

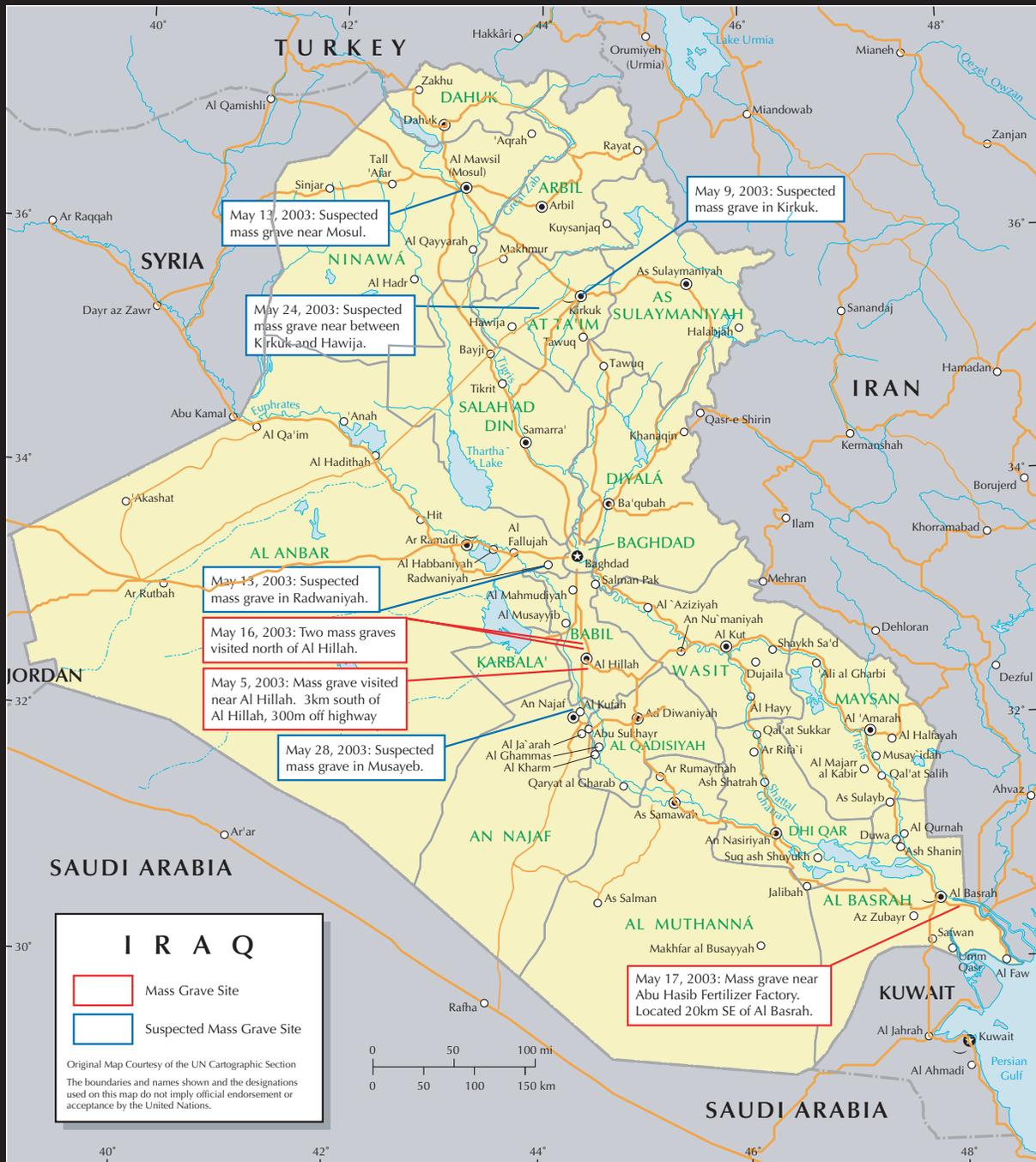


# *Iraq's Legacy of Terror*

# MASS GRAVES

U.S. Agency for International Development

# LOCATIONS OF FIRST MASS GRAVES DISCOVERED IN IRAQ



Mass Graves was edited by USAID Senior Writer Ben Barber with assistance from Stephen Epstein of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives.

Cover: Iraqis search for relatives and friends among victims found in a mass grave in Musayib, 75 kilometers southwest of Baghdad. The victims are thought to be from the 1991 uprising against the Iraqi government. The bodies, wrapped in linen shrouds, are being held in a makeshift morgue in a nearby youth center.

All photos by USAID/ Thomas Hartwell except photo on inside back cover, which is by U.S. Department of State/ Sandra L. Hodgkinson.

