

Arif Qurbany

Galawezh

An eyewitness Account of
Halabja and Anfal genocide

Translated from Kurdish by Abdulkarim Uzeri



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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to
Peter Galbraith
Who made Americans aware of
genocides against Kurds

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INTRODUCTION

When I started collecting information for my first volume of a series of books on the Anfal crimes ,I was determined to be accurate and realistic ;going after the truth ,all the truth ,and depend on very reliable sources .

To me the most reliable sources were the witnesses who had been subjected to the genocidal operations but somehow could survive and rejoin their families or the remaining members of their relatives .Indeed some of them had lost their whole family . From this point of view ,I had to visit villages and towns which officially ,according to the presidential decrees of Saddam Hussein's government ,became areas of extermination of the Kurdish nation .Beside these Kurdish victims ,I tried to meet Arabs who

participated in the executions of those crimes and I succeeded in interviewing a bulldozer driver who had buried the Anfal victims .As he put it ,some were buried alive ,and among them was a 35 days old baby.

During my search ,I could meet an elderly lady in the Garmian province who was rounded up at gun-point and taken along with her family to the Topzawa concentration camp .There in the camp ,they were separated according to gender and age .As for her part ,she was send to one of the most notorious prisons in the history of Iraq known as Nugra Selman .The lady started telling what she had witnessed“ ,My son and I spend six months living on small pieces of rotten bread ,but when some people from Halabja were transferred who had brought some rice with them ,I couldn't stop trying to get a small portion of cooked rice .It smelled so wonderful ”!

The fact that there were people from Halabja in Nugra Selman prison ,and that they

too became subject to Anfal genocidal campaigns ,was new to me and the other Anfal experts .First of all I wanted to make sure that the old women had meant what she said .She was very confident about her memory ,and told many more facts .But what she didn't know was whether there were survivors among them or not .She didn't get any of their addresses or the name of a single well-known family.

Thus ,I had to work hard to discover these new dimensions of the Anfal campaign .What casted doubt about the credibility of the story was the fact that the gassing raids on Halabja had happened well before the start of the Anfal operations .

I started looking for people who might have some knowledge on this matter but couldn't find anyone .It was well known that the chemical attacks on Halabja had happened well before the first Anfal operation and the inhabitants were either dead or injured and transferred to Iran for treatment .That means

Halabja was deserted !So where did these people come from ?The only solution was to go Halabja itself and trying to meet some survivors ,Survivors of both crimes.

For me it was impossible to visit Halabja because at that time it was under the control of Islamic extremists) Ansar Al-Islam .(Indeed ,I did not feel safe in my home town Chamchamal either .Those Ansar adherents were in there too but they were not so strong .

I didn't give up .I continued making my enquiries but I could only visit Halabja after its liberation by the Patriotic Union Forces)this liberation happened after the Ansar crimes on Awayee-Hama village near Halabja .(I then made several visits to Halabja but I couldn't trace anything .I asked some friends to help and call me back when they found anybody who could help .On September ,2002 7 one of those friends informed that he had found a family of one of the Nugra Selman victims.

I visited Halabja again and Farouq Jamil came along with me .My friend Lukman Aziz was already there .A member of the Patriotic Union put us up in his house and found the address for us .On the same day we found two more families .We wasted no time ,and managed to record these three important meetings in a single afternoon.

In March ,2003 I added these interviews to my third volume of Anfal Crimes .But because the volume was bulky and these incredible stories weren't in a very attractive place ,I thought about writing separate books about them .Actually a single book was enough for all three of them .But because the stories were interesting and had happened in different ways ,a booklet for each story seemed more informative .The title of)Halabja -Anfal Eyewitness (was chosen for each them .

It is of significance to mention that those three ladies were gassed on the same day in the same place but they were taken by

different means and in different times to Iran . Even in Iran they were housed in separate refugee camps ,so each one has her own unique story .

All of them were deceived by false promises from Saddam Hussein that they would be resettled in Hawraman .But all of them were put onto buses and transferred against their will to Nugra Selman prison !They were in different convoys ,faced different humiliations and tortures .It is noteworthy ,that the gassing victims of Hawraman and Halabja were transferred to Iran on humanitarian basis but they were handed over to Saddam's regime as POWs .In this case ,the United Nations and Human Rights Organizations should have supervised the exchange process and ensured their safe return to their homes .

