

Iraq History Project



Testimonies

2007

TESTIMONIES
IRAQ HISTORY PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS
LAW INSTITUTE

2007

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
[لِيُحِقَّ الْحَقَّ وَيُبْطِلَ الْبَاطِلَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُجْرِمُونَ]
صدق الله العظيم

سورة الانفال / الاية 8

FOR HE HAS DECREED THAT TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL, AND
FALSEHOOD SHALL VANISH, IN SPITE OF THE EVILDOERS

HOLY Q'URAN (8:8)

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PREFACE

This publication presents an overview of the Iraq History Project along with ten selected testimonies from the project database. These personal narratives recount severe human rights violations committed during Saddam Hussein's regime, including killing, torture, rape, and chemical weapons attacks. The Iraq History Project presents this material to ensure that the suffering of the past is not forgotten, to improve the understanding of the nation's current crisis and complex transition, and to encourage the implementation of policies that address the needs of victims both past and present.

The Iraq History Project is managed by the International Human Rights Law Institute at DePaul University College of Law and its local staff and consultants. When the project began in late 2005, it was unclear whether it would be possible to effectively gather detailed narratives on past violations in Iraq. The project began with a qualitative methodology based on large scale human rights data collection projects in other countries, particularly truth commissions, and a small staff working in Kurdistan. By mid-2006, the team was gathering material throughout the country. Soon after, the project grew to involve a staff of over sixty including project managers, interviewers, data entry staff, and analysts.

The Iraq History Project is driven, above all, by the courage and conviction of the thousands of Iraqis who have shared their stories. The project would not be possible without the leadership of Ms. Kurdistan Daloye, Country Director, as well as our extraordinary Iraqi staff, who go to great lengths to gather and analyze these testimonies, often under very difficult circumstances.

On behalf of the International Human Rights Law Institute and the Iraq History Project staff, I hope that you find this publication valuable and engaging. It is our intention that this project will contribute to a broad and inclusive national process of facing past atrocities and building a more just society.

Daniel Rothenberg
Iraq History Project Director

OVERVIEW OF THE IRAQ HISTORY PROJECT

The Iraq History Project gathers and analyzes personal narratives from victims, their families, witnesses, perpetrators, and others regarding human rights violations committed during Saddam Hussein's regime. These testimonies document the experience of torture, massacres, assassinations, the use of chemical weapons, rape, disappearances, and other acts of systematic repression.

The Iraq History Project has collected over 7,000 testimonies from throughout the country, making it one of the largest human rights documentation programs in the world. The project gathers detailed, open-ended interviews that are carefully recorded by hand, reviewed several times for accuracy and later entered into a specially designed, secure, and searchable database.

Interviewers use social networks, victims' organizations, and local non-governmental organizations to identify and contact potential interviewees. Interviews are conducted where the individuals feel most comfortable, generally in private homes or organization offices. Interviewers are paired with interview subjects in a manner that maximizes their comfort and encourages the collection of detailed testimonies. For example, women are interviewed by other women, Kurds by other Kurds, Assyrians by other Assyrians, Marsh Arabs by Marsh Arabs, etc.

The interview process allows victims and others to talk openly about their experiences in ways that are personally meaningful. Iraq History Project staff have found Iraqis throughout the country to be very interested in telling their stories. The material provides an improved understanding of the nature and prevalence of specific violations, broad patterns of abuse, and the long term impact of systematic repression.

The interviewers present the material they gather to the main office for review and entry into an Arabic/Kurdish database. The database encrypts the identifying information and narratives which are stored on a server located outside of the country to protect material from tampering, theft, or accidental damage. All paper records are destroyed after being entered into the database, which is password protected and can only be accessed by authorized staff.

Beginning in mid-2007, the Iraq History Project began presenting material widely to the Iraqi people through publications, radio broadcasts, newspaper inserts and a website (www.iraqhistory.org). Project staff are currently involved in a comprehensive analysis of the material gathered over the previous year and a half. The database allows the testimonies to be searched by violation, perpetrator, location, keywords, and relevant words, names, or phrases. This enables a detailed review of types of violations and patterns, as well as the identification of responsible parties, and the preparation of case studies. The final analysis will be published in mid-2008 and widely distributed in Iraq and around the world.

The Iraq History Project uses people's stories to document the impact of political repression, emphasizing the importance of understanding past atrocities through the voices of victims. Experience in other countries demonstrates that when these stories are publicly presented, they enable an interpretation of the present in relation to the past. This counters a convenient and highly politicized rewriting of history and also encourages the implementation of responsive state policies that serve victims' needs and help prevent a return to authoritarian rule.

The Iraq History Project is designed to continue operating long into the future and may serve as the foundation for other transitional justice programs.

The prior regime linked the exercise of political power with brutality, violence, and a rejection of human dignity, basic rights, and fundamental Iraqi values. While the future of the country remains uncertain, the possibility of genuine peace and responsible governance requires serious reflection on the systematic atrocities committed over the last three decades. The Iraq History Project is designed to contribute to this understanding, aid national reconciliation, assist victims, and support the defense and protection of fundamental human rights in Iraq.

IRAQ HISTORY PROJECT

INTRODUCTION TO “TESTIMONIES”

The following testimonies are edited versions of interviews gathered by the Iraq History Project. These stories provide insight into how decades of brutal repression impacted the lives of the Iraqi people.

These testimonies document cases of detention, threats, torture, rape, chemical weapons attacks, and other serious violations. Some of the stories presented here are from political opponents to Saddam Hussein’s regime, while others document the voices of individuals, including children, who were targeted indiscriminately through systematic campaigns of terror. One story is from a former torturer, representing the project’s commitment to gathering material from perpetrators as well as victims. While these stories and the thousands of other testimonies collected by the Iraq History Project reflect diverse experiences, they are linked in their common engagement with the profound human suffering resulting from decades of authoritarian rule.

These testimonies have been edited to preserve the anonymity of those interviewed, as well as individuals mentioned by name. The names of individuals, organizations, and military and security units are included in

the database and play a significant role in the Iraq History Project's analytic work.

These testimonies present firsthand accounts of the experience of severe human rights violations. This material is often graphic and may be disturbing for readers. However, as difficult as it may be to review these testimonies, it is only by openly engaging with the suffering of the Iraqi people that it is possible to understand the truth of life under the prior regime. Facing the horrors of the past is an important means of building a secure and peaceful future based on the respect and defense of fundamental human rights.

WIDAD

When we look at life, we discover how cruel it is.

I know this because I lost the most precious things.

When I was younger, I was happy. Then, after they took my father away, I lost my love for life. They deprived our family of the force that held us together, and afterwards, only tragedy remained – and injustice, oppression, and tyranny.

I was once a young girl, proud of my honor and virtue. I lived with my father, who was a guard at the petroleum company, my mother, four sisters, and a brother who had been crippled by polio.

My father was an honest, God-fearing man who brought us up well. He never made us feel that we were a burden for being girls. He cared for us and provided for all our needs. My mother was a kind lady who showered us with compassion and tenderness.

My father had friends who were like him in their honesty and pious nature. They used to spend the afternoons in a cafe talking.

One day, he returned home to tell me about a conversation with our neighbor, who was a member of the local Ba'ath Party Section.

The man said, "Why do you pious bunch come together everyday at this cafe? Are you conspiring against the Ba'ath Party?"

"Why would say that, son?" said my father, "We are your father's age. Why do you speak this way to us?"

The neighbor laughed and went away.

The next day, November 20, 1992, my father went to work and never returned.

When he didn't come home, my mother was worried. This had never happened before. My mother went to my cousin's house and told him about my father. Then, my cousin went to the Petroleum Department in Misan. There was nobody there except the guards at the gate.

"We don't know anything about him," they said, "Some men came in a white Land Cruiser and took him away."

My cousin came back and told us about what he heard from the guards. My mother went crazy. She started beating her chest and screaming. Then, all of us girls started crying and screaming. We thought, "What can we do without our father?"

The next morning, my cousin took my mother and went to ask about my father. They went to the Amara Security Directorate; nobody there told them anything. They went to Istikhbarat; nobody there said a word. They went to all the police stations in the area and returned at night without any information on what happened to my father.

I had been the best student in my secondary school and, at the time, I was studying at the Technical Institute. I left my studies for two weeks to find out what happened to my father. I went to all the Security Directorate offices and police stations in Baghdad and Basra. No one would tell us what happened to my father. We were devastated.

Slowly, we began to accept the situation. My mother started a new life. She would take milk from the countryside and make yogurt, cheese, and cream, and sell it in the market to provide for the family and help us finish school. Some of our relatives gave us money to buy medicine for my sick brother. Some neighbors also helped us. This continued for about a year.

Then, my mother fell ill and became paralyzed. From then on, our situation grew worse. Our only hope was for me to get a good job after graduating from the Technical Institute.

One day, while I was at school, Zaina approached me. She was the daughter of a Ba'ath Party Section member and always bragged about her father's position. She had a car and used to drive to and from the Institute. She wore expensive clothes, gold rings on her fingers, and gold chains around her neck.

Zaina often tried to be friends with me, but I avoided her because of what happened to my father. Still, that day, I was very upset.

"What's wrong, Fatima?"

"Nothing."

"How can you say 'nothing'? You are such a bright student and now you're not paying attention in class. Talk to me. Maybe you'll feel better."

I don't know what happened to me then. I started crying and speaking about my father who went missing and about my mother, my brother, and our difficult life. I wondered why all of this was happening. I never understood why my poor father was taken away.

"Who took your father?" she asked.

"The Ba'athists who have no fear of God."

I don't know why I said those words.

She looked at me in anger and said, "So, you hate the Party and the State?"

"No, I don't hate them. But why did they choose us out of all people?"

She left and went out of the hall.

Two days later, I was at a lecture at the Technical Institute when an officer and three men appeared. They came into the lecture hall.

The professor asked, "How can we help you?"

“It’s none of your business. We’ve come for Fatima. We have a warrant for her arrest.”

When I heard his words, I began shaking with fear.

The other students looked at me, half in accusation and half in empathy. The officer grabbed me and they took me with them. They forced me into a white Land Cruiser. They put me in the middle row, with a man on my left and another on my right. The officer sat in the front seat next to the driver.

When we reached the suspension bridge, the officer ordered the men to lower my head. After five minutes, the car stopped. They took me out of the car and into a building. I found myself inside the General Security Directorate in Misan.

Two guards looked at me.

“She’s a great find!”

At the time, I didn’t know what they meant.

They took me to a small, windowless room. They locked the door and left me alone. At the time, I felt terrible. I didn’t know why I was there. I worried about what would happen to my poor handicapped mother and my family. I started crying. What had I done to be thrown in this cell, locked up, facing these four walls?