# A Vast Human Tragedy

In a decade and a half of humanitarian work I have witnessed the aftermath of much human tragedy, including the Rwandan genocide and the killing fields of Cambodia. In June 2003, I visited Iraq's mass graves, the most recent addition to mankind's legacy of mass murder.

Rows of white bundles containing bones filled room after room. Families filed by, searching for signs of those who had disappeared, some stolen during the night, others taken in daylight. Even small children were not spared the butchery.

The graves that Saddam Hussein's henchmen dug and filled with human beings are a bitter sign that mankind still has a long way to go before every person has the basic human rights promised by all our religions and cultures—the rights of life and liberty.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari told the United Nations that under Saddam Hussein, Iraq was “a murderous tyranny that lasted over 35 years.” “Today we are unearthing thousands of victims in horrifying testament,” Zebari said.

I walked across the sandy plains of Iraq and saw the mass graves that were just found and are beginning to yield their tragic secrets. The bones tell a story of horror and shame: arms bound together, skulls pierced from behind. Hundreds in one long trench.

Those who survived inside Iraq, and those who watched helplessly from abroad, have joined together to begin the long, painful process of accounting for the dead. British Prime Minister Tony Blair said on November 20, 2003, that as many as 400,000 Iraqis lie in these mass graves.

They are Kurds, killed because of their ethnicity. They are Shiites, killed because of their religion. They are Sunnis, killed for their political views. They are Egyptians, Kuwaitis, and Iranians, killed because their lives meant nothing to Saddam Hussein, his sons, and their followers.

As Saddam's evil regime collapsed in April and May, 2003, and his Baath Party mass murderers retreated into the shadows, Iraqis began to act on their formerly hidden grief. They searched for their loved ones rounded up over the years in campaigns of terror. They had heard rumors about shots in the night, mass burials, and vanished prisoners. Now they followed those bloody trails to the mounds of earth they suspected entombed their beloved children and parents.

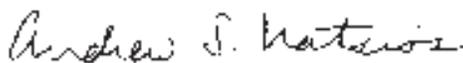
The new leaders in Al Hillah, Karbala, Najaf, and a dozen other cities and towns around Iraq worked with U.S. and British forces to try and protect some of the mass graves. We hope to preserve the evidence of these crimes against humanity.

Human rights groups have formed, assisted by USAID and working with the Coalition Provisional Authority, to urge people to record the names of those being exhumed and describe the circumstances under which they were seized and slain.

Yes—people want to find the remains of their loved ones and give them a proper burial in consecrated ground. But the Iraqi people also want justice—to punish those who callously killed their fellow citizens by the busload, day after day, year after year.

Above all, if people in Iraq and around the world hope to learn from the crimes of the past, the mass graves of Iraq must be documented, reported, and never forgotten or denied.

This booklet is a small, early marker on that path.



Andrew Natsios, Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
January 2004

# Iraq's Mass Graves



*A victim, still blindfolded, found in a mass grave in Musayib.*

## A LEGACY OF TERROR

Since the Saddam Hussein regime was overthrown in May, 270 mass graves have been reported. By mid-January, 2004, the number of confirmed sites climbed to fifty-three. Some graves hold a few dozen bodies—their arms lashed together and the bullet holes in the backs of skulls testimony to their execution. Other graves go on for hundreds of meters, densely packed with thousands of bodies.

“We’ve already discovered just so far the remains of 400,000 people in mass graves,” said British Prime Minister Tony Blair on November 20 in London. The United Nations, the U.S. State Department, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch (HRW) all estimate that Saddam Hussein’s regime murdered hundreds of thousands of innocent people. “Human Rights Watch estimates that as many as 290,000 Iraqis have been ‘disappeared’ by the Iraqi government over the past two decades,” said the group in a statement in May. “Many of these ‘disappeared’ are those whose remains are now being unearthed in mass graves all over Iraq.”

If these numbers prove accurate, they represent a crime against humanity surpassed only by the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Pol Pot’s Cambodian killing fields in the 1970s, and the Nazi Holocaust of World War II.

## REPORTS OF MASS KILLINGS

Beginning in the 1980s, reports of mass murder began filtering out of Iraq. Saddam’s Baathist loyalists and police rounded up members of the Dawa party—they were never heard from again. Human rights groups said 180,000 ethnic Kurds were rounded up and killed in the Anfal campaign in which hundreds of mountain villages were destroyed. Those left alive were moved into bleak collection cities that still dot the plains between Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah. It was a crime so staggering that, without hard evidence of bodies to back it up, many refused to believe it possible.

Then in 1988 came the use of nerve and mustard gas against Iraqi-Kurdish civilians in Halabjah. Five thousand were killed in a single day. The world was shocked, but still, the missing people rounded up over the previous months and years remained vanished.