Arif Qurbany ,the Kurdish author

FOREWORD

The Ba'ath regime's campaigns against the Kurdish people were numerous and included a wide range of crimes.

The campaigns started with Arabization of inhabited areas in the southern part of Kurdistan including Kirkuk city and several towns like Khankin ,Makhmur and Sengal .The original Kurdish inhabitants were forced out of their homes without being allowed to take their basic necessities ,while the Arabs who occupied these houses received them for free , over and above the fact that they had already been given cash as an inducement to reside in Kurdistan) .It's worth mentioning here that Arabization was first commenced by the British authorities in the1920 s ,but those evicted Kurdish families were not recorded (.

The second main campaign was directed against the Barzanis .Thousands of Barzani

families were forced out of their towns and villages and were gathered in collective settlements under military control .In ,1983 eight thousand young men were rounded up at gun-point and taken to some unknown destinations in the south of Iraq .Thereafter , they all disappeared ,and even foreign diplomatic efforts has failed to trace a single person .Reports from Iraqi military sources indicate that they were used as guinea pigs to test the effects of various chemical agents.

Another horrific feature of the Iraqi campaign was the regime's resorting to chemical weapon against civilian populations ! On April ,1987 ,16 a chemical attack on the Balisan valley near Erbil killed dozens of civilians .On March ,1988 ,16 a sustained chemical attack was launched on Halabja , where roughly five thousand civilians died and many more thousands were seriously injured.

Shortly after the chemical attacks on Halabja ,the true barbarian nature of Saddam's regime manifested itself .The

excessive appetite for bloodshed came to light ,when in broad daylight the mass killing of Kurdish civilians started .Saddam Hussein and his cousin Ali Hassan”) Chemical Ali (“insulted the holy book of Islam and executed one of the ugliest crimes in history by launching the` Anfal `campaign to exterminate the Kurdish people) Anfal is the title of a chapter from the Quran .(Only recently ,in March ,2011 has the Iraqi parliament formally recognized these crimes as Genocide .

Documents show that over 182,000 Kurds were either shot dead or buried alive in the Iraqi Desert .Tons of the original Iraqi documents about the Anfal operations are being kept in the library of the US Congress .

After the liberation of Kuwait ,the whole world witnessed the mad attacks of Saddam’s defeated army on the Kurdish population that led millions of them to flee their homes in freezing weather and take refuge in rocky mountains near the borders with Turkey and Iran .Cold weather ,starvation ,dehydration

and lack of medical care caused a huge death toll .In addition ,the regime's economic embargo on the Kurdish North hit hard on the social ,political and economic infrastructure of Kurdistan.

All these crimes are somehow publicized and recognized by the world community .But what was not revealed and still unknown even to Kurdish Anfal experts was the` anfal-ing 'of the already afflicted people of Halabja after the gas attacks on March !1988 ,16 The author of previous Anfal books ,my friend Arif Qurbani ,was shocked when he first heard from an old survivor of Nugra Selman prison that she had met with scores of chemical weapons victims from Halabja .This moved Mr .Qurbani deeply and impelled him to undertake a further long investigation to find the whole truth .The only way to achieve that would be to find some Halabja survivors of both the chemical attacks and the Anfal operations .The investigation took more than a year of hard work to find three survivors .

Galawezh ,the heroine of this story ,was one of them .Her story makes one quiver just as when watching horror movie!

Galawezh along with thousands of other Halabja victims were handed over by the Iranians to the Iraqi authorities at the border points in Kurdistan .This took place after the cease-fire following the eight years-long war between them .The cease-fire was sponsored by the United Nations Organization .This means that the UN should have supervised the exchange of the POWs .Galawezh and other Halabja refugees had been informed that Iraqi government promised the Iranians that all the people of Halabja and Hawraman would be relocated in their own renovated homes .What then happened was that all these poor wounded victims were taken to the Anfal fields instead ,and almost all of them were massacred!