Several hours later, a man came in. He handcuffed me and blindfolded my eyes. He walked me somewhere. He took off the blindfold and released my hands. I found myself in a square room with a bed, a cable, a stick, and a rope.

I was so afraid. I was wondering what they were going to do to me?

Moments later, the officer who arrested me entered the room. He approached me slowly.

"Sweetie," he said, "I think that God chose the most beautiful features and gave them to you. I hope you won't make us both tired and that you'll confess easily."

"Confess to what?"

"Two days ago when you were sitting with another student, you cursed the President."

"Believe me, I didn't do that," I said, "I was worried about life, my sick mother, and my father who disappeared. I didn't know what to do. I only said to Zaina, 'Why did the Ba'athists choose us?' That's what I said."

"So, you cursed the Ba'ath Party?"

"I didn't curse anyone. I was sad and sick with worry for my family."

"You are a liar. You criticized the Ba'ath Party. This makes us think you're part of an organization inside the Technical Institute."

"No, I'm a peaceful person. I have no political affiliations. I beg you, let me go. If my mother knew about this, she would die."

"Let's not worry about your mother," he said. "Here, you are alone."

He came close to me in a strange manner.

His eyes were red.

He pushed me to the bed and started to take off his clothes.

I screamed, "What are you doing, you animal?!"

He stood up. He spit in my face and slapped me. "Look who's talking? Fatima, the whore!"

He attacked me like a monster. I was screaming and fighting with my hands, but he was like a wild animal. He was strong. It was impossible for me to stop him. He stripped off my clothes. I was crying and begging him to leave. I was screaming as loud as I could.

I was unable to stop him and his cruel desires.

Then, he beat me with a cable and I lost consciousness.

I woke up when he put some smelling salt under my nose. When I came to, I saw that I was naked. I began to scream. I beat myself. I broke down like a crazy person.

He was so cold. He sat there as if he had done nothing. He looked at me.

“Put your clothes back on, bitch! You insulted the President and the Party. This is what you deserve!”

After I put my clothes on, he opened the door and went out. Then, the same man who brought me to the room came to take me back to my cell.

The same thing happened every night for four months.

I began to wither, day after day. My health went from bad to worse. My nerves broke down. The officer used to give me pills so I could sleep at night and be more relaxed for him.

One night, when they brought me to the room, the officer was there with several other men.

“This is the pretty girl I told you about!” he said.

I began to scream. He tied a cloth around my mouth. He pointed a gun to my head and ordered me to take off my clothes.

I refused. He pressed the gun closer.

I followed his orders and took off my clothes. Then, he removed the cloth covering my mouth.

I shouted at them, crying, “Don’t you have any honor? Don’t you have sisters or wives? What would you do if one of them faced what’s happening to me now?!”

“Our sisters and wives are not like you,” said one of them. “You’re a slut and a whore!”

The officer said to one of the men, “Enjoy her! She’s yours!”

Then, everybody went out and the man stayed in the cell. He took what he wanted.

Then, the second came in.

Then, a third.

I fainted. I couldn't bear the situation.

What had I done to be treated this way? What was my crime?

The officer who first assaulted me ordered a man to whip me with a cable. The man hit me all over my body. I lost consciousness. When I came to, I was back in my cell.

A week later, a man came and took me to another room. There, I found an officer sitting behind his desk, while the officer who assaulted me each day was beside him in a chair. He acted as if he'd never seen me.

The officer behind the desk said, "After we investigated the charges against you regarding the allegations that you cursed the President Leader, we have found you to be innocent. You will now be freed. You will leave here. However, you will work as a spy and tell us everything that is happening in your neighborhood."

I didn't say a word. I would have done anything to get out of that dirty place.

He made me sign a paper.

Then, I was taken home in a white Land Cruiser, just like the one that took me to prison.

When I returned home, I found more sorrow. My mother had died. My brother was near death because he wasn't receiving his medications. My sisters had left school.

I couldn't stand to see what had happened to my family and, one night, we ran away to live with my maternal aunt in Samawa. She was an

old woman, a widow, who had a married son and a daughter in school. She lived in a big two-story house and let us stay on the second floor.

I went to work in a clothing factory owned by one of my aunt's friends. I spent my salary caring for my sisters and buying my brother's medication. I transferred my sisters to schools in Samawa. One of them finished the Teachers Institute, the other entered secondary school, and the third entered college.

We thanked God for everything.

We lived there until the fall of the tyrant.

Then, I returned to our old house.

By then, I had lost my dignity. I continue to live in disgrace, after what happened to me.

Still, God avenged me. The father of the girl I knew from school was killed by unknown men. Then, their family's situation deteriorated. They left their home. Nobody knows where they went.

As for my father, we found his body in one of the mass graves.

What can I say? We have no power other than what God gives us. To God we belong and to Him shall we return.

I thank God for everything and hope no human being should ever suffer injustice. *Inshallah.*

HAWBASH

I have only told someone this whole story once before. It is so difficult for me that I can hardly bear it.

On March 13, Iran attacked and bombarded Halabja because there were a large number of Iraqi army forces deployed in the city. It was 1988 and I was in fifth grade.

All the schools and government offices were closed. We went to the basement of our neighbor's home—they had already fled to Iran. We stayed in the basement for three days.

I saw the Iraqi soldiers run through Halabja's streets. The soldiers threw down their weapons and asked people to hide them. They asked for food and Kurdish clothes. I was scared of the Iraqi soldiers. I wanted to see them all leave.

Since the situation was very bad, my father and some of our relatives held a meeting. They decided to go to the basement of a government office which was known to be a very strong building. The basement was large and there were three or four hundred people hiding there.

At that time, people knew that Halabja would be conquered by Iran. Later, I saw Iranian soldiers in the city. There was no bombardment that day. The situation seemed normal. There was an atmosphere of calm in the city as if it were covered with the ashes of the dead.

One morning, I went to the fourth floor of the building where we were hiding to look at the city. I wanted to know what was happening and to see if people were fleeing the city. Around eleven in the morning, I saw helicopters flying towards town. I was with a group of other children. We ran downstairs.

The bombardment started before we made it to the basement. Two bombs fell close to the building. I had never heard such a loud sound. The explosion burst a window and some people were injured by the broken glass. Jets continued to bomb the city. Inside the basement, people were crying, shouting, and praying to God.

We were crying. My parents kissed all of us and said, "Don't be afraid."

I heard a child shouting. I heard someone say, "I can't believe the world will end like this."

We all held each other. I will never forget the shouting and screaming of the people in the basement. It was so loud that no one could hear each other.

My father kept saying, "Don't be scared. This is nothing. Soon, it will stop."

Then, the bombing stopped. Suddenly, it grew very quiet.

My father said, "Let's go outside."

The wall of the building where we were hiding had collapsed. We walked through the rubble – my parents my brothers, my sisters, and me. My little brother took my father's hand.

We went to my uncle's home. His house had collapsed. We went down into the basement. There was no one there.

Then Halabja was hit by more bombs. Some were close to us, and others fell far away. People hid themselves under collapsed roofs and other places where they could hide from the planes.

There was a man named Ahmed who went outside. He fell down the stairs. His body was shaking on the ground like an epileptic. Then, my father and others realized that they were using chemical weapons.

Even now, I can hardly talk about it.

Once we realized that chemical weapons had been used, we thought we'd all die. Ahmed had a sister who was crying. She said "I can't leave Ahmed, I want to die here with him." Ahmed's brothers and sisters stayed by his side. All of them died and became martyrs.

We had three vehicles. Before we went outside, my mother soaked our heads in water and put a wet cloth against our mouths. I had a school handkerchief covering my face. Then, we ran out of the house to the vehicles. I was in the back of a pickup truck.

I saw white smoke rising.

I saw people fall onto the ground and die. I watched people hang onto our pickup, try to climb inside and then fall off and die.

Then, the drivers of our vehicles became confused. The chemicals affected us. My cousin, who was driving the pickup, fell unconscious and crashed into a wall. He died and became a martyr. Everyone inside the cab was injured and unconscious, including my parents, brothers, and sisters.

Another cousin and I were conscious and alive.

My cousin said, "Let's run to my uncles' home."

I said, "I can't leave my family."

It was evening and it was getting dark.

My cousin left.

This was a day in which no one cared about anyone else.

I stayed there with my parents, brothers, and sisters. I sat there alone. I touched my parents' faces and shook them to see if they were alive. I didn't want to believe that they had died. I kept shaking them and hoping they would start breathing. It was useless.

I got out of the pickup truck. I walked away. I kept looking backwards and thinking of them. I was wondering whether they were alive or dead. Then, I returned to the truck.

I wanted to die. I wanted to be like them, laid out in the back of the truck. I kept thinking that my father and my older brothers were stronger than me, so how could they die and leave me here alive? I thought to myself, "They should save me. It shouldn't be me here trying to save them."

I saw people moving, wandering through the streets. I was afraid.

That night, a man came to the pickup. I didn't know who he was or where he was from.

"What do you want?"

"I need food. I'm hungry."

I told him to take some of the food we had in the truck. I didn't know if it was contaminated. He took the food and left. I have no idea what happened to him.

I stayed in the pickup truck for a full day.

I was unable to sleep, even for a second. I just sat there looking at the dead bodies. I also watched the jets bombing the Sazanyan area where the people had fled. I counted the bombs. I felt as if I was dreaming.

Then, I heard snoring. I realized the noise came from my oldest brother. This was one of the most beautiful moments in my life. As my

oldest brother gained consciousness, he began shouting. His leg hurt terribly. The gas had done something to him.

Gradually, my family began to wake up. One of my cousins woke up. Then, one aunt and then another.

My little brother gained consciousness for several seconds.

“What happened to our parents?” he asked me, “If they are dead, I ask you to pray for me so that I can die with them.”

After he spoke these words, he died and became a martyr.

I hoped that my parents would also wake up, but they had died.

After the sun rose, my aunt went to my brother’s home and the rest of us stayed near the pickup, hoping some of the others would wake up. There is a well-known photo of myself, my brother, my cousin, and my aunt sitting behind the pickup truck. That picture was published in a magazine.

Then, a group of Iranian soldiers arrived. They said, “Come with us.”

I looked at my parents and my other relatives for the last time. By then, I was sure they were all dead.

They took us to a hospital in Iran. I don’t know where it was. They removed our clothes. We took a bath. They gave us new clothes. I stayed there for a short while and then they took us by helicopter to a hospital in Tehran. We stayed there for several more days.

I was eleven years old. I had never hurt anyone. My family was innocent. We had done nothing. In the space of a few days, my life grew dark and became a nightmare.

JASIM

I cry when I speak about what I have done. I know that nothing I can do would be enough for me to deserve forgiveness. I only hope that my willingness to confess my crimes is proof that I am truly repentant.

I used to live in a body of a criminal. I was a beast. I had a damaged soul in which everything beautiful had been destroyed. I killed the mercy and love within my heart and left, in its place, hatred and injustice.

