

# Saddam's day of judgement

by Kathy Evans

**G**enocide, by its very nature, does not breed many survivors. When a few do manage to witness, or survive, firing squads, gassing, systematic torture, or mass rapes, their brave words cry out for justice.

It's a commodity in short supply in the Middle East. For the millions of Iraqis whose lives have been touched by the atrocities of the regime of Saddam Hussein, justice looks like a distant dream. One of those dreamers is a grave digger from Suleimaniya who courageously came forward with this testimony.

"I must have buried 600 or maybe up to 1,000 people — all killed by the secret police between 1985 and 1989. Sometimes they were Kurdish guerrillas, sometimes women, sometimes children. Sometimes they'd been tortured. There were other grave diggers, but I'm sure I buried most of them."

Another brave witness is a resident of Basra who tells of what happened in his neighbourhood during the uprising in southern Iraq which followed Kuwait's liberation.

"We went into a house, into the living room. There were the bodies of two young girls completely naked, hung from the fan that was suspended from the ceiling.

"In another room was the rest of the family — at least eight bodies, including a child under the age of two. The bodies were bloated — it had been at least two days. The streets of the neighbourhood were full of bodies, lying in heaps. I saw whole families cut to pieces, arms, hands, legs."

There's no shortage of testimonies and certainly no shortage of crimes to be judged. Last Wednesday, a group of Iraqis launched an international campaign to seek support for the establishment of a war crimes tribunal for Iraq. Backed by the opposition movement, the Iraqi National Congress, the campaign called INDICT aims to lobby the Security Council to set up a mechanism to try the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein and some 38 of his senior officials for genocide and crimes against humanity.

The charges against Saddam Hussein — numbering 37 in all — read like the recent history of Iraq: the gassing of thousands of

Kurdish civilians in Halabja, the invasions of Iran and Kuwait, the torture and killings of thousands of Iraqi Shia after the Kuwait war, the systematic destruction of the habitat of the Marsh Arabs, the abduction of Kuwaiti citizens ... the list goes on.

Against his henchmen, the charge sheet reveals personal involvement in acts of execution, torture and rape against Iraqi civilians. Like Ali Hassan al Majid, the security chief, who personally participated in the mass murder of the inhabitants of the village of Dujail after an attempt was made on the life of the president there. Or the first deputy prime minister, Taha Yassin Ramadan, accused of 11 charges including ordering the murder of a group of insurgents by having tanks run over

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their heads. Or Uday Tikriti, Saddam's son who is accused of eight counts of murder, sexual assault on Iraqi women, and personally selecting large numbers of Basra residents for execution for their role in the insurgency.

There is no shortage of evidence to back the charges, for as in the rule of Pol Pot in Cambodia, meticulous records were kept of the orders for detention, torture and executions. Amongst this bureaucracy of genocide, the memo written by Security headquarters in Baghdad to the director general of the Dohuk governorate to shoot 95 per cent of demonstrators, keeping the remaining 5 per cent for interrogation. There are also careful records and lists kept of every village ordered for "elimination" and reports on when and how the orders were carried out.

From Sulaimaniya security headquarters, there is a list of 87 names neatly written out recording their execution for such crimes as trespassing into forbidden zones or being an Iranian agent, or teaching Kurdish.

What then is the prospect of justice for the Iraqi people? The Jews had their day in court in Nuremberg in the aftermath of the Second

World War. The Yugoslavs and the Rwandans are also now painstakingly investigating the details of genocide carried out in their countries. Why not a tribunal for Iraq, the opposition is asking?

The campaign for an international tribunal, INDICT, began in London last week with the backing of a group of British MPs. At the House of Commons launch, messages of support were read out from British Prime Minister John Major, Lady Margaret Thatcher and the government of Kuwait. In March, the campaign goes to the United States.

Its supporters argue that such a tribunal will emphasise the distinction in law between the Iraqi people and the present leadership. It will also cripple any diplomatic moves of those named in the indictments.

Despite these messages of support, Western leaders remain uncomfortable with the idea of a war crimes tribunal for Iraq. The establishment of a tribunal originally surfaced during discussions over resolutions passed against Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait. It was quietly dropped later.

Its revival could face opposition from Iraq's supporters in the Security Council, such as France and Russia. Both nations are owed billions of dollars in debts for arms by the Iraqi regime and both are subsequently anxious for oil production and trade to fully resume. Even those nations considered most hostile towards the Iraqi leadership such as Britain and the US may balk at moves to further isolate the only nation capable of facing Iran.

As a spokesman for the British Foreign Office put it: "Obviously we share the objectives of the campaign to bring Saddam Hussein to justice. However, we doubt the process of Yugoslavia can be duplicated for Iraq after such a long passage of time."

As for crippling diplomatic moves by those named in the indictments, on the very day the campaign was launched, Iraq's vice premier, Tariq Aziz, was having talks with the French foreign minister Herve de Charette. Aziz's visit to France was part of a European tour which included Belgium and Spain.

Justice, it seems, could be a long time coming for the people of Iraq.

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