



## **Dr Bernard Kouchner, former French Foreign Minister, supports campaign for recognition of Kurdish Genocide in Iraq**

**17<sup>th</sup> January 2013, London:** Today, at the international conference marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the chemical weapons attack on Halabja and 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the intervention in Iraq, Dr Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of Medecin Sans Frontier and former French Foreign Minister, expressed his support for the campaign to recognize the Kurdish genocide. Having witnessed the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's attack on the village Halabja during which 5,000 Kurdish men, women and children were gassed to death with chemical weapons, Bernard Kouchner said:

“We were witness of mass murder in Halabja, it's time to have an examination of the facts. Of course it was genocide. In Iraq, who was supposed to protect the Kurds? The international community.”

Bernard Kouchner condemned the international community's lack of action at the time of the atrocities, but stressed that it was now time for the British public to know what happened to the Kurdish people and to recognize their massacre as genocide. The e-petition which calls on the British government to recognize the Kurdish genocide in Iraq has already been signed by nearly 27,000 people showing a clear level of support amongst the British public.

The international conference has again highlighted how, during Saddam's Hussein's regime, thousands of Kurdish people suffered unspeakable cruelty and violence with many ending up in mass graves or under chemical attack, while the world remained largely silent. Most importantly, the speakers raised the question of international recognition of the Kurdish genocide in Iraq.

Ms Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, High Representative to the UK, Kurdistan Regional Government says: “We said ‘never again’ after chemical weapons were inflicted on us, but almost exactly 25 years later, the international community fears they will be used again in Syria. This shows, now more than ever, why the genocide against the Kurds must be recognised internationally. Dictators must not be allowed to use these lethal, despicable weapons without international outcry, recrimination or justice. Saddam Hussein was never tried for his crimes of targeted mass murder and only Sweden and Norway have recognized his crimes as genocide. More than 24,000 British people have signed an e-petition urging the British Government to recognize what happened in Iraq as genocide. We hope the Government is listening.”

**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 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.