I grew up in difficult circumstances. My father worshiped liquor. He couldn't live without it. He lost his mind whenever he got drunk and beat my mother. My two sisters and I would search for a place to hide. If he found us, he would tie us to a date palm and lash us with a leather whip. My mother would try to help us and he would beat her, leaving us tied to the tree. He would tear her clothes and whip her. We had scars on our bodies.

Then, my mother took us and ran away to her family's home. My uncles disliked my mother because she arrived with three children. Their wives were cruel to us and treated my mother like a servant.

I grew up full of suffering and anger.

One day in 1977, Nazem, one of my mother's relatives, asked me if I wanted to volunteer to work in the Security Directorate. With his help, I was appointed in a month.

I was very happy. I told my mother about my new job, saying, "We will rent a house and get out of here. I won't let you work. From now on, you will have your own home. Then, no one will tell you what to do."

I had so many dreams. I wanted to achieve them quickly, without considering the cost.

On my first day of work, Nazem took me to the Security Directorate. It was in a large building with long halls and many rooms. Before we entered the main office, Nazem warned me, "Don't ask questions, Jasim. And, don't object to anything. Do you understand?"

Nazem introduced me to Colonel Mohamed. He was a tall, well-built man with big eyes.

"This is Jasim, Sir. The one I told you about."

"So, he's just as you described him."

"Yes, Sir."

The officer looked at me.

"Since you're tall and strong, I have decided to give you a proper job."

I didn't ask any questions.

Then, Colonel Mohamed spoke with Nazem, "The Operations Room seems like a good place for him. He looks like a torturer!"

I was shocked when I heard that word. I knew what it meant. I didn't say anything. I was afraid I would lose the job and return empty handed to my mother, without fulfilling any of my promises.

We left the officer's room.

I asked Nazem, "Can I refuse this job? Or, choose another one?"

"What are you saying? You should thank God. Others dream of this opportunity. You will be punishing the criminals who threaten our security and stability. Don't ask questions! Do you understand?"

I was quiet.

Nazem took me to a small, windowless room with various instruments. There were blood stains on the walls. The floors were rough. The room was lit by a single, yellow bulb. Inside, was a tall, heavily built man with a dark complexion and a thick moustache. His nickname was Abu Husam.

Nazem said, "This is the new employee. Officer Mohamed has ordered that you train him for three days. Is that clear? I won't repeat it."

Then, he turned to me, "Jasim, you'll stay here to learn. After three days, you'll start working. You are not to leave this room until six p.m."

Nazem left me with Abu Husam.

I was scared. I felt lost. I didn't know what to do.

While I stood there thinking, two men brought a young man into the room. One of the men said, "Show no mercy until he confesses."

Abu Husam beat the young man with heavy blows. He kicked him. Then, he started to undress him. He began to beat the man's private parts with a cable. The man was screaming and begging Abu Husam to leave him alone. This only made Abu Husam increase the beating until the man's skin broke and he started to bleed. The man fainted. Abu Husam left the young man on the floor and called the two guards. They came and carried him back to his cell.

Minutes later, they brought in another man who was in his thirties. Abu Husam started to torture him by hanging him by his legs from the ceiling and beating him with a cable until his shoulder was displaced and he fainted. Then, Abu Husam let him down to the floor.

I felt ill as I watched Abu Husam torturing these people.

It was hard for me to control myself.

A short while later, they brought in a woman who refused to inform on her husband, who was a member of the Dawa Party.

Abu Husam undressed her. He made her sit on a chair and tied her down. He connected electric wires to her hands, feet, and breasts. He began to shock her. She was shaking and screaming. She began to drool and then, she fainted. Abu Husam took her out of the chair, dressed her, and called the guards to take her away.

At that moment, I hated myself.

I knew that soon I would become like this man.

At the end of my training that day, Nazem came in and ordered me to go home. When he saw my condition, he took me home and we spoke.

“What happened to you, Jasim? This is only the first day. You were only watching. What would you be like if it were you that had been working?”

“What did those people do?” I asked.

“They did a terrible, unforgivable thing. They want to overthrow the government. They want to destabilize the country. If that happened, there would be chaos, terror, killing, and looting. Don’t believe that any of them are innocent! We are the innocent ones! You are an innocent man! You suffered tragic days with your evil father. You had to live dependent on your uncles. Forget what you’re thinking about. Prove that you’re capable in your new job. Don’t let yourself become weak before those traitors. Then, you’ll be able to settle down. Then, your mother who suffered for your sake for so long will finally rest.”

He dropped me home and left.

My mother saw that I was sad and asked, “Is there something wrong, son?”

I looked in her eyes, shining with happiness, seeing me return from my first day at work and filled with the hope that we would soon have a better, more settled life. I couldn’t tell her what happened that day.

“Nothing, mother, I am just not used to this new job.”

“Everybody finds things difficult at the beginning,” she said, “but they get used to it.”

I spent that night thinking about how I was supposed to hold the cable and beat people. I was filled with pain. Then, I remembered Nazem’s

words, saying those people were criminals and traitors. I began to tell myself that they deserved what was happening to them because they had betrayed our nation. I convinced myself that they must be punished.

Soon, the three days of training were over and the day I was to start working had arrived. I didn't sleep that night. I knew that from then on I would be a torturer.

In the morning, I went to the Security Directorate; Nazem was waiting for me. He said, "Don't let me down. Do you understand?"

I went to the Operations Room and found Abu Husam waiting to supervise my work and assess me.

The first person I was to torture was a man in his forties who was accused of joining the Dawa Party. I held the cable, but my hand was trembling. How could I beat this man who was older than me and whose eyes were begging for mercy?

Abu Husam shouted at me, "Don't let your hands shake! Don't be a coward!"

I raised the cable to beat the man, but I couldn't find the strength to hit him. Then, Abu Husam slapped me hard in the face.

An officer who was in the room said, "You're a soldier here. Those who volunteer to work in the Security Directorate are the servants of the government. They follow orders. This time, I will have mercy on you. Your punishment will be minimal. If it wasn't for Sergeant Nazem, who is dear to us, then I'd really hurt you."

He turned to Abu Husam and said, "Carry out the orders!"

Abu Husam tied my hand down and hit it with a metal pipe until it broke. This was my punishment because I couldn't carry out the orders. My hand was in a cast for three weeks.

After my hand healed, I returned to work. This time, the officer decided to supervise me personally. I was forced to torture a woman with electricity. I undressed her and connected her private parts to wires in the way Abu Husam had done. I shocked her until she fainted. I don't know how my heart could be filled with such cruelty.

"Well done!" said the officer. "That's the way to do it! Those people are a plague! They're trying to destroy our country. You must show them no mercy!"

His words filled me with complicated feelings. I wanted to pull myself together. I wanted to have a merciless heart. After that day, I committed many violations as a torturer.

I began to fulfill my dreams and pursue my own needs. I rented a house for my family. I worked hard for the approval of the officers, and when they said, "good job!" it meant a lot to me.

One day, the officer ordered me to torture a man who was a member of the insurgents. The officer asked me to use electricity. I connected his penis to very high voltage. I was merciless. When he fainted, I disconnected the wires and he urinated. His urine was mixed with blood. Then, I broke one of his legs.

We had an arrangement with a lieutenant colonel that whenever a beautiful girl was sent to our department, I was to beat her for a little while with a cable or stick. Then, I would take her to his room to spend the night. When I took a prisoner to his room, I would stand next to the door after he locked it and listen to the woman screaming or begging him to leave her alone. I could hear how he would beat them. He raped so many women.

At this time, I drank heavily. I tried not to think about all the things I was doing. It was my job.

I once tortured a man who was held in an underground cell in solitary confinement. He was accused of being a Dawa Party activist. He was a very handsome man. I burned his skin with a hot metal bar and mutilated his body. Some of the officers ordered a group of homosexuals who worked at the Security Directorate to rape him. Later, he was taken to a remote, uninhabited area where there is nothing but open sky and stars and he was executed.

I continued to work. Then, God punished me by giving me a very beautiful wife. She was a very good woman with good manners, but I treated her badly. My job had affected my personality.

At that time, the security officers used to come to my house to drink and have a good time with their girlfriends, who were often dancers they met in nightclubs. My wife didn't want the officers to visit our house. I beat her, and told her to shut up. I explained that our life depended on my obedience to the officers. I told her that it was impossible to refuse them, even if they asked for something terrible.

Still, I wouldn't let these men see my wife.

One day, one of the officers went to the central market in Amara with Nazem. That day, my wife was also at the market. They passed by her and Nazem greeted her because we were relatives. She spoke with him.

The officer asked Nazem, "Who is that woman?"

"She is Jasim's wife, Sir."

"So, Jasim has such a beautiful wife, and he doesn't tell me?!" he said. "I'm going to punish that shit!"

Nazem came quickly to tell me about this. He warned me of the officer's cruelty. When I finished work, I went straight home and beat my wife. Then, I sent her off to her family's home, and asked her not to come back.

That day, I destroyed my life and lost my children.

The officer called me back to the Security Directorate. When I arrived, he met me in his private office. He was drunk.

“Why didn’t you tell me about your wife, Jasim?”

“What wife?”

“Do you have more than one wife?”

“No, Sir. I have only one wife, sir. She is at her family’s house. I divorced her at the cleric’s office.”

“You shit! You divorced her?! Why did you do that? Why didn’t you leave her for me?!”

“You are of a higher level, much better than this woman. She gave me a very hard time. It is not worth spending a moment of your time with her.”

“I want you to bring me the official divorce documents.”

Then, I was forced to go and formally divorce my wife. I thought this would help me save her.

When the officer saw the official divorce documents, he asked me, “Now, how can I get her?”

“I don’t think that’s possible, sir. She has cancer. That was why I divorced her. You shouldn’t get near her.”

“What a pity that this beauty carries such a terrible disease.”

One day, I was torturing a detainee by removing his fingernails. He had been accused of smuggling arms to the opposition in the marshes. Even though he was tied down, he was screaming and fighting back. Without realizing it, I scratched my hand with the metal instrument I used to remove prisoners’ fingernails.

Gradually, the wound became worse. I went to a well-known surgeon. He conducted some tests and found out that I had become diabetic. I had

gangrene due to my high blood sugar and he said that it would affect my entire body unless they removed the infected part, which was my right hand.

This came as a terrible shock.

Yet, I knew that it was God's punishment since I used my right hand to hold the torture instruments.

My hand was amputated. I became useless to the Security Directorate and retired in 2001.

Slowly, I began to look back at those bitter times and to think about the crimes I committed.

My mother passed away. My sisters got married.

I became very lonely. When I was alone, I faced my thoughts, sorrows, and past crimes. They began to haunt me. It made me almost crazy to remember the voices of all the people I had tortured, screaming and begging. I spent my nights crying for what I did and for the injustice I committed by harming so many people. I saw myself as a monster.

