

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



**JUSTICE FOR IRAQI KURDS**

*It's time to recognise the truth*

## **British Government responds to calls to recognize the genocide in Iraq, as more than 26,000 people sign e-petition**

**16<sup>th</sup> January 2013, London:** Today, sustained efforts by British and Kurdish campaigners have harvested a formal British Government response to their calls to recognize the mass murder of Kurdish people in Iraq as genocide but it is disappointing and needs improvement.

Ms Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK says: "Sandwiched between the very welcome acknowledgement of the specific suffering of the Kurds, the importance of minority rights and the strong relationship with the Kurdistan Region and Kurds in the UK is a frankly disappointing and weak view that the UK should wait for an international judicial body to act before it decides to define long-running efforts to eliminate the Kurds as a genocide, although, the Iraqi High Tribunal, the Iraqi Presidential Council and the Iraqi Parliament have endorsed its definition as genocide. We will continue to urge the UK Government to pull out all the stops and go the whole hog by taking a moral stand in defining our suffering as genocide so it becomes harder for it to happen again in Iraq or elsewhere."

An e-petition urging the British Government to recognize the genocide now has more than 26,400 British signatures, demonstrating considerable support for the cause.

The Government response states that:

*The Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein systematically persecuted and oppressed ethnic and religious groups over many years. No group suffered more than the Iraqi Kurds. This year we will remember, in particular, the atrocity of the attack on Halabja in 1988, when Iraqi planes used poison gas to kill thousands of Iraqi Kurds.*

However, the Government response goes 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. Where an international judicial body finds a crime to have been a genocide, however, this will often play an important part in whether we will recognise one as such.*

Tomorrow, Kurdistan Regional Government Foreign Minister, Mr. Falah Mustafa, will speak at an international conference in London, alongside genocide legal experts, humanitarians, parliamentarians and survivors of the genocide in Iraq. He will call for international recognition of the Kurdish genocide. The conference marks the 10th anniversary year of the international intervention in Iraq which ended Saddam Hussein's brutal regime and the 25th anniversary of the chemical attack on Halabja, and the Anfal genocide operation during which 180,000 Kurdish men, women and children were brutally murdered.

Conference speakers will reflect on the brutal reality of what happened to the Kurdish people in Iraq and make the case for why it must be recognized in order to prevent it ever happening again.

Ms Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman says: "We are heartened by the public support for our cause shown by the e-petition and the British government's recognition of the atrocities committed against our people and support for the Kurdistan Region in Iraq as well as the Kurdish community in Britain. Sadly, the response from the British Government doesn't go far enough. It shows that we still have a long way to go to gain formal recognition of the atrocities suffered by our people. Our fight will continue and we urge people to show support by signing the e-petition, this is not over. We remain hopeful that there may be a debate in the British parliament in which these issues can be aired."

"Recognition will help to prevent such atrocities happening again. Recognition will show other dictators that mass murder of a targeted group will not go unpunished. Saddam Hussein got away with genocide and the international community watched him do it. Even now, as the killing and threat of chemical weapons in Syria continues, and as 60,000 Syrian refugees flood into Kurdistan, we are reminded of what can happen to innocent people when the international community refuses to acknowledge and recognize the reality of what is happening in front of it."

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors:**

For further information or photos, please contact Stephanie Blott, Amy Bourke 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>

**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.

