



JUSTICE FOR IRAQI KURDS

It's time to recognise the truth

Iraqi Paralympic team includes first ever Kurdish athlete
Kurdish athletes can now compete following the fall of Saddam Hussein



4 September 2012:

Today, 24 year old Kovan Hassan makes history as the first Kurdish athlete to represent Iraq in the Paralympic Games.

Hassan, who has already won many national and international medals, is participating in Discus, Shot-put and his speciality, the Javelin.

Speaking from the Olympic village, Hassan said, 'Everyone is waiting for my success, but especially the disabled at home who support me the most and want me to come back with a medal.' He hopes that his participation in the Paralympics will inspire others with disabilities to get involved in sport.

Such optimism is in stark contrast to the brutal days of Saddam Hussein's regime. Hassan says 'athletes were beaten and then expelled from the team for not being good enough, a medal was considered the minimum, and those who failed to achieve this were penalised heavily.'

Saddam Hussein's legacy still casts a dark shadow. There is a large disabled population in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq following systematic attempts to wipe out the Kurds from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons on the Kurds, the most notorious being the attack on the town of Halabja in 1988 which killed 5,000 people. Those who were not gassed to death were frequently left maimed or disabled. Children are nowadays born with deformities and cancer rates remain abnormally high in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The British Government does not yet recognise that the planned and targeted mass murder of the Iraqi Kurds by Saddam Hussein and previous regimes was genocide. For the Kurds, recognition of this is the

first step towards finding those responsible, including companies which sold chemicals for the weapons, and holding them to account to ensure the atrocities inflicted on the Iraqi Kurds never happen again.

Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK, says, 'We are thrilled to see Kovan competing in the Paralympic Games and wish him all the luck in the world. It is wonderful to see an Iraqi Kurdish athlete compete at last.

Ms Rahman added, 'Kovan's inclusion in the Iraqi team shows how far we have come since Saddam. Yet, we are still fighting for acknowledgment of his horrific crimes. I urge everyone to sign the Justice 4 Genocide petition for recognition of the horror endured by the Kurdish men, women and children who were killed by Saddam Hussein's campaign of mass murder. Kovan Hassan represents a new beginning for Iraqi Kurds but international recognition of our recent past is also an important part of this renewal.'

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

For further information, to organize an interview with Bayan Sami Abdul Raman, Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK, or if you would like a high resolution version of the photo of Kovan Hassan, please contact Stephanie Blott, Amy Bourke or Helen Ayres at KRG@luther.co.uk or call 0207 618 9193.

Please sign the petition here: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31014>

For more information please visit the website: www.justice4genocide.com

Some key facts about Kovan Hassan

- Kovan Hassan is 24 years old. Until the age of 22, Hassan competed in the youth category, but since then he has competed in the adult category. Hassan was born with dwarfism.
- Kovan Hassan was born in Akre town in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 1988.
- He began his professional career in 2009 after being talent spotted whilst playing in a football tournament for disabled people.
- Kovan is competing on the 4th, 5th & 7th of September.

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 Iraq Government estimated there being 270 mass graves in Iraq containing between 10 and 10,000 bodies in each grave. However, the International Commission on Missing persons have recently estimated that there are significantly more mass graves in the country.
- The Kurdistan Regional Government estimates that over 180,000 Kurdish people were killed between February and September 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. Hundreds of small scale chemical attacks took place against the Kurds. 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. Halabja is famous for being the largest ever chemical attack on a civilian population in history.
- 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 did not die from gun shots were then buried alive.
- In 1993, US-based Human Rights Watch launched an extensive investigation into the 1988 attacks on the Kurds by Saddam Hussein's regime and concluded that it was genocide (Human Rights Watch, The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds, 1993.)
- 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.
- 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.
- Also 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 Iraq-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 August 2011, The Iraqi Court of Justice, Iraqi Council of Representative, and the Iraq's Parliament officially recognised the Faylee killings as genocide.