I went to the imam of Al-Hussein District Mosque to ask him for advice on how I could atone for my crimes. The imam told me to declare my true repentance to God. He said that only God was capable of forgiving my sins.

So, that is what I did.

I began to ask God to forgive me for having done wrong and making so many people suffer. I believed that God's will was stronger than man's will and that God was punishing me for what I had done.

I saw that I had become addicted to violence. My heart began to see clearly. I tried to cast away the darkness and seek truth as the way to salvation. The reason I am confessing all of this today is out of the hope that God will forgive me.

I decided to return to my former wife and children. I told her that I had declared my repentance. I explained that I had become a completely new person and that if she returned to me it would help me pass through my crisis.

She returned, but I discovered that my children could not accept me. To this day, they treat me with cruelty and hatred and act as if I am a stranger who means nothing to them.

After the regime change, I was frequently harassed, despite the fact that the Sheikh talked to the community and explained that I had declared my repentance two years before the government fell. Still I saw contempt and hatred in their eyes, as if they were saying, "This is the one who tortured innocent people. This is one of the Security Directorate's loyal servants!"

I decided to move far from the main city.

I now spend most of my time at home, trying to be closer to God. I ask God to forgive me for my sins, to have mercy upon me, and to free my conscience from its suffering.

For God is forgiving and merciful.

BATO

I was young and musically talented. I wanted to be a great artist. One of my relatives had a band in Baghdad and he taught me how to play all sorts of music including Western songs. I became a fine guitar player.

Years later, I returned to Kirkuk to set up a band with some friends. We played in various clubs. One of the musicians in the band was a relative of mine who helped set up these events. I would accompany him during his visits to various other relatives. He would ask me to wait outside the homes we visited with my guitar. He told me that whenever I saw a stranger, I should start playing and singing. I was happy doing that.

He was a member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, which was an illegal group. I didn't know this at the time.

During these years, the Iraq/Iran war was at its peak. Everyone was afraid of their shadow. The intelligence agents were always looking for the slightest hint of anything to investigate.

One day, we were at a gathering of the Assyrian National Club in Kirkuk to commemorate one of the national holidays. My relative said, "I want you to sing a song. I want to find out if you're ready to know what's going on."

He asked me to sing an Assyrian patriotic song which was forbidden by the Iraqi government. I was young. I sang the song.

From that moment on, my suffering began. Suddenly, I became part of the movement without really understanding what was happening.

One day when I was playing and singing I saw someone sitting at a table, watching me. After the show ended, the manager of the hall called me over and said, "Can you please come to the office?"

When I went in I saw eight people sitting there. It was one o'clock in the morning. They started questioning me and asked for my identification card. I was carrying a card from the Kurdish Militia, who cooperated with the regime.

Then they blindfolded me and took me into their car. They took me into a really small room and took off the blindfold. I opened my eyes but I couldn't see anything because the room was so dark. I was very scared.

After ten minutes, I heard voices. It sounded as if they came from within a cave. Many hours later they took me into a long narrow room. There were lots of prisoners there. No one was talking to each other. I sat in that room for nine days without anybody questioning me.

They called my name. They blindfolded me again and took me to an interrogation room. They started beating me very hard and torturing me.

Then, they took me to a room where there was only a backgammon set and chairs. After an hour, someone came into the room. He was holding papers and pens. He didn't say anything.

"Are you Baya"?

"Yes."

He started to beat me and insult me. He hit my stomach and I started vomiting. I fell to the ground.

He ordered me to stand up and sit in the chair. He gave me a cigarette and asked me to tell him the story of my life with especially accurate details about my family.

After I finished he said, "We know you have two handicapped brothers and a handicapped sister. We don't want anything from you except assistance. Help us by telling us the names of those who oppose the government in Kirkuk. If you give us these names, we'll take you back home."

"I don't know what to say."

"You know what we want. We've arrested a lot of people. We can bring them here in front of you. Then, you can tell us their names to confirm their participation in groups that oppose the government."

I knew this was false. All the important members had fled the country.

"At your shows, what sort of songs do you sing?"

"Ballads, national songs, and other songs."

"No, there were times when you sang some special songs."

"I don't get involved in politics."

Then, he brought over a tape recorder and a cassette.

"Isn't this your voice?"

I was very surprised.

"Yes, that's my voice." Then, I explained, "The words of the song are about the city of Mosul and its culture. One of our singers sang that song outside the country. I bought the cassette at an official music store in Kirkuk. The cassette entered Iraq through the customs checkpoints. It can be found everywhere. The audience always asks me to sing certain songs. I have to respond to their requests. I'm not interested in politics."

"Iraq is our country. How can we allow strangers to come here and destroy it?"

Our conversation went on like this for hours.

Then, I was blindfolded and taken back to the same room. I was in that room for nineteen days without another interrogation.

During that time I wondered about many things. My family didn't know where I was. I was in a lot of trouble and very scared.

So, I prayed and kept my faith in Christ.

Then, I was blindfolded and handcuffed, and put into a car and taken to the Security Directorate. When we entered the building, they took off my blindfold and I found myself standing in big room. The people who brought me over handed them an envelope with a red seal which was used by security and intelligence agents.

A soldier ordered me to stand in one corner of the room. Then, some guards came to take me away. They gave me a severe beating with bamboo sticks. They were swearing as they beat me. It was very painful and blood was pouring out of my back. They pushed me into the office and I fell onto the floor.

The officer ordered me to stand up. Then, he told a guard to fetch him cold water. The officer poured the water over my body. It was winter and I started shivering. Then, the officer ordered the guard to torture me, "Beat him while he is still wet."

This made the beating especially cruel. The guard hit me with the bamboo and with his hands until I lost consciousness.

I woke up in a room with perhaps a hundred people. It was difficult to sit down and many had to sleep standing up. After four days, I was summoned to appear before an investigating officer.

"It appears you had a false identification card from a Kurdish National Defense regiment."

They brought me back to the cell and later transferred me to a base near Sulaimaniya and forced me to become a soldier.

Eventually, I received permission to visit my home in Kirkuk. When I reached the house, I knocked on the gate. When my father saw me, he fell

to ground. I helped him stand up and he started crying, "We thought they'd killed you."

A short while later my father died.

For years I have lived with fear, anxiety, and worries. For a long time, I couldn't sleep at night.

Eventually, I started singing and strumming the guitar again. I began playing here and there.

Sometimes, I think about how I played guitar outside that house whenever people came by. And, then I realize that we are now a people with a future.

AHLAM

I am a woman who has been destroyed by fate, a woman who lived through unbearable oppression, a woman who has suffered sadness and deprivation at the hands of a tyrant.

I cry for my husband and children. When I lost them, I felt as if I had lost my heart, soul, and life. There was nothing left but bitterness, pain, and misery. Yes, this is the truth. This is the suffering of an Iraqi woman.

My name is Ahlam from Basra. I was the mother of five boys. I had no girls to help me with my burdens. My husband, Abu Hasan, had the largest fabric shop in Basra's Ashar district. We lived in Baradhiya which is a beautiful neighborhood on the Shatt-al-Arab river.

My husband was a pious man of high principles. He planned to give the shops to our children as soon as they finished school, so he could go and study at the Hawza.

Our story began in 1991 with the start of the Uprising. At the time Hasan was in 12th grade, Hussein was in 10th, Abbas was in 9th, and Jaafar and Sadiq were in primary school. My sons were clever like their father. We led a simple life.

During the Uprising, I was surprised to learn that my husband was politically connected to the Dawa Party. He was a leader of a secret cell that had members living in Iran. They entered Iraq during the Uprising and took over the Provincial Complex, the Police stations, and the Ba'ath Party buildings.

The Uprising continued for about five days. Then, my husband learned that the Army and Republican Guards were advancing towards the city and we should leave immediately.

He looked for a car to get us to Iran while I gathered all our money. On our way, we had to cross a floating bridge. When we reached the bridge, we found that the Army had surrounded the whole area and were shooting anyone who tried to cross.

We were stuck at the bridge. We didn't know what to do. Armed soldiers approached us, pointing their guns.

"If any one of you moves, we will kill you all. We'll shoot you all at once. Do you understand?"

They had the accents of people from Tikrit. My husband was very nervous. He was sweating and was very afraid for us.

"If I was alone," he said, "then I wouldn't pay much attention for them. I am afraid for you, not for myself. I will ask God to save us from their hands."

Moments later, our tragedy began. They forced us out of the car. They pulled off my abaya and hijab. They beat my husband and sons on their heads and shoulders. Then, they tied their hands and blindfolded them. I was crying and screaming.

One of the soldiers said to me, "Shut up! I don't want to hear your voice! You dirty traitors! You scum!"

They took us to a military Land Cruiser. I was very afraid. I had never seen anything like this in my whole life. I never thought that we would go through such an experience. I cried softly.

A group of armed soldiers rode in the car with us. They took us to the Basra Security Directorate which they had recaptured.

They brought us inside. At the time there was nothing there but empty walls because the people looted everything during the Uprising. They took us into a big empty cell. The walls were burnt.

We were the first family to be arrested in that place.

They released my husband's and sons' hands and took off their blindfolds. They took our belongings. Then, they started beating and kicking us.

"You just wait! We'll grill you like sheep!"

We stayed in the cell all night. My husband kept looking at us with tears in his eyes, as if he knew what was going to happen.

While we were there they arrested around fifty families and brought them to the same cell. It was terrible. Children were crying. Men were nervous. Women were weeping and begging, "God to save us!"

We remained there for two days. By then, the cell was full of families and there was no longer anywhere to sit and everyone was forced to stand. At night, about fifteen soldiers came in carrying cables and sticks and beat us. They didn't spare a man, woman, child, or elderly person. But, this was easier than what followed.

Then, the brutal Ali Hasan Al-Majeed came and ordered that they torture the rebels and their families.

They blindfolded us and took us to a room. I think that the room was under the Security building because we went down some stairs. After

about ten minutes or more, they took us into another room. I heard them unlock the door. Then, they took off our blindfolds.

We found ourselves inside a terrible place with barrels filled with acid, iron poles, chains, and a large metal cleaver. Five torturers tied us to the iron poles with chains. Then, they brought a hot iron bar and put it on our skin, one by one. We were screaming, but it was useless.

They held up the heads of my husband and three older sons by pulling their hair. Then, they poured the acid on their faces. It burned them.

I don't know how to describe my condition. I screamed until I fainted. Then they poured water over me, so I woke up.

Then, they amputated my husband's hand with the cleaver. They took out a knife and started stabbing him.

I was screaming, "Allahu Akbar!"