After the 1991 Gulf War, Shiites and Kurds revolted, but the rebellion was quickly crushed by Iraqi tanks and troops loyal to Saddam Hussein. While Kurds got protection from U.S. and British aircraft, creating an autonomous region in northeastern Iraq where they were safe from persecution, the Shiites were brutally repressed in the south, and tens of thousands vanished.

The following pages include first-hand accounts from three Iraqis who survived the mass murders. Each tells what took place in a way that no formal report can match. Yet the world is duty-bound to learn the facts—cold, brutal, and numbing—of what happened over these years and how a modern government, equipped with the powers of a modern army and police, turned against its own people.

## A HISTORY OF DENIAL

The reports of mass murder under Saddam Hussein had been made for years by the United Nations, the U.S. Government, HRW, independent journalists, and the families of people who were arrested and then vanished. But the Iraqi regime denied the reports, refused to allow U.N. investigations, and stonewalled human rights groups.

“As in previous years, the regime continued to deny the widespread killings of Kurds in the north of the country during the ‘Anfal’ campaign of 1988,” said the U.S. State Department’s 2002 human rights report. “Both the [U.N.] Special Rapporteur and HRW concluded that the regime’s policies against the Kurds raised questions of crimes against humanity and violations of the 1948 Genocide Convention.”

Finally, the regime was swept away by U.S., British, and other allied forces in May, 2003, and the truth emerged. It came as no surprise that once the country was thrown open to the world press and international organizations, they might find evidence of these crimes against humanity. But few imagined the full extent of the slaughter that came to light.

## SEARCHING FOR THE GRAVES

In early May, Saddam’s police, paramilitary troops, and army fled from their prisons, barracks, and killing fields. Thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children began a grim trek to the forbidden places they feared they would find their missing children, parents, and friends.

Reports that mass graves had been discovered reached officials at the first U.S. administrative body in Iraq, the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), which was later replaced by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). A human rights expert from the U.S. Agency for International Development was one of the first outsiders to follow the Iraqis to the site of their grim discoveries.

“South of Al Hillah in early May I heard about bones,” said Sloan Mann of USAID. “When I showed up, people

were randomly digging through the site. I went there two days after the mass grave was discovered.

“The site was very disturbed. Children walked barefoot in the grave. There were many families. Some were mourning. Some were curious onlookers.”

Mann stood on the edge of a ditch some 20 meters long and 2 meters wide. About 25 sets of remains were showing, all in neat piles, along with the clothes the victims had worn when they died. Some were the clothes of children.

## THE UNITED STATES OFFERS TO HELP

To help the Iraqis exhume their loved ones, the CPA authorized Mann and other U.S. officials to assist. Mann was part of the first deployment of Abuse Prevention Units (APUs), created by USAID to protect human rights in emergencies or conflict. The teams offered quick grants to buy everything from shovels to exhume graves to computers for logging in victims as they were unearthed. Money was provided for training Iraqis in forensic medicine—the science of determining the legal cause of death—so that evidence might be obtained for prosecution of those responsible for the killings. Help was also given to several Iraqi human rights groups, including the Free Prisoners Association and the Lawyers Association. They began compiling lists of missing Iraqis, suspected mass grave sites, confirmed victims, and documents relating to disappearances.

In some cases, former Iraqi guards, burial workers, and even executioners themselves came forward to tell what had happened. Some said that if they had refused to arrest and kill as ordered, they would have been thrown into the pits themselves.

The CPA and USAID officials working with the Iraqis quickly decided to divide the mass graves into three groups:

- **Emotionally overrun sites**  
These are sites that have already been overrun by people seeking the remains of their missing relatives and friends. Since the sites are disturbed—and it would be unthinkable to intervene to stop people from completing their search—U.S. aid is aimed to train Iraqis to assist the community emotionally and to collect whatever information is possible: victim names, circumstances of disappearance, etc.
- **Humanitarian exhumation sites**  
In these sites, trained Iraqi professionals teach the community how to put together all the bones and

other remains from each victim, properly identify the remains, and help families obtain the best accounting of what happened to their loved ones. The primary purpose of these excavations is to identify missing persons, although some evidence will also be recovered by local forensic teams.

■ **Full criminal investigation sites**

Between eight and 20 sites are expected to be selected for full exhumation for accountability purposes in the Iraqi Special Tribunal, which was recently established by the Iraqi Governing Council to try cases of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide.

## THE TASK AHEAD

At the donor conference held in Madrid in October, funding, forensic teams, equipment, mortuary assistance, and training programs were requested from the international community to assist the Iraqi people in uncovering mass graves. These donations and assistance will be necessary for many years to come as the Iraqis move forward in their reconciliation process, according to the CPA senior human rights official Sandy Hodgkinson. The CPA Office of Human Rights and Transitional Justice has sent out staff to communities and talked about the need to have patience, preserve the sites, and respect the dead. So far, 270 suspected mass grave sites have been found by Iraqis, the CPA, and the U.S. Army's Criminal Investigative Division. However, in some cases, mass grave reports have turned out to be either simply old cemeteries, or falsely reported to attract attention or to obtain funds.

