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UK 'CAN RECOGNISE KURDISH **GENOCIDE**'

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The United Kingdom "can act and make it clear to the world" that this Government recognises the **genocide** committed against the Kurdish people, a Conservative MP said today.

Nadhim Zahawi told the Commons there existed a judicial decision in Iraq, a decision at The Hague and the decisions of other nations acknowledging the campaign against the Kurds as **genocide**.

The MP for Stratford-on-Avon was born to Kurdish parents in Iraq, but fled the country with his family to the UK during

[Saddam Hussein's](#) Enhanced Coverage Linking persecution of the Kurdish people.

Speaking at the start of a Backbench Business debate on the 25th anniversary of the Kurdish **genocide**, Mr Zahawi said that **genocide** did not end with the fall of the Third Reich in 1945.

Between 1960 and 1991, he said, the campaign of persecution unleashed by Saddam against his own people, singling out the Kurdish community, saw more than a million people disappear, "most presumed dead, murdered by Government forces".

He said: "No international criminal tribunal has been convened to investigate the extermination of the Kurdish people, there has been no international campaign to bring those responsible for these atrocities to justice, the British Government have not formally stated that the actions of Saddam and his lieutenants constituted **genocide**. That is something that must be put right."

The Iraqi Kurds he said endured a "systematic military programme of discrimination, demonisation, removal and death" and when Coalition forces entered Iraq looking for the weapons of mass destruction they found mass graves containing thousands of concealed bodies.

Mr Zahawi said: "I am truly proud that Britain is at the forefront of the international community when it comes to protecting human rights, so recognising the Kurdish persecution as **genocide** will send a strong message to those totalitarian regimes around the world who may consider committing such acts.

"After all history has shown us that when a dictator thinks they will get away with it, they will commit atrocities against their own people. We need only turn our gaze to Syria to remind ourselves of that.

"It is only by raising international awareness of these crimes that we will educate people against the intolerance and hatred that led to these heinous acts. It is only by proving that the perpetrators of these crimes can and will be brought to justice that we will make the dictators of this world think before they act.

"It is through the recognition of the Kurdish **genocide** that we can ensure these aims and that the British nation can cement its position as a protector of liberty and human rights."

The motion signed by a cross party group of MPs states: "That this House formally recognises the **genocide** against the people of Iraqi **Kurdistan**, encourages governments, the EU and UN to do likewise, believes that this will enable Kurdish people, many in the UK, to achieve justice for their considerable loss and further believes that it would enable the UK, the home of democracy and freedom, to send out a message of support for international conventions and human rights, which is made even more pressing by the slaughter in Syria and the possible use of chemical arsenals."

Tory MP Robert Halfon (Harlow) said: "Little justice has happened to those who actually caused the Kurdish **genocide**.

"It's a frightening thought but it is said that some of the organisers of the Anfal and the pilots who dropped the chemical weapons remain at large and may even be in Europe. Others are in positions of responsibility in Iraq's military and Government.

"To be fair, Iraq has now officially recognised the **genocide** and it must now be the duty of the rest of the world to do the same to ensure all the perpetrators are brought to the ICC (International Criminal Court) and to help with education and remembrance so we ensure what happened is never forgotten by the future generations.

"We will be debating until the next millennium whether the Iraq war was justified.

"But one matter that is indisputable is that the removal of [Saddam Hussein](#) Enhanced Coverage Linking not only saved the Kurdish nation from being destroyed by **genocide** but also has brought about an independent, progressive free nation in the shape of **Kurdistan**."

Mr Halfon, who is Jewish, said his life experience and some of his family's experiences in Nazi concentration camps, meant he believed it was his "moral duty" to try to help other nations.

He added: "We always talk about never again and you never imagine that what happened in the Second World War could happen only 25 years ago.

"But you had it all over again and the mustard gas reminds me of it all too clearly.

"And if we are to make never again more than just a slogan, we have to really mean it."

Tory MP Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock), a member of the all-party parliamentary group on **Kurdistan** which visited the region last year, said the atrocities against the Kurds should be recognised as **genocide**.

He said: "I think we owe it to all those who lost their lives, and all those who bear the haunting memories, to demonstrate that we are listening, that we have heard their cries for justice and that we are going to respond.

"I therefore call upon the Government to formally recognise the **genocide** against the Kurds and the people of Iraqi **Kurdistan** and encourage them to use their good offices to encourage other nations, the EU and the UN, to do likewise.

"We must never forget what has happened and we must do all we can to seek recognition for the people of **Kurdistan**."

Labour's Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) said that it "took an awful long time" for most of the media and political establishment in this country to "cotton on" to what was really happening towards the Kurdish people in Iraq.

He said: "Quite honestly a lot of British Government policy was blind-sided because of their obsession with supporting Iraq against Iran in the dreadful Iran-Iraq war and the considerable economic interests that Britain had in Iraq at that time, not least on oil exploration and exploitation and other issues.

"So I think we have to have a sense of deep self-criticism on that whole process and not having that sense of self-criticism does us no favours at all."

Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt said the UK Government was not the appropriate body to make a declaration the atrocities were an act of **genocide**.

But he said the Government was sympathetic to the arguments made in the debate and would work for possible solutions.

Mr Burt said: "Where an international judicial body finds a crime to be a **genocide** will often play an important part in whether the United Kingdom will recognise one as such.

"But whether or not the term **genocide** is applicable in this case, it is clear appalling atrocities were committed against the Iraqi Kurds by [Saddam Hussein](#)  whose final conviction by the Iraq Tribunal was for his crimes against humanity."

Mr Burt said, admitting it would be "to the horror" of his officials, that he had listened to the nature of the debate and while he could not signal a policy change from the Despatch Box he did wish to go further.

And he added: "I don't think I would be respecting the mood of the Commons and the way this has been put if I was to simply say 'look, this is our position, which we all know well, and that's where we are'.

"I'm sure the Government will find the vote of Parliament helpful when further representations are made, as they will be.

"If there is not an easy way to bring this forward to international tribunals and there may not be at the moment, what more might we be able to do? Perhaps there is more, collectively, we ought to be able to do to recognise just the sheer horror of what was done, very clearly, targeted on a group of people just because of who they were.

"We will think collectively (with Labour) about how the United Kingdom might be able to take this forward but there is no change in our policy for now."

The motion was adopted by MPs without a vote.

In a statement, **Kurdistan** Regional Government High Representative to the UK, Ms Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman applauded the motion, which said Parliament formally recognised the **genocide**.

She said: "We thank our parliamentary supporters in Britain and all who have signed the petition.

"We believe that this historic recognition will accelerate fruitful links between our peoples and will help the survivors of the **genocide** and victims' families to realise that the UK does indeed take a stand against the mass murder of innocent people."