They became angry. They hit me with a chain and I fainted. They brought me back to consciousness again. Then, I saw that they had tied my husband and three older sons to one another and put them on the ground. They left me and the two younger boys. Two torturers held onto their heads and opened their mouths, while a third torturer poured acid in their mouths and over their bodies. My husband was the first victim, and my three sons followed soon after.

I became crazy. I screamed and screamed and then collapsed.

After they finished, one of them turned towards us and said, "We'll spare your lives, but we'll make you an example for others."

They held my hand down and poured acid on it until the skin began to burn and peel. Then they deformed my two children's faces with acid.

I almost lost my mind. I didn't know whether if I was dead or alive. I didn't know if it was all real?

Then, I finally started to understand what had happened.

Yes, it was true.

My three sons and husband had been killed.

I was kept with my remaining two children in a small cell until an amnesty was issued three months later. Then, we were released.

My brothers took us to the best doctors in Baghdad for treatment. I lost my hand because it became infected. My brothers decided that I shouldn't be left alone. They came and lived with me and took good care of me and my two children.

We managed to go to Jordan in 1997. We didn't return to Iraq until after the fall of the tyrant.

When I came back, I was filled with sadness. I now live for my two sons who have graduated from institutes and are working with their uncles.

I am waiting for my time to come, to leave this life, and join my late husband and three sons in the afterlife.

OTHMAN

I was arrested on October 15, 1986. This day is like an open wound for me. Yet, last October 15 was different, since on that day I stood in front of the ballot box to vote.

Six of us were arrested that day. Most were students in the same preparatory school and members of a football team. At the time, I was studying law at the University of Baghdad.

They brought us to the Security Directorate in Sulaimaniya for interrogation. We could hear the sounds of gunshots nearby. We were worried because the Iraqi security believed the Peshmurga forces wanted to save us.

“If those Peshmurga come here, we’ll kill you.”

I was alone in the interrogation room. They took off my clothes. Along one side of the room, there was a column which had several hooks. There was also a table about a meter long with various tools. My hands were handcuffed behind my back. Two men lifted me up and hung me from one of the hooks. The hook was very high and I was just able to touch my toes to the top of a stool. They removed the stool and all the weight of my body pulled down on my arms.

They didn’t ask me any questions.

Then, they brought a generator which had two long wires about the thickness of a telephone cord. They attached one wire to my penis and the other one went around my waist. When the electric current went through my body, I felt a great shock and a strange sound came out of me, like the roaring of a bull. It was something I couldn't control.

Then, liquid came out of my penis, blood, urine and semen. The man torturing me was covered with this liquid and he became angry. So, he tortured me even more. I lost all resistance. I was electrocuted many times and fainted.

Later, I woke up. The electric shocks made me thirsty. I had never been so thirsty in all my life. They put a glass of water on the table. I asked if I could drink it. They said, "If you want the water, you have to confess."

I was electrocuted many times. Sometimes they put the wires in different places. Sometimes they attached them to your nipples, your ears, or your shoulders. Sometimes they took off my clothes and put a piece of wood under both knees. They would handcuff me and shock me through my penis and chest. My body would twitch forward and backward. I couldn't hear anything except for a loud sound inside my head.

Other times, they would beat me. They struck the soles of my feet with a wire cable. Two of them would hold me and others took turns hitting me. They hit my feet so hard that I later lost my toenails. My feet swelled up. They kicked my knees with combat boots. They hit and kicked my hips and shoulders. They beat you in all the places you might use to rest so that later you couldn't sit down and there was no way to rest or seek comfort. Here, you can see a scar from where they struck me.

After all this torturing, you feel as if you are nothing, nothing but a piece of meat. Many cannot live through such torture. Many cannot endure

the pain. At the time, I wished I was dead. In fact, I don't know how I survived.

At one point, I was brought to a big hall. There was a long column which had rings set into it. They attached my handcuffs to the rings and hung me against the column. This was what they did to the prisoners they hated the most. Some people were hung in the position of a cross.

There was a cell opposite the column where they hung us. Sometimes they put your wife, children, or sisters in that cell. They did this to psychologically destroy you. They wanted to hurt your family by making them watch you being tortured. There were always two men guarding you. They had an instrument, which was a piece of thick wood with some sort of batteries and electricity inside. They would use this to shock you awake every time you fell asleep.

From when I was arrested to when I was brought before an investigative judge, I was unaware of time. I couldn't keep track of the days or months. I didn't even know whether it was night or day. Sometimes, I tried to keep track of time through meals, like an animal.

From what I understand, someone had testified against me. They tortured him severely and beat him over and over until he chose my name from a list. There's always someone who'll give information about you. Or, there's a secret document with your name. Or, a spy who says something about you.

I was accused in connection with four operations. They say my name was also on a list from the minutes of a meeting held in the home of a man named Faraidoon. They had the book with the notes.

I told them I didn't know Faraidoon. I told them that I was from a village and that the Peshmurga came to our village and forced us to prepare food for them.

One day, they brought me in front of a judge. They asked me to sign a statement without reading it to me.

“If you do not read the statement to me, I won’t sign it.”

Eventually, they forced me to sign it.

Then, they brought me to the Security Directorate jail. They tortured people there every day.

I was held in a small room, maybe three by four meters, with over thirty-five other prisoners. In summer, some people fainted because of the heat and dehydration. Many people were wounded from having been beaten and tortured. They rarely sent anyone to hospital. In the winter, they poured water into the room.

The guards worked in shifts. Sometimes they’d wake us at night. Sometimes, they’d shout insults. At times, an officer would come into the room for inspection. If they found so much as a match on you, they’d beat you. We were afraid to speak. If we talked to each other about anything, the officers accused us of planning a conspiracy.

Sometimes, they’d give you just a single piece of bread for the entire day. Other times, they’d pass out a small triangle of cheese for two people for breakfast, a spoonful of lentils for lunch, and the same for dinner. Or, they’d cook a chicken and divide it among forty prisoners.

There were many different people inside the jail – Kurds, Turkomans, and Arabs. There was a religious man who was a prisoner. He had a small Holy Koran and devoted most of his time to prayer. I remember that in jail even the communists prayed.

One night, the Director of Security, Colonel Jasim, came to our jail. While he was searching the cell, he saw the Holy Koran.

“What is your name?” he asked the religious man.

The man told him his name. Then, Colonel Jasim took the Holy Koran and spat on it, "This Koran is not for you. It is ours. Neither God nor Jalal Talabani can save you here. Here, you obey us."

Then, he started beating everyone.

At the end of May, about a year and a half after I was arrested, I was taken to the Revolutionary Court. The Head of the Revolutionary Tribunal was Judge Awad al-Bandar, who is now on trial with Saddam Hussein. There were around ninety prisoners in the court, sixteen of whom were Kurds and the rest were Arab Sh'ia.

Many of the people in the courtroom were simply relatives of those accused of challenging the government. According to Iraqi law at the time, the security forces could arrest the brother of a Dawa Party member just because he failed to tell the security forces about his brother's activities. The detained brother was often executed.

My group included five others arrested in connection with the same case. We were sentenced to life imprisonment and all the other Kurds were executed. Four of the Arabs had their sentences reduced. The rest were killed.

While I was in jail, over five hundred people were executed.

In September 1988, the government granted a general amnesty for Kurdish prisoners. We were released later that month. The Director of Security held onto my identity card and said that he could arrest me at any time. I was required to go to the Directorate of Security every Friday. Also, the government wouldn't allow me to return to college to continue my studies.

After all of this suffering, I joined the Peshmurga.

GULA

My husband was arrested after several people gave the security forces his name. Six months later, some Iraqi officers arrived at my brother-in-law's home. They knocked on the gate and asked for me. My sister told them I wasn't there. I heard the conversation and came out. At the time, I didn't know they had come to arrest me.

There were several Iraqi officers including a lieutenant named Kamal. He was a tall, dark, heavily built man with a gold tooth.

"Are you Karwan's wife?"

"Yes."

He grabbed my hand. My sister held me, but the lieutenant hit her. He pushed me out of the house towards a car parked in front of the gate. He wouldn't even let me put on shoes or take a jacket. Before entering the vehicle, I begged them to allow me to take my two-year old son.

"Shut up. You and your husband are traitors. Your son is better off without you!"

When Lieutenant Kamal said this, I grew angry and refused to get in the car. But, I was also filled with sadness and sorrow thinking of my husband and son. And I was worried because I was six months pregnant.

Then, they pushed me inside the car. Lieutenant Kamal shoved my head against the window.

“You deserve to suffer because you work for the insurgents.”

They took me to the Emergency Security Directorate located in the Chwarbakh quarter near the Sulaimaniya Stadium.

Before we left the car, they blindfolded me and handcuffed me to Lieutenant Kamal. We walked for several minutes. Then, they took off the blindfold and I found myself in large hall with black walls and many gray doors.

They brought a man to me. He fell onto the ground in the middle of the hall. His left leg looked broken and he had lost his right eye. It was very cold and he wore only black underpants. His arms and back had been burned.

I approached the body slowly. I stopped, and then walked a bit closer. I looked at him and didn't say a word. He was so disfigured.

I couldn't believe it was Karwan.

“He's alive,” said Lieutenant Kamal.

I stood in that hall for five minutes in silence.

They took me outside the hall and up some stairs and put me in a dimly lit, windowless room. There were three people sitting behind a metal table. In the middle sat a judge, a white heavy man, balding with gray hair and no mustache. I was still handcuffed to Lieutenant Kamal.

“My daughter, do not conceal the truth. Tell us everything,” said the judge.

Then, they brought in two boys around fifteen years old. They had been beaten and their faces were swollen and bruised. They were our neighbors.

“We know her,” they said, one after other, “We brought guns and leaflets to her home many times and hid them under loaves of bread.”

They took the two boys out of the room. Then, the judge and the two other people left.

Lieutenant Kamal took off the handcuffs.

“Wait here.”

Around ten minutes later, two heavy built men came into the room. They were dark skinned and athletic. They wore military clothes and spoke Kurdish with a Khanaqin accent. They brought over a chair and desk and set it next to mine. They raised my legs onto the chair. Then, they hit me with a metal pole. They hit me hard, over and over. They swore at me.

“You slut.”

“You liar.”

“You whore.”

They beat me so long that I fainted and collapsed. I lost consciousness, but woke up when I felt a pain in my lower back. One of the soldiers was kicking me.

“She’s just pretending to have fainted.”

Pain swept through my body. I fainted again.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a military hospital. My right hand was handcuffed to the side of the bed. I was only slightly conscious. A female, Arab doctor was standing beside me. She stood up straight and had long black hair that fell over her shoulders. Lieutenant Kamal and a captain named Salam were there as well.

The doctor said, “You shouldn’t beat people like that. Now, this woman may lose her baby and die because of a hemorrhage.”

On the left of the bed there was a curtain. They drew it closed.

Later, a nurse came to me and asked in a low voice, “What’s your name? Do you have a relative who’s been detained? What’s his name?”