Another difficulty facing the effort to find and document mass graves is that those who carried out the murders, and other supporters of Saddam's regime, have threatened the human rights groups collecting evidence of crimes against humanity. The Free Prisoners Association has been attacked, and two assassination attempts have taken place.

Another challenge is the weather—the rainy winter prevented the opening of most mass graves until February 2004. Nevertheless, the first of some 40 international investigators began arriving in January 2004. They will prepare evidence for the Iraqi Special Tribunal, an Iraqi institution that will prosecute some of the estimated 6,000 people linked to Saddam-era crimes. The plan is to begin prosecutions with Ali Hassan al-Majid (known as “Chemical Ali”), a cousin of Saddam Hussein accused of ordering the gassing of the Kurds in 1988.

CPA official Hodgkinson states that overall, the mass grave program will differ slightly from the process used in Bosnia, and will be specific to the needs in Iraq. Scientific methods of excavation for investigative purposes will be the same. Programs to identify the missing, however, will differ from Bosnia, where to date, only 8,000 of the 30,000 bodies believed to be buried as a result of the conflict have been recovered.

Mass graves are not evident to the untrained eye. Many are concealed under tons of earth or hidden in inaccessible military camps. Satellite and aerial imagery is being used to identify disturbed earth; ground-probing radar also helps locate remains.

When a possible site is identified, a team including an archaeologist, anthropologist, surveyor, geologist, crime-scene officer, and satellite image technician—plus military support—goes to assess the site.

The CPA's Office of Human Rights and Transitional Justice has compiled a list of 270 reported sites across the country. Many sites are in the southwest and central areas around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Exhumations require heavy machinery as well as excavation, mortuary, security, military, and explosives experts. The team of 20–30 people will need living accommodations for four to six weeks.

Iraqi Human Rights Minister Abdul-Basit Turki said that in addition to families' need to find the bodies of missing relatives, excavating mass graves is important in building criminal cases against members of the former regime.

## IRAQIS WERE NOT THE ONLY VICTIMS

It was not just Iraqi citizens who disappeared into the mass graves.

“Despite several well-publicized exchanges with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, the regime effectively ignored

*Workers remove remains from a mass grave. After identification, bodies are wrapped in shrouds and carried to a makeshift morgue.*



requests from those governments to account for those who disappeared during Iraq's 1990–91 occupation of Kuwait, and prisoners of war captured in the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war," said the State Department report.

After the liberation of Iraq, reports surfaced that all 600 Kuwaitis carried into captivity in Iraq by retreating troops in 1991 were executed.

Egyptian officials also said they were seeking information about hundreds—possibly thousands—of Egyptian citizens who died or disappeared after they traveled to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war to take jobs. Many were returned home in coffins—without explanations of how they died.

## A PLAN FOR ACTION

Iraqi and U.S. foreign aid officials have prepared a plan for a long-range process of excavation that will meet all the needs for humanitarian, emotional, and judicial resolution of the mass graves. First, Iraqis with skills in forensic anthropology or simply archaeology are being identified to receive training by international forensic experts. Second, communities are being asked to recommend academics and professionals who want to learn the basics of forensic science. They will undergo training in humanitarian exhumation and the fundamentals of basic skeletal anatomy to facilitate the identification process.

The nuts and bolts of the exhumation process have also been planned: exhumation protocols, nationwide standard operating procedures, administration, and logistical support. Construction is underway to renovate a storage facility into a centralized evidence repository. Local human rights organizations are being funded to increase their capacity to organize and collect documents, evidence, and names of the missing. This will eventually tie in to a national outreach program for families seeking information on missing relatives. Information on missing persons that local organizations are collecting will be moved to the central evidence repository. There a full-time Iraqi staff will work to compile a comprehensive database. The information will then be passed to human rights organizations in communities across Iraq.

There are ongoing efforts to collect, verify, and combine information on suspected mass grave sites. A Danish forensic team arrived in Iraq in October, and a Finnish team was expected soon after. Swedish and German governments have also offered varying levels of assistance. Until the international teams are in place,



*Remains unearthed in a mass grave in Musayib are prepared for reburial by family members.*

forensic site assessments are being used to prioritize 8–16 carefully selected mass graves for a full forensic exhumation based on the following criteria:

- the grave represents a main period of atrocity
- the grave is relatively untouched
- the grave may give evidence of crimes against humanity
- the local population permits securing and exhumation of the site

A media campaign has begun through the daily newspaper *Al Sabah*, Iraqi Media Network, and other media outlets to explain the need to preserve grave sites. Getting the word out on a national level will help identify the missing and encourage citizens to come forward with evidence of atrocities. Although there are few reports of local impatience with the exhumation process, local and religious leaders, nongovernmental organizations, and the media must be continually engaged on the need to protect grave sites and encouraged to have patience with the process.