Galawezh's story demonstrates two facts . The first one is the degree to which the UN , the Red Crescent Organization of both Iraq

and Iran and dozens of worldwide Human Rights Organizations were totally negligent . The second fact relates to the degree of the underhand subterfuge of the Iraqi regime and its army .These refugees should not have been left as defenseless prey to the tyranny of Baghdad ,and medical care should have continued to the injured people inside Iraq as well as Iran.

The translator :Abdulkarim Uzeri

Galawezh Tells her Story

My full name is Galawezh` Adam Karim .I was born in 1965 in one of the most beautiful towns of Kurdistan called Tawella .Our region is known as Hawraman ,and is situated to the east of Sulemania City.

Hawraman itself is divided between Iran and Iraq .Our part is mountainous while the Iranian part is plain .My forefathers lived in Tawella .My mother is from the same place . She gave birth to nine children ,six girls and three boys .We were hard workers ,cultivating our lands and looking after our orchards and trees .We were well off ;my father was a shoemaker ,he made traditional Kurdish shoes from wool .We were very happy together .

In ,1980 I married a young man named Akram Mustafa .He too looked after an

orchard but officially he was a labourer .Only a few months after our marriage ,our life turned to a hell :the Iraq-Iran war had started .The beautiful Tawella came under artillery shell and warplane bombardment from both sides .Houses were destroyed and many families lost their lives .Life in Tawella became unbearable .The only solution was to leave the town.

My father chose Halabja as our new place of residence .There we could rent a house in the Pasha-quarter .Our stay in Halabja lasted a long time .Although the place was nice and the people friendly ,we didn't feel happy there :we missed our home town .Tawella wasn't too far away but it was too risky to work there .So my husband took employment in a school in Halabja.

It wasn't easy to adapt to our new situation in Halabja ,especially as it had come under the under the full control of the Iraqi army .It looked more like a military barracks :uncouth solders were coming and going .They were

aggressive ,but we had to tolerate them .We spent almost eight years in that bad situation . However worse was to come ,the fighting became more intense around our area .On the one hand ,the Iraqi army was losing ground in the war and on the other hand ,the Iraqis were also attacking Kurdish civilians using all kinds of weapons including heavy artillery ,rockets ,airplanes and even poison gases .It seemed they were using the cover of their war with Iran to exterminate the Kurdish nation!

Thus ,our life was not safe at all .We feared that Halabja would turn into a battlefield . Shelling was getting more intense and we would take refuge in houses with large basements .In every street ,there was one or more houses with a cellar .The owners were good enough to let everybody in.

Eventually the Kurdish" Peshmerga "fighters came and liberated the area .To our surprise , the people were not happy with this liberation !Most probably they feared the cruel

revenge of Saddam Hussein's regime .The fighters shared the same opinion ,they always advised us to be aware of chemical attacks by the regime's army .They even taught us how to protect ourselves in the case of being exposed to chemical weapons.

Peshmerga were our people ,we always welcomed them .Their presence meant protection from the brutal enemy .But this time the Iraqi army seemed to be obsessed , we expected total destruction from the Baghdad's regime .We knew how they had attacked civilians with chemical weapons in other parts of our Kurdish homeland ,accusing even women and children of being Iranian agents!

The Peshmerga control lasted only three days and then the worst ,the ' black days ' came .On March ,16 I and some other women were sitting around an oven baking bread .A squadron of Iraqi military airplanes arrived overhead .We all hurried to take refuge in a nearby cellar .Other neighbours came to the

same place .Somehow I could see two planes dropping strange things .I heard a thunder and saw plumes of blue ,red ,black and white smoke spreading over our heads .I took quick action to cover my children's faces with wet cloths .I had three children :Bahar was five , Hawar 3 years old and Hawre was a young infant taking milk from the breast.

The sound of explosions were mixed with the wailing of women and children .The sound of the explosion was not so loud ,rather it gave an echo as if the sky was falling apart . We had been subject to attacks since our childhood but we had never experienced this before and the explosions had never lasted that long before!

We were simply terrified ,we were confused .We did not know what was happening or how to save our lives .Besides , we feared the old house would fall on our heads and that is why some people ran out of the cellar and jumped into a car to flee to safety.