I told her my name and told her that my husband, Karwan, had been arrested and jailed.

“Your husband asked about you. He’s in one of the beds behind you. He’s alive. I am going to tell him that you’re alive too.”

At that moment, I was so sad that I wished I was dead. It was simply too hard to accept that my husband was just behind me in the room and that we were separated by only a few curtains. We couldn’t speak or see each other. It was painful to think of how my husband and I were suffering, deprived of tenderness and love.

Eventually, the doctor came and told me that I had recovered and would be discharged.

“Your baby is alive.”

The doctor left me and I was alone. Late at night, Lieutenant Kamal and Captain Salam woke me up. They took me outside the hospital barefoot, in a red dress. They transferred me back to the Emergency Security Directorate. They brought me inside, opened a door and pushed me into a big hall with rooms full of prisoners. In the hall, there was a man attached by handcuffs to a metal pipe set in the ground. They released the man and put me in his place, fastening me to the pipe.

After a while, they brought me some bread and a small bowl of yogurt.

The rooms were full of men. They forced sixty or seventy prisoners into a single room. No one was allowed to speak.

I think I was the only woman in the jail.

The officer in charge was Lieutenant Abbass. He ordered the prisoners around, telling them when to sleep, wake up, sit, and stand. When it was night he told the prisoners, “Sleep and don’t move.” If someone moved, he would hit him with a pipe or a wire cable. The prisoners could use the

bathroom only once a day. Lieutenant Abbass would blow a whistle and all the prisoners from one of the cells would rush to the bathroom. After two or three minutes, he blew the whistle a second time and the prisoners would have to return to their cells. If someone was late entering the cell, he was beaten.

The next day, after midnight they took me to a small windowless room. The door to the room was metal and above it there was a red light. There was a metal table opposite a desk. There was a hammer, pliers, scissors, and some other tools on the table. On the wall, there was a mirror.

I was scared.

Then, Lieutenant Kamal and Captain Salam came into the room with a big, black dog.

"It's better for you to confess. Otherwise we'll beat you."

"What do you do for the insurgents?"

"What does Karwan do for them?"

"It is better that you tell us now so you can be released."

"I don't know anything about the insurgents. I don't know anything about my husband."

Lieutenant Kamal released the dog and spoke to him, giving him instructions with his hands. The dog came up behind me and put his front legs on my shoulder and started to lick my neck, my hair, and my ears. I was disgusted and scared. He spoke to the dog again. The dog came to my front and started to lick my face, nose, mouth, and breasts. He said something else and the dog urinated on me.

I said nothing. I didn't move. I was covered in dog urine.

They were both very angry.

"What are you?" asked Captain Salam. "Are you a pig?"

They looked at me for a while. Then, they left with the dog and the two dark boys from Khanaqin who had beaten me came into the room. Each one carried a wire cable.

They started to beat me. It was so painful that I fainted.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself back in the hospital. I saw the same doctor. I was handcuffed to the bed and there were two guards watching over me.

The doctor defended me. I will never forget this. She was angry with two guards and said, "I don't conduct medical examinations in this way. Remove the handcuffs and go outside."

The guards took off the handcuffs and left the room. The doctor asked me my name. I told her and then she told me her name. She asked me why I was arrested and wrote my name on a piece of paper which she put it in her pocket. After the examination, she asked to see the officer in charge.

Later an officer named Major Hamid came into my room.

The doctor said, "She's been tortured very badly. You shouldn't beat people like that. Also, patients in a hospital should not be handcuffed to the bed."

"These people are Peshmurga. It is better to let them all die."

"She's a woman who has no power to control her husband. Perhaps her husband made her get involved in politics. I'm going to move her to the delivery hall in the maternity hospital where she'll stay for three days without handcuffs."

"If you will vouch for her, I will honor your request."

The doctor supported me under the condition that if I escaped, she would be arrested. They gave me some injections and I stayed three nights in the hospital.

Then, Major Hamid and two guards came to hospital. They blindfolded me with a white cloth and then took me back to the Emergency Security Directorate. Once again, they put me in the big hall, but this time I wasn't handcuffed to the pipe.

After a while, a guard named Abdulla came close to me and whispered, "Your husband is here. He's in room number nine. If you want to see him, ask permission to go to the bathroom. Room number nine is next to the bathroom."

A bit later, I asked another guard to let me use the bathroom. He wanted to escort me, but I asked to go alone. I wanted to see my husband. They let me go and I walked down the hall. I looked through a small window as I passed room number nine. I saw Karwan. He was black and blue. We gestured to each other. He asked about me and the baby.

"We are fine," I whispered.

We spoke softly for a few minutes. Then, I returned to the hall and sat down. I was in that cold hall for four nights without being interrogated.

Around midnight one evening they took me to the first floor and put me in a torture room. There was a girl in the room. They were beating her. Her clothes were torn. Her face was swollen. She had collapsed on the ground. They made me stand before the unconscious woman for a long time.

Then they took me to a room with a television, some small tables, chairs, and a new sofa. Major Hamid was sitting in the room. They made me sit on the sofa.

Major Hamid said, "Although she's stubborn, give her a Pepsi. Maybe we should consider what the doctor said about the baby."

They brought me Pepsi and some candy.

Major Hamid started interrogating me. He asked me where we hid documents.

“I don’t know anything except what I already told you.”

I sat in the room for half an hour without saying another word.

Then, they put me in a car. I don’t know where they took me, but in the end, we were at the back gate of another office of the Security Directorate. The place looked like a gas station. There were groups of guards and soldiers.

As I stood there, the men laughed at me.

They made me go into a building. It was dark and I couldn’t see inside. They made me stand in a certain place and then they pushed me into a pit. I slipped down maybe two meters. I grabbed onto something which stopped my fall. I was scared because I had no idea of how far I might fall.

I was crying and screaming, “Torture me, kill me, but take me someplace where I can at least see what’s happening!”

I heard noises and shouting from people at the bottom of the pit, but I couldn’t see anything because it was so dark.

From the bottom, I heard a woman’s voice, “Come, my sister. Come down. There are many of us down here.”

Someone shined a light towards me. I could see the bottom and the ceiling, which was arched. Below, there were women, children, and old people all piled on top of each other. Their hair was tangled and dirty. The men’s moustaches and beards were long. They looked like wild people. It seemed that they hadn’t been outside for years. Two came close to me, and with the light, they helped me descend to the bottom. They took me through the crowd. It smelled terrible, like the smell of dead bodies or rotting fruit. I was barefoot and the ground was wet.

There were around fifty people in the room. I passed by them all slowly. Then, I was taken out of the room and brought upstairs. They opened the door and Captain Salam was sitting on a chair.

“Welcome. Sit down. How is your baby?”

“God is merciful,” I said.

“God is merciful,” he said.

He asked me the same questions as when I was first arrested.

“Believe me,” I said, “if I knew something, I would tell you.”

“Take her away.”

Two guards took me to a big hall. As they walked me to a cell, a prisoner named Kak Saman came up to me. He was a good man and asked me about my arrest. He looked sad. He gave me his coat because all my clothes were torn. He brought me a blanket and pillow.

“Your cell is very cold. Take these things.”

“What about you?”

“It’s not a problem. I’m a man.”

I took what he gave me and went to my cell.

One day, the guards returned and took me back to Captain Salam. He was looking over some papers. They forced me to sit down. Again, he asked me the same questions.

“You know you’re driving us crazy,” he said, “Why are you making fun of us?” We ask you questions and you tell us nothing. It’s time for you to talk.”

“I’ve told you everything I know.”

He started beating me very hard.

I began to cry. I couldn’t hear very well. I was in so much pain.

“Take her back to the cell.”

When I returned to the cell, I was aching and my ears hurt. I lay on my bed and started to cry. I was so worried. My head was aching. I was thinking of the baby inside me. I didn't know whether it was alive or dead. I missed my son.

They kept me in the cell for two more days and nights. Then, two women were brought to the cell. One of them was a young woman named Basoz who was imprisoned with her child. She had been arrested because of her husband. The second one was named Nazira and was arrested because of her son.

Basoz looked at me and said, "Oh my God! Do they hit every one in this way?"

They called the young women every day for questioning. Basoz was very scared. Her husband was a Peshmurga, but they hadn't found anything in her home to link her to the Peshmurga.

I told her, "During the investigation, just tell them, 'I have no control over my husband. He won't even listen to what I say.'"

They took the women off for questioning every day, but left me alone. I was crying for my relatives, for Karwan, and for my baby.

On Nawraz, the Kurdish New Year, Captain Salam came to the cell to say, "Tonight, you'll burn like a Nawraz fire! Your husband too. We are going to burn you here. Tonight, you'll both be killed."

"Don't you see that life in this prison is like being dead? Go ahead and kill me. For me, it would be better to be dead than to continue living like this."

An hour passed. No one came.

Then, Captain Salam came and gave me some bread and a cucumber, "You don't deserve this food, but come and eat."

"I don't want it."

He threw the food down. I picked it up and threw it back at him. He returned and spit in my face.

“Dog.”

“Bitch.”

“Slut...”

I was tired of my life. By then I expected to be killed.

On the first day of Ramadan, I felt contractions. The guards told Captain Salam who called Major Hamid. They took me to maternity hospital. I delivered my baby that day. I named him Bandi.

Someone told my family that I was there. The doctor brought me to room where there was a sick woman from Halabja. When my relatives came to the hospital, they pretended to visit the other woman. I didn't speak with them, even when they looked at me because there were two guards sitting beside me. It was difficult and sad. I spent five days there.

Then, they took me back to prison. When my baby was a month and a half old, they said to me, “We're going to release you.”

At the time, they said the same thing to Basoz and Nazira. I didn't believe them. They took us to the Sulaimaniya jail. They interrogated us again. There were maybe a hundred women and children in the cell. I sat near the door. It was dirty and you could see insects crawling over all the prisoners.

Again, we were transferred. I was put in a cell with seven other women, all Kurds. I was there for fifteen days. During that time I was never interrogated or tortured.

One day, I was called to the office of the Director. He was a large Arab.

“Do you want to go home?”

“Does anyone ever tire of their home?”

“If we release you, you will work for us?”

“No.”

“Why do you work for Peshmurga?”

“I don’t work for the Peshmurga. I’ve been suffering here for over a year.”

“We don’t want to torture you. We want to treat you as a sister.” Then, he spoke to the guards, “Take her to room number eleven.”

There were two security men in that room. They asked me to confess. Then, they started to hit me with a wire cable. They beat me so hard that I lost consciousness. When I woke up, I found myself back in the room with my son, Bandi. He was hungry and crying, but I had no milk for him.

Then, one day, the Director came to the room and gave Bandi a few dinars.

“Go,” he said. And, I was released.

