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JUSTICE FOR IRAQI KURDS

It's time to recognise the truth

Boy who fled Iraq will carry Olympic torch through London

26th July 2012: Today, Kurdish teenager Sam Jafar, 19, will proudly carry the Olympic torch through London, having dedicated himself to volunteering for a sports youth group in the capital. Ten years ago, Sam walked for days from his home town in Iraqi Kurdistan, through the snow covered mountains to Iran, in a bid to escape Iraq and Saddam Hussein's brutal regime. He arrived in London in 2002, and lived in temporary hostels until he was granted British citizenship and found a permanent place to live last year.

Keen to give something back to the community which welcomed him, Sam first started volunteering in 2009, aged 16. He signed up to the 'City Transformed Through Sport' project and was offered an opportunity to work with a local football club (Kyu-Yo-Bu-Shin), helping coach children and young people aged 5 to 17.

In 2011, Sam was awarded the Westminster Active Award for his dedication, coaching ability and for being such a fantastic role model to local children. The Award caught the attention of City Hall and Sam was nominated to become a 2012 Olympic torchbearer for Westminster.

Sam Jafar says: 'I'm still shocked to have been chosen. I didn't expect to be at all! It is such a great honour. Growing up in Iraqi Kurdistan was tough. People were forced to fight for the regime. One of my relatives refused and they cut off his ear. When we fled the regime, England took us in and I wanted to give something back to the people by volunteering. I never dreamed it would lead me to carry the Olympic torch down Oxford street.'

As well as giving back to his adoptive home, Sam still thinks about the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people in Iraqi Kurdistan who were murdered by Saddam Hussein during the genocide from the 1960s to late 1980s. Currently, the British Government does not formally recognize what happened as genocide. A petition, sponsored by Nadhim Zahawi MP, and supported by numerous MPs and Peers has been launched to urge them to change their minds (<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31014>). Sam is keen to do what he can to support the campaign.

He says: 'What Saddam did to the Kurds was a huge betrayal. People simply 'disappeared' and we still don't know where many of the bodies are buried. What happened was genocide and it should be recognised as this. I ask everyone to sign this petition.'

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

Please see the website: www.justice4genocide.com

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Notes to Editors:

For further information, to organize an interview or photos, please contact Stephanie Blott, Amy Bourke or Helen Ayres at KRG@luther.co.uk or call 0207 618 9193 to arrange it.

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.