The Iraqi Governing Council set a major marker on the path to resolving the issue of the mass killings when it announced there will be a national tribunal for criminals. This is the next, unwritten chapter of this story. ■

# Survivor Stories

The following testimonials are from survivors of executions that occurred outside Mahawil, a city north of Al Hillah, approximately 60 miles south of Baghdad.

## ALI'S STORY

Ali,\* 36, an aircraft mechanic, was driving his family from Al Hillah to his farm in Mahawil on March 6, 1991, during the Shiite uprising after the end of the Gulf War. The city was being bombed.

Ali was stopped at a military checkpoint outside the city near a brick factory and ordered to get out. His wife, newborn baby, and handicapped mother were ordered to drive away.

Ali was ordered to remove his jacket, and uniformed men tied his hands and feet with his jacket and pieces of cloth and placed a blindfold over his eyes.

Ali could still see through the blindfold, however, and saw about 12 other people, including men, women, children, and elderly, pulled from cars, bound, and blindfolded.

They were dragged to a white Toyota Land Cruiser and piled on top of each other over the seats. No words were spoken, because when others attempted to speak they received severe blows to the head and body.

It was approximately 10 a.m. when they arrived at the Mahawil military camp on the outskirts of the city. There they were unloaded, registered, and escorted into a large assembly hall filled with approximately 200 people. Everyone was sitting on the floor with their hands

and feet tied. They were blindfolded and positioned facing the walls.

Ali was placed near the door and could see outside. At about 4:30 p.m., the military men built a large ring of tires about 20 feet wide and set it on fire. Next to the fire were large buses, and the soldiers began escorting people from the hall to the buses. At this time, people were also being carried out of the hall and thrown into the fire. Ali believes that because the military was in a hurry to execute them and not everyone would fit on the buses, they decided to burn some people alive. After about 30 minutes of witnessing this, he was escorted from the hall and loaded onto a bus.

At approximately 6 p.m., they were taken on a short drive to a swampy area behind the brick factory. It was dark and he saw headlights in front of the buses. He believes the lights were headlights from the Land Cruisers driven by Saddam's men. He could hear shots but not voices. Ali was paralyzed with fear. Everyone in the bus was blindfolded.

After about 15 minutes, the bus in front of his drove away and the headlights were directly on his bus. They pulled seven to 10 people off the bus. Shots rang out. Ali's group was the next to be pulled from the bus. In his group was a blind man, three brothers, a woman, and her five year old son. The group was led to the front of the bus where the headlights were directly on them.

\* All names have been changed.



*Iraqi women seek to identify remains of lost family members.*



*An identification card found in a mass grave in Musayib.*



*Remains unearthed in a mass reburial.*

They were pushed to the ground and then were pulled up one at a time to be executed. They were pushed a couple of feet to the edge of the swamp and shot. Most would fall before being shot because they were overcome with fear. Ali does not remember any words being spoken—except the plea of the three brothers who begged that at least one be spared. They were executed one at a time. Next, the woman was shot in front of her five-year-old child. The child lunged at the legs of the executioner and was kicked away and shot in the face. The blind man was then executed and his chest exploded on Ali.

There were three executioners. They took turns shooting and reloading. Ali was last in the group to be shot, and the soldier who was to execute Ali shot between his legs. The soldier was then shot dead by another soldier. During this commotion, Ali turned to the swamp, jumped over bodies, and ran through the water. They shot after him. He was hit in the left hand and foot and fell, breaking his nose. He continued on and made it to the other side of the swamp.

A tractor with soldiers came in his direction looking for him, so he tossed his robe into the water and hid in a thicket of cane. The soldiers saw his robe and sprayed it with bullets thinking they had shot him. A bulldozer appeared next and began shoveling dirt on it to cover what they thought was his body. Ali was very near and

was knocked unconscious by falling rocks, but he was not completely buried. When the bulldozer left, he pulled himself out of the dirt and crawled to an empty canal. He could still hear shots in the distance: a third bus had arrived during his escape.

Ali crawled through the canal for about 30 minutes, making his way to a farmhouse. He knocked on the door, and was taken in by the family, which told him later that he “was a piece of blood.” He doesn’t remember much about the care they provided him except for the yogurt they fed him and the heater they placed near him. The family knew his uncles, so they clothed him, gave him a donkey and a cane, and told him to follow the canal to an uncle’s house. Ali made it there, and his uncle cleaned him and took him to Baghdad the next day. He hid there for one month without telling anyone except his uncle. He returned home to discover his two brothers had been executed in similar roundups.