They put me in a taxi. I went to my aunt’s home. When she saw me, she started to cry and shout. She hugged me. She couldn’t say anything except “My Gula”! After that she took me to my father’s new home. When my mother opened the front door, my aunt couldn’t speak. She just pointed to me waiting in the taxi. My mother fainted.

Then, my father came out and yelled, “Gula has been released!” One of my sisters ran out and to the street and started shouting and dancing.

HASHIM

I was born in Baghdad and finished my primary, intermediate and preparatory studies there. I was raised in a well-cultured and politically enlightened family with my parents and three brothers. I entered the Military Academy and was one of the brightest students there.

After I graduated, I became an officer in the *Mukhabarat* and shortly afterwards, I was appointed as an escort to Saddam Hussein when he was still Vice-President.

Soon after, I married and had a beautiful baby boy.

About eighteen months later, I became a security officer at the Presidential Palace.

Then, Saddam became the President.

I worked hard and made no mistakes. I loved my job. I loved my country even more.

In early December 1990, my driver was taking me to the Presidential Palace. He asked my opinion about the invasion of Kuwait. I told him that I wasn't happy with the invasion and what followed. Kuwait is an Arab country and I felt that it shouldn't have been treated in such a brutal manner.

Our conversation ended.

Neither of us said anything more. He dropped me at the Palace and left.

Ten days later, as I was going to work, our car was stopped by a white Toyota Super Saloon. Four men stepped out of the car carrying guns. They pulled me out of my car and arrested me.

I asked them, "Who are you? What do you want?"

One of them said, "We are from the Mukhabarat. You are under arrest for something you did. You will hear about it soon enough."

They put me in back seat of their car. One of them sat on my left and the other on my right. We drove away, leaving my car and driver behind.

On our way to the Mukhabarat offices, I was thinking, "What did I do? What happened? And why did they take me away and leave my driver?"

Then, I remembered the conversation I had with my driver. I suspected him, but I wasn't sure that he was involved.

About half an hour later, we arrived at a building in the Mukhabarat's Hakimiyya prison. The original Hakimiyya headquarters had been destroyed so the new offices were in one of the buildings that near the Saddam Tower in Mansour. At the time, the head of the Mukhabarat was Sabir Al-Douri.

They brought me to a room and made me take off my clothes. They gave me a pair of old pajamas. Then, they walked me to a very small cell. Its walls were painted red and the ceiling was so low that it was impossible to stand. The door was similar to that of a safe and it was also painted red. The cell had a small window covered with glass, and a toilet which smelled terrible.

They left me in the cell and went away.

I stayed there for a week without being asked anything. A man used to come by to bring food and then leave. I tried speaking with him but he never said a word.

At the end of the week, a man came and opened the cell door. He took me to the interrogation room.

There, I saw the head of Mukhabarat who had come to interrogate me in person.

I was very surprised to see him.

He asked me, "What is your name?"; "What is your address?"; "What is your job?"

I answered his questions even though I was aware that he already knew everything about me.

Once upon a time, he was my friend.

Then, he asked me, "Do you object the annexation of Kuwait?"

"I don't object to anything. It's none of my business."

"Then how could you say that annexing Kuwait was a mistake because it is a country that should not be occupied by force?"

"I didn't say that."

He stood up and slapped me on my ear. I fell to the ground.

He called someone named Ali and said, "Take him to the torture room."

Ali stood silent for a while. He was tall, heavily built, and had a dark complexion and a terrifying face.

As we were on our way to the torture room, I was in shock. What made my friend do this to me? What had happened to the world?

Ali took me to the torture room which was underground. It was a medium-sized room with many torture instruments. He took off my clothes and pushed me to the ground. Then he sat on my chest. I felt as if my chest was going to break apart and I was going to die.

He stood up and pulled me by my hair. I felt as if my hair would be pulled off my head. He tied my hands behind me and made me stand on

table set on wheels. He hung my hands in a hook in the ceiling, and then pushed the table away. I hung from the ceiling. My shoulders felt like they were dislocated. I lost feeling in them.

He took me down about quarter of an hour later, saying, "Put on your clothes."

I dressed with great difficulty because I couldn't move my arms. He took me to that small cell. I was devastated, exhausted, and in pain. He left me there for a week.

I used to hear the screaming of those being tortured.

I used to hear the women screaming.

I began to fear for my wife.

One day, another man took me to the torture room. He made me sit on a chair and tied my hands to the armrests. He put clamps on my ears and then electrocuted me. I couldn't stand it and I fainted. When I regained consciousness, I found myself back in the cell.

About a month later, I was sent to Al-Karkh Courthouse where I was accused of opposing the regime. I was sentenced to life imprisonment and the confiscation of all my assets.

Then, I was sent to the Special Sentences Department at Abu Ghraib prison. There I was placed in a room with ten other prisoners. They were all sentenced for life imprisonment and all were officers and intellectuals.

One week after I arrived in prison my family came to see me. The prison management allowed us two visits per month. On the first visit, my wife, brothers, and parents came to the prison.

My father said, "Be patient, son. This is a test of patience from God. Remember that believers always face difficulties in life."

My family brought me food, drinks, and cigarettes. I used to give some of these to those prisoners whose families never came to visit.

I lived a terrible life in prison, but I kept my father's words in mind. I was patient and kept my strength.

They used to take prisoners out to the courtyard every once in a while. They would beat the prisoner with cables while he helplessly screamed and begged for them to stop. The more he screamed the more they beat him until he lost consciousness. Then, they would leave him.

We would carry him to his prison cell and take care of him.

I remained in that prison for five years. During that time, I never saw my son.

In 1995, the government issued an amnesty, but I wasn't covered by it. That increased my pain and suffering. Two weeks later, an amnesty was issued for political prisoners. I was covered by the second amnesty and released.

When I left the prison, I saw my family there with a drum and trumpet band. The band started playing as my family hugged me and kissed me. The band kept playing until we arrived home. My neighbors and relatives all came to the house to congratulate us for my release.

I saw my son and hugged him. But, he didn't know who I was. I was very sad. As the time passed, he got to know me. He became very attached to me and we never left each other's side since then.

God has also gave me a beautiful daughter. We all live with my parents in the same house. We remained under surveillance and I was unable to find a job until the regime fell.

I hope the situation in Iraq calms down.

I hope no Iraqi ever has to suffer injustice again.

We suffered so much under Saddam, that brutal tyrant.

BANAZ

We were a happy family and everyone was jealous of our good fortune. But, this happiness ended quickly. Our wonderful life together turned to misery because of Saddam. I was married in 1983 to a man named Karim. He was my cousin and was quiet, calm, and kind. He was from a rural village and I was from the city of Kirkuk. He was a farmer and I was well educated.

We moved to the village and had two daughters and a son. In 1988, the government informed us that we had to appear before the authorities within twenty-four hours. We all went to the main road. There were a lot of Iraqi soldiers there as well as Kurdish militia who worked for the government.

We waited for hours in the rain and cold. Our bodies were covered with mud.

Then, they put us in military vehicles.

The regime's agents told us, "The government has made a nice, new town for you. We are going to take you there. You will be much happier there than in your current village."

As the military vehicles were driving away, we realized the government agents had lied to us. They took us to the military base in Chamchamal and put us in a prison. There were people from other villages

there as well. Then, they brought vehicles to take us to a big building in Tobzawa. Each family was taken to a table with a number of chairs. Iraqi officers were there with Kurdish translators asking everyone questions.

“Why did you flee?”

“How come you’re not Ba’athists?”

“Will you work with the government?”

We told them, “We just want to live in peace.”

They refused to accept our answers. An officer stood up and hit me and my husband. Our children started crying.

After the questioning, they took us outside.

My husband and I loved each other with all our hearts. We held hands. We loved our children. I hugged my son and held onto my baby daughter. My older daughter had one hand on her father’s pants and the other on my dress.

The security agents pulled my husband to one side and me to the other side. We didn’t want to be separated from each other. We tried to hold on to each other. They beat us and we fell to the ground.

I was screaming, “Why do you treat us like this? We are ready to be shot here together, to be burned together! Please don’t pull us apart!”

I went down on my knees to kiss the feet of the government agent. At the time, I believed that my husband and I would always be together. The officer kicked me with his boot. I collapsed and fell unconscious. I had no idea it would be the last time we’d ever see each other.

When I gained consciousness, I found myself in a room. I saw women hitting themselves. I saw my cousin crying. I heard the women talking about how they were separated from their children. Then, I realized I couldn’t find my own children, except for my baby who was only eight months old. I started crying and beating myself.

Late that night, they cut the electricity off and the room became very dark. Then, they opened the door and brought some children inside. We were all looking for our children, feeling around for them like animals, touching their hair and bodies. All the women grabbed onto the children they touched. We were kissing them and gently holding them.

After around half an hour, they turned the electricity on. We saw all the mothers embracing different children. With the lights on, each mother found her own children. There were so many people in the room that no one could sit or rest. We spent the evening standing.

In the morning, they opened the door. They gave us only a few small loaves of hard bread. We divided the bread among ourselves and fed our children.

Once a day, they let us go to the bathroom. But, it was also a sort of punishment because they forced us to walk past a room where the men were held. We looked at them through the window. Many were tied down. Others were being beaten with wire cables.

Later, they brought some of the men, blindfolded and handcuffed, to the room where we were held. They forced them to walk through the room. If one fell, the security agents would beat him.

On the third day, they brought us out into a hall. We saw the shoes and clothes of the men on the floor. We felt hopeless.

Then, they took us in buses to an Arab village in a different district. We were all crying. The Arab women and children received us by laughing, clapping, dancing, and throwing stones.

They took us to a camp. They forced us to get out of the vehicles and moved us through a narrow passage with barbed wire on both sides. The guards said, "Hurry up. Move along!" It was very dark. We could see a dim light from the camp. Everyone held on to the person in front of them.

We walked forward to the sound of crying children, screaming women, and the wind.

As we entered the camp building, they turned off the electricity. We were very scared. I felt something thick and unpleasant against my feet. I had no idea what it was because it was so dark. We stayed in the darkness until around midnight when they turned on all the lights.

Then, we saw the bones of dead people.

There was blood on the walls and there were pieces of bloody cloth that no one dared touch.

I stayed awake all night. Many of the women and girls were sick with fear. For breakfast, they gave us several loaves of bread. We cut them into pieces and put them in water and gave this to our children.

Each day, my baby grew weaker. Since I hadn't eaten food, I had no milk. During the first two weeks, I fed my baby with sugar that I begged from some of the women who brought things from their homes. By the time we arrived at the camp, all the food was gone.

I asked the guards to bring a doctor to treat my baby. Instead, they came and took my baby from me. I tried to follow the guards. The other women pleaded with them to give me back my child. I fell on my knees and kissed their boots. They kicked me. They took my baby out of the room. I never saw him again.

