities she could only dream about in Iraq. In just 13 months she had mastered English to such a level that she passed her 11+ exam.

Bnar has never forgotten the images of war and suffering she witnessed as a small child. She became leader of her school's Amnesty International Group and a landslide vote elected her Head Girl of her school.

Bnar now leads a very normal life and is studying medicine at Cardiff University. She is an exemplary role model for young British people. She loves music, parties, studies hard, has hopes and ambitions, and is a very beautiful young woman.

Bnar also sent a message to the conference delegates. She said: "It is really comforting to see that the stories of so many who were killed will not be forgotten. It is also very sad that people are still suffering today (for example in Syria); sadly, genocide is not a thing of the past."

The e-petition to recognise the Kurdish genocide now has over 27,000 signatures. Please sign here: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31014>

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Notes to Editors:

For further information or photos, please contact Stephanie Blott, Amy Bourke or Helen Ayres at KRG@luther.co.uk or call 0207 618 9193.

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

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

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.