



## INVISIBLE AND SILENCED WOMEN

The Stories of Women Tortured During Saddam Hussein's Regime

*The following are excerpts from a report being compiled by the Global Justice Center and a team of Harvard Law students assisting Iraqi women. The Center has documented reports of over 4,000 incidents of rape and gender-based violence in Iraq during Saddam Hussein's regime.*

"I can't sit down and remain silent when it's said that an Iraqi woman was raped," he said. "This couldn't happen while Saddam Hussein is alive."

--Saddam Hussein, in response to the prosecutor's open statements in the Anfal Campaign, *New York Times*, August 22, 2006-08-22

*The following is the account of a woman who was raped by Saddam Hussein himself. The Global Justice Center taped a video interview with this woman in December 2005. \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_ years old and the mother of a baby child in 1978 when she was abducted, taken to a presidential palace, and raped for five hours by Saddam Hussein. A few months later, she was summoned to the National Assembly, where she was threatened, in order to ensure her silence.*

"I was feeling my weakness and helplessness. Now I was in bed next to his [Saddam Hussein's] naked body. Who would believe me if I went out and told people on this story? I wished I could scream and let all the people in Baghdad know about this crime. I wished he had no political position or bodyguards, and then I could do something to protect myself. Sorrowfully, I was worried on my baby, who was still in custody of that heartless young lady [who had taken him from me]. They might have killed my child already, I was thinking. The flood of my tears didn't stop. Then, I hated my tears because they showed my rejection to be with him, and for sure he was going to be angry with me. I really could not determine what to do."

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"Our pains have been neglected while he [Saddam Hussein] is demanding to have a cigarette and to have a shower because he hasn't been showered for a while. I believe that the judges who [are] prosecuting him must be trained and we must begin with this judge because judges must work with consciousness and humanity.... Women must be assisted by laws. I would like to talk with Iraqi women who have been subjected to rape or who will be subjected to rape in the future.... I was blaming myself for not talking about this incident. I have saved my life. There are many women who do not want to talk about being raped by Saddam... Why should these women feel shame? Shame is upon the person who did this rape."

**Beheadings:** *Under the pretext of fighting prostitution, units of 'Feda'iyye Saddam,' the paramilitary organization led by Hussein's son Uday, beheaded over 200 women in public, dumping their severed heads at their families' doorsteps. Witnesses can confirm that these women were labeled as prostitutes and beheaded because they were the wives of political opponents of the regime.*

- ❖ Amina had four children, two boys and two girls. The oldest was Zyad, age 8, and the youngest was Zeyneb, age one. The children witnessed the execution of their mother together with their mother-in-law. Amina, 25 years old, was regarded as an honorable woman but the Feda'iyee Saddam said she was a prostitute. Her feet and hands were tied together, and her long black hair was pulled back and tied on top of her head. One-hundred-and-fifty to two hundred people were present at the beheading—men, women, children, and many security people. The security people were dressed in civilian clothes, brown short-sleeved shirts and brown trousers, and their faces were uncovered, “because for them it is a matter of pride to do what they do,” one witness said. The executioner was perhaps forty years old and had an assistant who held out a sword. “There was a big silence, we heard a big ‘ha’,” the witness said. Amina’s body was taken away so that there could be no funeral. Her family was taken away as well and released 25 days later.
- ❖ A woman with a husband and three children was beheaded because of her husband’s alleged involvement with activities against the state. Men belonging to the Feda’iyee Saddam went to her house and took her into the street. Two men held her by the arms while a third pulled her head from behind and beheaded her in front of area residents. The security men took the body and the head away in a plastic bag. They also took away the children and the mother-in-law. Their fate remains unknown.
- ❖ The Commonwealth Office of the U.K. Government has reported that “Najat Mohammed Haydar, an obstetrician in Baghdad, was beheaded on October 2000,’ after being labeled as a prostitute. According to Amnesty International, the real reason for her death was her criticism of the corruption in the Iraqi health service.

**Torture in Prison:** *A woman describes her torture and the threats of rape she suffered while in the Baladiyah prison complex, also the headquarters of Saddam’s secret police:*

- ❖ “The most difficult thing I’ve ever done in my life was to muffle my screams while I was being tortured. They beat me, but I bit my tongue until it bled. I wanted to spare my child the terror of hearing her mother scream. One of the more vicious guards once tied my baby to a table, taunting me with the threat of torturing Suzan. I was tied to a chair so I could do nothing but watch as they lashed little Suzan. My baby shrieked until her belly button flipped inside out, and when they saw what had happened, they howled with laughter. During one of the torture sessions, two of the men threatened to rape me *and* Suzan. Thank God, they didn’t rape my baby.”
- ❖ “In one cell, pieces of human flesh—ear lobes—were nailed to the wall, and blood spattered the ceiling. A large metal fan hung from the ceiling and... prisoners were attached to this fan and beaten with clubs as they twirled. There were hooks in the ceiling, used to suspend victims. A torture victim reported that prisoners were also crucified, nails driven through their hands into the wall.”

**Imprisonment and Rape:** *Many victims of the regime were arrested and held as hostages in order to force a relative, who may have escaped abroad, to surrender. Others were imprisoned because of their family’s link to a political opponent or because of their ethnic origins.*

- ❖ “The last young women to be imprisoned here died in these fetid cells two months ago. The Peshmerga say they found three of their bodies, naked and with their hands bound, on the floor. One of the girls was 12 years old. Another older woman had been gang-raped and died later.”