He left the neighborhood and changed his identity. He was also protected by an intelligence officer in his neighborhood. When Saddam was toppled, he resumed his identity after having been in hiding for over 12 years. He is a member of the Human Rights Association of Al Hillah. ■



grave are prepared for



After identification and preparation for reburial, a victim is moved from the morgue by family members.



Iraqis look at lists of victims unearthed from a mass grave in Musayib.

## MUHANED'S STORY

Muhaned,\* 32, is from Al Hillah. From 1984 to 1991, he worked as a nurse in the army. During the 1991 Shiite uprising he was stationed in the north. On March 5, he traveled by bus to Al Hillah to see his parents. It was winter and he arrived early in the morning. Upon entering the city near a brick factory, his bus encountered an army unit near the statue of Saddam. The army unit stopped the bus and would not allow entrance into the city. The bus driver was told there was a curfew and to return to Baghdad. Several people, Muhaned included, got off the bus to walk to Al Hillah. In his group were six men (all Army and in uniform), an old man, two children, and a woman. The army unit saw them approaching and took them into custody. One of the men refused to be taken and was beaten in front of the group. They were escorted to a military bus and loaded in the back. Those who spoke were beaten and called traitors.

They were taken to the Mahawil military camp, where their hands were tied behind their backs, and they were blindfolded. They were escorted into a large assembly hall. Muhaned could hear whispering, but he does not believe there were many people in the hall at that time. He sat on the floor and fell asleep. Around noon, somebody kicked him and took his name, and he fell asleep again. Around 3 p.m., he awoke to see that the hall was filled with well over 100 people. His ties had loosened and he was able to see. He saw his neighbor. He also saw Ali (see first survivor story). They spent the entire day without water, food, or toilets. People were forced to go to the bathroom where they sat.

\* All names have been changed.

At about 5 p.m. they began loading people onto buses. Muhaned was at the back of the hall and was one of the last to be escorted out. There was no light in the hall, but through the windows, he could see the glow of a large fire. He could smell rubber burning.

People were being escorted out to the buses in groups of about 20 at a time. Some people, however, were picked up and thrown into the fire. Muhaned and those around him could hear the screaming. A woman yelled at a soldier, "Why are you burning these people?" She was told, "They are criminals." From this, Muhaned felt safe because he had done nothing wrong.

As the hall emptied, a soldier pointed at his group and said "Take them. Captain Abbar has signed for them." Muhaned did not understand what this meant and began crying and praying. When he exited the hall, the fire was only three to four meters from the entrance. Those who were walking slowly, or whose feet were tied, were thrown in the fire. The rest, including Muhaned, were escorted to the buses.

Around midnight, they drove to a muddy road next to the swamp behind the brick factory. On one side was a swamp and on the other side a canal. He saw a white Toyota Land Cruiser and a bulldozer on the edge of the swamp. The Land Cruiser's headlights acted as a spotlight on the front of the bus at the edge of the swamp.

Baath party members piled out of the Land Cruiser and another bus and began loading their weapons. Muhaned and the others were escorted off their bus and forced to crouch at the edge of the swamp in several rows of six. At their feet were dead bodies. A woman stood up and silently wrapped herself in her long black



An Iraqi holding the name of a victim on a scrap of paper, searches a list of victims.



Iraqis dig for remains.



Workers identify and sort remains. Some are wrapped in shrouds and taken to a morgue.

robe in the same fashion people are wrapped for a funeral. Although he was blindfolded, Muhaned's hands were free, and he moved his ID card into an internal pocket, hoping to preserve it so that his body might be identified. Everyone was praying.

Six Baath party members lined up in front and to the side of the crouching rows. Muhaned was in the back row on the very edge of the swamp. Spotlights shone on them. A very large Egyptian man near Muhaned kept asking why they were being executed. At that moment, gunfire erupted and the man jumped to his feet. His body was sprayed with bullets and the force of his body knocked Muhaned back, flattening him and pushing him partially into the swamp. The Egyptian's body completely covered him. The shooting lasted for about 30 seconds. The soldiers surveyed the bodies and discovered one person was still alive and moaning. They killed him. They did not discover Muhaned.

The buses and Land Cruisers left the area. The bulldozer began to approach. At this point, Muhaned pulled himself out from under the dead Egyptian and hid in the cane so the bulldozer driver would not discover him. He could taste blood, but found no wounds on his body. He watched the bulldozer push the bodies into the swamp and cover them with mud.