After that, there was a fatal disease that afflicted many of us. People started vomiting. Four or five children died every day. Some days, old people died as well. Every day more people died.

Because so many people had died, they started giving us better food. They brought us eggs, cheese, jam, rice, and soup.

There was one intelligence agent who was very cruel. He assaulted women and forced them to have sex with them. He beat me in a very brutal way and raped me.

Some of us pretended to be sick, and with the help of the medical committee, we were transferred to the hospital. Then, we informed our relatives to come to the hospital so they could see us. We saw each other but didn't speak. Sometimes, I would write letters which I would pass to my relatives hidden inside different things.

There were two Arab guards who helped me pass information from the prison to our friends and family outside. I did a lot of things through those two guards, but our work together didn't last long. An intelligence agent learned that I sent letters to my relatives and one day, he found one of the guards with a letter I'd written.

He read the letter and sent it to Security Directorate in Kirkuk. They brought an armored car to take me away. They charged me with helping the Peshmurga. I denied the accusation.

They beat me. They tortured me. They wanted me to confess. They locked me in a room which was shut with a big padlock. Inside, I saw shoes, a dress, a jamana, and some bones. I stayed there for three days. They beat me every day with a wire cable and a pipe. I was afraid that I would be killed.

After around six months, an agent named Ali started firing into the air. He told us to stand up and start dancing. He told us that the President had granted a general amnesty.

"The men have already been released and you will be released tomorrow."

In the morning they put us in a vehicle that took us to Tobzawa, Kirkuk, and then Chamchamal.

I went to my brother-in-law's home. He took in my daughters, but rejected me.

My family said that I dishonored them in prison. Some said I collaborated with the regime. Others said I failed to wear black clothes as a symbol of mourning for my husband and had broken Kurdish tradition. They hit me and insulted me. They took my children and forced me out of their home.

I went to the house of some other relatives. They begged my brother-in-law to let me be with my children, but he refused saying, "They're not her children. I don't care where she goes. If she returns I'll kill her."

Eventually I found a man who took me to my father's new home. He was very kind to me. I spent six months there, far from my children. I was like a mad woman. I fainted many times each day. I saw my children in my dreams.

Later, we sent several respected, elderly men to my brother-in-law's home to convince him to let me see my children. It was useless.

I began to suffer from a psychological illness. My life was full of misery and suffering.

After the liberation of Iraq, I went back to Kirkuk. Now, I work for an organization that helps women who were victims of the Anfal campaign. I am committed to working with these women and to trying to improve their lives.

I will never forget what happened to me. I think constantly about the brutality I suffered and remember how I was beaten. I often think of my baby who was taken out of my arms by security agents and who died alone, without me.

KARRAR

When I started the 7th grade, I moved to my grandfather's house in downtown Hilla. My uncles were young and they treated me as if I was their brother or friend so I was happy to move in with them.

I was in 8th grade when the 1991 Kuwait War began which was followed by the Uprising. We were very worried after we heard about the massacres committed by the government forces in the rural areas, especially near Tourist Road where my parents lived.

My grandfather decided to visit my parents. My uncles tried to stop him, but he insisted saying that he was an old man and that nobody would think of arresting him.

I held onto him as he went out. I was crying and begging him to take me along to visit my family.

He refused and said, "You're strong and the military might think that you're older and arrest you."

I kept watching him as he walked away. When he reached the main street, I ran as fast as I could to reach him. He slapped me and ordered me to go back to the house. I cried and sat on the street, refusing to return.

Then, he bent down, kissed my head and cheek, and apologized.

“Come on then. Come with me. I am afraid for you. I am afraid that those armed men filling the street would arrest you.”

We walked until we reached a military checkpoint, where they asked me to show my identification documents. I showed them my student ID.

They asked my grandfather, “Where are you going?”

“We’re going to the Tourist Road area to see my son and his family.”

“Please, uncle, go back home. The Tourist Road is full of soldiers and checkpoints. They might suspect you. You are an old man. We don’t want you to get in trouble.”

“Thank you, son. I won’t be late. I’m just going to see my son’s family and then I’ll return right away.”

The young soldier tried to convince my grandfather not to go on, but he insisted on going.

We arrived at another checkpoint beside some palm trees and vineyards. There was a bus filled with people, both young and old. I thought that they were going to see their relatives just like us.

I suddenly heard my grandfather speaking nervously to an officer, “Why should I go with you? I am an old man, and my grandson is just a child. I came to visit my son’s family and see if they were alright.”

I didn’t realize how bad the situation was. I said, “Let’s go with them, grandpa.”

The officer asked me for my identification document, and I showed it to him.

He said to another soldier, “Hey Ali, take those two with you.”

“But the bus is full. There’s no place for them.”

“Well, make room!”

The soldier Ali took us toward the bus.

My father said to him, "Please, let us go away, son. I am an old man. Please, for my sake and for this child's sake."

"Uncle, I have to follow the orders. I am a southerner, and that officer is a Tikriti. If I don't follow his orders, they will take me instead of you."

We arrived at the bus, which was full of passengers. Women were crying and weeping.

I sat on the bus floor next to the feet of a young man. His face was that of a holy person. I looked at him all the way. He was asking God for mercy and forgiveness, reciting, "There is no god but God, and Mohammed is His Messenger" as if he was preparing himself for death.

He saw that I was watching him. He looked at me, smiled and said, "Don't be afraid, habibi."

The soldiers' guns were pointed at us. They wouldn't allow to us speak to one another.

About a half hour later, the bus arrived at Mahawil Camp and entered the main square. There were so many people there that it looked like Judgment Day.

A soldier went down to get orders from an officer. He returned quickly and ordered the driver to drive out of the camp because there wasn't any place for us. The bus went on for some distance and then it turned back. I thought that it would take us back where we came from, but instead it went towards the brick factory.

The bus door was opened and we were ordered to step down. We all refused. I looked through the window and saw a soldier pointing his gun at us ordering us to get out of the bus. Going through the door was like stepping out going into a world of death.

One soldier came aboard the bus. He pushed a young woman. She cried and begged him not to kill her. The young man who I was sitting next to stood up and said, "Let her go! I'll come instead of her."

His attitude gave all of us courage and strength.

The man reached the bus door. Then a soldier pushed him until he stood by a trench. They shot him and he fell into the trench.

The people cried out, "Allahu Akbar!"; "May God destroy you, tyrants!"; "God is our shelter!"

People fell one after the other into the trench.

Then, it was our turn.

I never knew that my grandfather was so strong. He held me in his hands as if he was going to crush me. I could hardly breathe.

The shot hit my grandfather's head, blowing out his brains. I heard his breathe grow faint, but it was louder than all the others who were also dying.

I was choking. I wished that I would die from a bullet rather than a lack of air.

I remained under my grandfather's body, silent and terrified.

Bodies kept falling over and around us until everybody had been killed. Then, a machine came and pushed sand into the trench, enough to hide the bodies, but not fully bury them.

I kept saying, "There is no god but God, and Mohammed is His Messenger" and asking God for mercy and forgiveness.

There was little light of life in me. I decided to keep it. A few times, I thought that I had died, but then I felt my heart pounding as if it wanted to get out of my chest.

I put my right elbow on a dead woman that fell next to my grandfather. I pushed her to create an empty space. My grandfather's arms

were still holding me tightly. I tried to get out of his grip and use the space around me to breathe. Sand was coming down over my face and into my mouth.

It took me about half an hour to get out from the bodies piled in the trench.

When I got out, I fell to the ground to rest. I was totally exhausted and about to lose consciousness, when I heard a man ask, "Are you alive?"

I was startled and began to act crazy. He was wearing clothes stained with blood. The man was also afraid. He had been shot in the shoulder.

I was shivering and my teeth were chattering.

He hugged me and said, "Don't be afraid, son. I made it out of the trench. I am alive too."

The wounded man took me and we walked together towards a village. It was completely dark and very cold. The roads were full of potholes due to earlier heavy rains. We walked and fell until we reached the village.

Then, the man said, "Go to one of the houses. I'll stay here because I am wounded and they might suspect me and tell the army."

I left him and went to one of the mud houses. I knocked at the door, and a woman's voice answered.

I said to her, "Please let me in for the night. I have lost my way."

She took me inside, and brought me some warm food, but I refused to eat. She brought me a cup of hot milk and I drank it. She brought me a blanket and brought the kerosene heater close to me.

I couldn't pull myself together. I started crying.

I said, "I have a wounded man with me. There's a bullet in his shoulder and he needs medical care. If he stays in this cold weather he might die."

"How was he shot?"

“He was wounded during the executions that took place a while ago.”

The woman pretended that she didn't know what had happened. She looked scared. However, she decided to help us. She told her elder son to go out with me and bring the wounded man back to the house.

We went to the place where the man was hiding and took him to the house.

The woman was courageous. She provided us with food and shelter that night. She found enough strength to get a knife, cotton, and some bandages. She heat up the knife and took the bullet out of the man's shoulder. She put bandages over the wound and gave the man two sleeping pills. He slept until the morning.

We had breakfast and the woman gave us clean clothes, and said, “You will have to leave now because the military patrols here will find you.”

We thanked her, left, and separated. I went on foot over roads and pathways where there were no military checkpoints. I arrived at my grandfather's house and told my uncles about what happened. They sat and read the Q'uran, and prayed for my grandfather.

None of the security officials ever contacted us about my grandfather because his name wasn't on their lists. How he died remained unknown to everyone, even the closest neighbors.

What I saw made me suffer. I used to weep and cry at night without understanding why. After things calmed down in Hilla my uncle took me to a psychiatrist for treatment.

After the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003, my uncles went to the mass grave. They found my grandfather's glasses, his wallet, his identification document, and a little perfume bottle he used to carry with him. They took his bones and reburied them in Najaf.

After all those years, I still see the victims.

I hear their cries and the sounds of them dying. I can recall these scenes today as if they happened only yesterday, a reminder that we were ruled by terrible forces of evil and darkness.

CONCLUSION

These testimonies present firsthand accounts of terrible suffering. It required great courage and strength for these individuals to tell their stories. In many cases, they had never spoken openly before about what they experienced.

The Iraq History Project gathered these testimonies to create a victim-centered record of past repression. The project provides a means of ensuring that these stories are carefully documented and that the suffering of individual Iraqis and the larger society is acknowledged, now and well into the future.

The Iraq History Project is committed to supporting a process of reckoning with past atrocities in Iraq. The project has created a methodology that should prove useful for future transitional justice initiatives, such as a possible Iraqi truth commission, the development of assistance programs for victims, mechanisms of reparations, memorialization projects, and various forms of educational programming.

Engaging with past suffering is a complex process that involves many sectors of society and is likely to evolve over decades. It is the goal of the Iraq History project to contribute to these efforts and to support a society that honors its victims and respects and defends fundamental human rights.

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