



JUSTICE FOR IRAQI KURDS

It's time to recognise the truth

UK MPs and Survivors commemorate 25th anniversary of Halabja chemical attacks in Iraq

- **From 14-16 March 1988, 5,000 men, women and children were murdered and thousands of people were injured in the chemical attack by Saddam Hussein on his own people**
- **UK MPs and other friends of Kurdistan from Europe and around the world attend commemoration events in Erbil and Halabja, Kurdistan.**

16th March 2013: Today, UK MPs join survivors and special guests in Kurdistan to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the chemical bombing of civilians in Halabja, Northern Iraq, by Saddam Hussein and his cousin 'Chemical Ali'. During the brutal attack, more than 5,000 men, women and children were murdered, many dying slowly in agony. Thousands of people were injured in the attack and many of those who survived were disfigured by the chemicals, developed cancer, and gave birth to babies with severe birth defects.

To mark the anniversary, UK MPs and other friends of Kurdistan from Europe and around the world are currently attending commemoration events in Erbil and Halabja, Kurdistan. They include: Nadhim Zahawi MP, Robert Halfon MP, Dave Anderson MP, Simon Minks (Public Prosecutor in The Hague), and Dr. Bernard Kouchner (former French Foreign Minister and co-founder of Médecins Sans Frontières).

The attack on Halabja took place over a three day period. Prior to the chemical attack, bombs had been dropped on the city to ensure that all windows were smashed so that there would be no escape from the deadly gas.

"Saddam Hussein's intent to exterminate the Kurdish people in Halabja was stark in this attack," says Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK, Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman.

"Today, we remember those who died and give thanks for those who lived. What happened to the Kurdish people here was genocide; a systematic attempt to exterminate the Kurdish population in Iraq. On this anniversary of such brutality, we call on the world to formally acknowledge the genocide perpetrated against the Kurds."

Kamran Haider was 11 years old when the chemical bombs were dropped. He and his family tried to hide in a cellar but one by one his parents, three brothers and sister died. The gas blinded him and for

days he lay among dead bodies in the cellar until he was found by rescue teams. He now lives in Portsmouth with his wife and children.

“I lost my whole family. They were screaming and crying, but gradually they went silent. In time I didn’t hear them anymore. I saw my family in front of the bomb shelter, they died together. My skin was burning and I couldn’t see or move. After three days in a bomb shelter surrounded by dead bodies, I was rescued.”

The chemical attack on Halabja was one of many such attacks on the Kurdish people from the 1960s to the late 1980s. Alongside chemical weapons attacks, many Kurds were rounded up and shot, starved, tortured or buried alive. Some simply disappeared. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, more than 270 mass graves have been uncovered in Iraq containing between 10 and 10,000 bodies in each grave. Experts are still digging for more.

Last month, in a historic Parliamentary debate on the Kurdish genocide, the UK Parliament formally recognised the mass murder of Kurdish people in Iraq as genocide. The debate was secured by Iraqi-born Conservative MP and Co-Chair of the APPG on Kurdistan Nadhim Zahawi MP and other members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region.

Speaking during the debate, 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?”

The debate followed a year-long campaign for justice for the murdered Kurds centered on a Government e-petition which urged the UK Government to formally recognize the genocide. The petition closed on the 7th March with 27,794 signatures.

“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.”

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.

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.
- In 2012 and 2013, the Norwegian, Swedish and British Parliaments all recognised the genocide.