After the bulldozer left, Muhaned made his way to the canal and followed it until sunrise. He ended up in Al Hillah near the courthouse. He went to the river to wash the remains of the Egyptian from his body. A man spotted him and questioned him about the human remains on his shoulder. Muhaned refused to tell him anything and the man offered to help. He provided

Muhaned with food and set him on the path to his house, telling him to stay within the farms. When Muhaned arrived home, he found that the army had bombed his house. Thankfully, his family had not been injured and he was reunited with them shortly afterward. He did not tell his family what happened, but his wife discovered through his recurrent nightmares.

Muhaned went to see a psychologist but did not tell the true story. A few months later he ran into Ali again, whom he had seen in the hall. Both believed the other had been executed. They agreed never to speak of what happened. "Our lives depend on our tongues now," they said. They made a pact to claim to dislike each other so that if either were caught and forced to speak about the other's capture and attempted execution, the other could claim it was a lie. They both forged documents, obtained new identities, and did not speak about their shared horror. They've lived in constant fear for over 12 years—fear of being discovered, recaptured, tortured, or killed. Muhaned was suspicious of everything. Any time a car parked in front of his house he felt panic.

Finally, out of fear, Muhaned left Iraq for Syria in 2000, but returned after the fall of Saddam. Now, Muhaned and Ali are close friends. "For the first time in over 12 years, I am free and living without fear in my country," says Muhaned, who is working with the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Al Hillah Human Rights Association. ■



ains. When identified, victims taken to a makeshift morgue.



A victim found in a mass grave in Musayib still wears a blindfold.



Remains of Iraqis removed from a mass grave in Musayib lie wrapped in linen shrouds.

## HAMID'S STORY

Hamid\* was born in Al Hillah in 1963, left school after the ninth grade, and began working in his family's bakery. In 1982, like all Iraqi men, Hamid was required to join the military. He fought in the Iran-Iraq war, was wounded and disabled in 1985, but continued to serve in the army until 1991.

Hamid participated in the uprising that followed Saddam's retreat from Kuwait and southern Iraq. Many former army men participated in killing Baath party members in the south. In March 1991, Saddam's revenge was brutal: executions were carried out all over Iraq. Saddam sent forces throughout the country, imposing curfews and ruthless military rule.

Hamid recalled seeing a woman and child crossing a road after having received permission to do so. When the child dropped something and his mother went to pick it up, she was shot. Military planes flew over Al Hillah and dropped leaflets informing people to evacuate the city because chemical weapons would follow. People were in a state of panic. Military units patrolled the city with loudspeakers telling soldiers to return to their units and advising them that there would be an amnesty. No one believed it.

Hamid and his brother Hyder, then 19 and also a former soldier, decided to escape to Baghdad, where they believed it would be safer. As they were crossing a bridge leading into Baghdad they were stopped at a checkpoint, blindfolded, and had their hands tied behind their backs. They and 18 others were driven to the Mahawil military camp.

In the camp's yard, they could hear the sound of pipes and cables hitting people and of people's screams. His

group was forced to squat in the yard for hours. Anyone who fell or spoke was beaten. Then they were "lined up like cattle" and forced to march as the soldiers jeered at them.

Their blindfolds were removed near the entrance of a large hall. Hamid heard the sound of a skull cracking. He turned and saw an old man lying on the ground, blood gushing from his head. The man had fallen out of line during the march.

They were packed tightly into a hall with about 400 people. Hamid was in the corner of the hall and near a window. There was a fire outside—a large ring of burning tires. He saw a man he knew being led from another hall. The man was bleeding and stumbling in the yard. Soldiers surrounded him and beat him with cables. Soldiers from Hamid's hall went outside to join in the beating. The man fell to the ground and was knocked unconscious. The soldiers then picked him up and threw him into the fire.

Hamid could see an officer named Abu Diba in the yard. Abu Diba ordered the soldiers to throw one of his own men into the fire: the man had appeared to object to what was happening. Three soldiers grabbed him and shoved him into the fire. Hamid could see the soldier struggling to get up but his legs were tangled in the tires. Hamid blacked out.

After hours of standing in the hall, the soldiers filled the floor of the hall with about six inches of water. This prevented anyone from sitting on the floor or sleeping. It was winter and very cold. They stood like this for 24 hours. During this time, soldiers would enter and call out a name and say "Ahmed Hassan, your family is here for you. Please come forward." As the person came for-

\* All names have been changed.



*Aweda Abed Al-Amer grieves over two members of her family found in a mass grave in Musayib.*



*Iraqis dig for remains from a mass grave in Musayib.*



*After identification and sorting, linen shrouds are taken to a mass grave.*

ward, he would be escorted to the yard where his feet would be tied to a pole or a piece of wood. Then he would be suspended upside down and soldiers would whip his feet and back with cables. When the prisoner lost consciousness, the soldiers would splash him with water and continue the beating.