- ❖ Two sisters, Yusra Tayef Shafi' and Hadhin Tayef Shafi', were arrested on 17 July 1986 in Basra and questioned about contacts with their brothers, who were wanted by the security services as suspected members of al-Da'wa Party. The two sisters were held for 11 days at the General
- ❖ Security Directorate in Basra, where they were blindfolded, beaten on the soles of the feet (*falaqa*), and threatened with execution. After six months at the General Security Directorate, the sisters were tried on charges of protecting a member of an unauthorized organization, convicted, and sentenced to 15 and 20 years' imprisonment without the right of appeal.

**Murder and Mutilation:** *In 1990, Saddam Hussein amended the Iraqi Penal Code to give even more legitimacy to men who kill their female relatives in defense of their family's honor. The amendment protected the men from prosecution and punishment (Article 111)*

- ❖ In July 1996, Kajal Khidr, 24 years old and pregnant, was accused of adultery, tortured and mutilated by six members of her husband's family. The incident took place near the town of Rania in the Sulaimaniya governorate. The family cut off part of her nose, and told her that she would be killed after the birth of her child. She received immediate treatment at a hospital in Rania and three months of further treatment at a hospital in Sulaimaniya, where she was kept under police protection.
- ❖ Pela, unmarried and living with her family in Sweden, was killed on June 24, 1999 while on a visit to the family home in Dohuk. Pela was shot in the head by one of her uncles, and survived the wound, only to be shot by another uncle, ensuring her death. On October 9, 1999 the Dohuk Criminal Court convicted Pela's uncles of the killing, but gave them each a suspended one-year prison sentence. In support of its decision, the Court referred to a line in the autopsy report—"the hymen was broken"—and to the defendants' "honorable motivation" in committing the murder.

**Rape As Torture:** *Hussein's government used rape and the sexual assault of women as a means of torture to extract information and forced confessions from detained family members. The regime also intimidated and blackmailed their political opponents by showing them videotapes of family members being raped and sexually assaulted.*

- ❖ "Last October another bride, 18, was dragged, resisting, into a guardhouse on one of Uday's [Hussein's son] properties, according to a maid who worked there. The maid says she saw a guard rip off the woman's white wedding dress and lock her, crying, in a bathroom. After Uday arrived, the maid heard screaming. Later she was called to clean up. The body of the woman was carried out in a military blanket, she said. There were acid burns on her left shoulder and the left side of her face. The maid found bloodstains on Uday's mattress and clumps of black hair and peeled flesh in the bedroom. A guard told her, 'Don't say anything about what you see, or you and your family will be finished.'"
- ❖ *Rape and impregnation of Kuwaiti women in Dar al-Tufula:* A British journalist visited an orphanage for babies born to Kuwaiti women raped by Saddam Hussein's soldiers. He reported, "The nursery, decorated with cartoon figures and colorful mobiles, hardly looks like a home for the children whom Kuwait would rather forget. But it is an uncomfortable fact that most of the babies here are living reminders of the Iraqi invasion, born to Kuwaiti women raped by Saddam Hussein's soldiers. Estimates vary, but during the seven-month occupation more than 500 Kuwaiti women are believed to have been raped, so repeatedly."

- ❖ *Rape of women at Nugra Salman prison by Amn agents during Anfal Campaign:* According to Human Rights Watch, “One even more lurid account spoke of a large group of single women being kept apart from the other prisoners and regularly raped by *Amn* agents. One of these women reportedly killed herself with a knife as a result... Middle East Watch did not succeed, however, in speaking to any witnesses or victims of rape at Nugra Salman. The Kurds, it should be noted, are reluctant to talk to outsiders about matters involving sexual abuse.”
- ❖ *Torture causing miscarriage, southern Iraq, 1991:* In their 2003 survey of human rights abuses in three southern Iraq cities (An-Najaf, An-Nasyriah, Al-Amarah), Physicians for Human Rights interviewed a woman who was arrested and tortured in 1991, resulting in a miscarriage. “I now only speak to the Iman and to God. Just after the arrest, I tried to kill myself by drinking gasoline. I became unconscious and my family took me to the hospital. I had poisoned myself. I also tried to kill myself by touching electricity. I no longer want to kill myself, for the sake of my children, but I feel desperate, especially when I remember my family no longer has any contact with me. I cry every day.”
- ❖ *Rape of female relatives of General Najib Al-Salahi, June 2000 (on videotape):* Former general Najib Al-Salahi, who fled to Jordan in 1995, received a videotape in June 2000 of security forces raping a female relative. He subsequently received a phone call from an intelligence agent who stated that another of his female relatives was being held and warned him to stop speaking out against the government.
- ❖ It is alleged that most prisons had “official rapists” as employees. According to Kanan Makiya, author of *Cruelty and Silence*, evidence of regime-sponsored rape exists on a three-by-six-inch note card (available at the Harvard Research and Document Project). Makiya believes that the card is an employment document for a civil servant whose sole job was to rape women in a certain prison.

***There are currently Iraqi women who were raped and impregnated in prisons. Although they were released in 2003, they are living in hiding with their children in the ‘Green Zone’ in Baghdad. They are afraid that if they go home their families will kill them.***

\*Information and documentation on any of these crimes are available from the Global Justice Center. Please contact Abby Goldberg at [agoldberg@globaljusticecenter.net](mailto:agoldberg@globaljusticecenter.net).