A soldier entered the hall and told them, "We have killed the criminals and we are taking you to your units." They were then blindfolded and escorted out. He could hear the buses. They were told to run straight ahead where someone would receive them. Those who fell or who did not run were beaten to death with pipes. He could hear people falling to the ground and the sound of bones cracking and of blood splattering. He could hear the screaming and moaning of people being beaten to death.

The 50 survivors were loaded onto the bus. The buses pulled out and traveled for approximately 15 minutes; the road was rough.

When they stopped, people were unloaded in groups of three or four and led to the tops of small mounds of dirt. He heard a guard ask if there were any more left and when another answered no, gunfire erupted. Hamid's neck was grazed by a bullet; he felt bullets entering his leg. The force of the shots knocked him backward into a hole—a grave. He landed upside down with his feet in the air. Other bodies fell on him and pushed him down a slope. The executioners fired another round of "mercy bullets" directly into the holes, trying to ensure that the people were dead. Then there was silence.

A few moments later the buses left and a bulldozer pushed dirt over the graves. Hamid's gravesite was on a slope that descended to a swamp. Because he slid down

the slope, he was only partially buried. He could hear someone near him moaning. The man, an Egyptian, told him that the soldiers had left and that he could see the headlights on the main road. Hamid asked the Egyptian where he was shot, and the man replied that only his toes were injured. Hamid couldn't move due to his injuries, and he was partially buried. The Egyptian, Muhammed, pulled him out of the mud and up the slope to the edge. Hamid's leg was severely broken—the bone had pierced through his skin.

They crossed the river. Muhammed helped him crawl up the bank by pulling him up with a cane. They hid in a canal. Hamid was very cold and thought he was dying. He asked Muhammed to go back and look for his brother. Muhammed confirmed that everyone at the site was dead.

They continued through the canal and then crossed some farmlands, drinking water from rivers. They traveled like this for days. A farmer discovered them on his land and shot at the Egyptian. Hamid convinced him to hold his fire. The farmer took them in and provided shelter in one of his buildings, but he told them they could not remain long. He left them and promised to return in one hour. Hamid and Muhammed were sure he would return with the military. Hamid urged Muhammed to leave to save himself, but he refused.

The farmer returned with food and hot tea. After they ate, he treated the wound on Hamid's neck but told him he couldn't treat the leg until the morning. At dawn he returned and said he couldn't sleep and was praying for him throughout the night. He gave Hamid a pillow to put over his face and proceeded to remove two bullets from Hamid's leg. He used a pair of rusty pliers and scissors to dig the bullets out. He removed fragments of



g, remains are wrapped in makeshift morgue.



Workers search remains for identifying items. .



After identification and sorting, remains are tagged, wrapped in linen shrouds, and taken to a makeshift morgue.

bone as well. He placed a splint on his leg and wrapped it with cloth. He gave them a donkey and a three-day supply of food.

Hamid rode on the donkey and Muhammed led the way. He lost track of time. They felt they were being followed.

They made it to a village near Al Hillah—where Hamid’s aunt lived. The aunt took him to the family farm. Muhammed stayed the night and continued north the next day. Hamid received medical care from a family friend who came to the farm.

Hamid then decided he should return to his army unit. He went to Amara because he had many friends in the town. He put on his military uniform, and his family drove him to Amara. There were checkpoints all along the route, but they had no problems. Their car ran out of fuel and he saw a truck carrying regular army troops. He told them he had been injured but provided no details. He felt they had a good idea of what happened, and they viewed him as a hero and allowed him to join them. They took him to a military hospital where he was treated by Saddam loyalists. He told them he was in an accident and made no mention of bullets. When the x-ray showed that a third bullet remained in his leg, he became worried that he would be discovered.

Soon after, he was offered a job in Baghdad with the highest level of the party as a supervisor for a building contractor. He decided instead to buy a car and work as a taxi driver. He also opened a flower shop in Baghdad.

In 1994, the “economic police” arrested him and he was tortured for 34 days. He was beaten and given electric shocks on his ears, tongue, and nose. They wanted him to confess that he was a member of another party—all parties other than Baath were illegal. He was finally released, but his “criminal” file prevented him from gaining employment, so he returned to his flower shop.

Two years later, in 1996, he was arrested by the “intelligence police.” He was beaten and tortured for 18 days and questioned about the uprising. He was finally released but was ordered to close his flower shop because he was accused of holding political meetings there.

Hamid closed the shop and returned to Al Hillah with his wife and two young children. Since the fall of Saddam’s regime, he has helped the Al Hillah Human Rights Association identify suspected criminals and has assisted in the location of evidence pertaining to mass graves. ■



Logo for the volunteer grassroots organization, the Association of Free Prisoners and Missing Persons.



Volunteer takes a break from sorting documents to pray.



*USAID Abuse Prevention Officer Jean Geran, carries out an assessment of a mass grave site.*

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