It took rather a long time for the explosions to stop and allow us to take a look outside . What we saw first was columns of multi-colored smoke .The smoke was so thick that it made it difficult to see the sky or to know that it was still daytime .Oh God ,when we looked at the ground we just couldn't believe our eyes !Piles of people were lying in the yard and around the house ;they were unconscious or semiconscious ,some were trying to stand up and leaving the place but kept falling over . Some were bleeding from their mouths.

Those who were still healthy couldn't find their out of this hell .They were terrified , shocked and confused .There was a big panic . The people were dizzy and giddy ,and couldn't make their way out of the town .When making the smallest step ,they stumbled over fallen victims .The whole thing looked like a Day of Judgment .

Moreover ,we were breathing only with great difficulty .We wanted to escape and find a place with a clean air but we were only

wandering around .The only thing we could do easily was to just sit and try and gasp some air.

When the smoke lifted ,we could see more piles of motionless bodies ,some embracing each other .Most probably they had been trying to help each other .Eventually we found the way out .Great numbers of people were lining up to leave the stricken city .Luckily ,we were able to help some suffering people .We assisted them to stand on their feet and encouraged them to become more calm and collected .We even told them that the planes would come back with new loads .This trick helped them try harder and harder but the breathlessness caused by the poisoned chemicals made the journey more complicated.

We were hurrying toward the Iranian border .We took a lot of shortcuts .We could easily reach one crossing place which was about one hour's drive by car .No one cared how long or hard the way was .As for my

part ,I was thirsty ,hungry and tired .I was carrying one child on my shoulders and another one between my arms while my husband was carrying our third child and a bag filled with necessary things .I had to keep an eye on him .He was often falling down but standing up and doing his best not to give up ! Many others were suffering ;some were vomiting and falling down on the roadside unable to travel further to safety .All of sudden ,I remembered my mother in law .She was with us in the cellar .I felt guilty for fleeing with my children without thinking of giving her a hand .It was the situation of the elderly ladies that reminded me of her absence .The ladies were sitting beside the road and unable to make any more attempts to reach the border .

To be honest ,the survival of my lovely children was my main concern .I had to hurry up and run away with my children .Saving precious minutes of time meant saving their

lives because even after leaving the town the bloody raids continued .

We were escaping from one enemy to take refuge with another .We left the worst and chose the bad .Iranians wouldn't have allowed us to cross their border if they had been able .They failed to stop us because they couldn't stop thousands of people pouring into their country from everywhere , from routes that have never been used before.

From the Iranian border ,I had a look at Halabja .I could see the city as clear as my own palm .That was my last look in my life .I left it with tears and never had a chance to see it again .My memory of Halabja is like imagining a gang of wicked people who want to burn a field of green wheat ,but the grain doesn't catch fire .Halabja is a wound in my heart that never recovers .I hope this experience will never be repeated anywhere on this earth .

The border crossing place was called Hawar .Many others had reached there ahead of us but none of them were feeling well . They weren't able to stand up on their feet . They were talking to each other .I myself ignored my son's inquiries for fear that he might ask us to take a break .To me ,Hawar looked like an afflicted area of ill-fated people . They were crying out in grief ,they were wailing and calling out the names of their loved ones.

We stayed for three weeks at the border . We had no energy to move on and we didn't have enough food to still our hunger . Somehow the Iranians were concerned about us .They directed us to a village which was protected from air raids .There we could have peace of mind ,and something to eat and drink .Later ,Iranian vehicles arrived and we were transferred to a place deep inside Iranian territory called Kangawaer which belongs to the Kermanshah Governorate.

The Iranian drivers gave us a clearer picture of our afflicted city saying that they had transferred thousands of wounded people and left thousands of dead bodies behind . The place where we were to settle was crowded with other survivors ,and many others were on the way .The pain of the absence of my mother-in-law struck me again.

My husband and I started to look for her in the crowd .But it was in vain - she had not been able to reach the border .We were not alone in this ,there were many others searching through the crowd .Parents searched to find their children ,wives were anxious to meet their husbands once more . Brothers had no idea about the whereabouts of their sisters .We all had things in common . We were all shocked and agonized.

Once more the Iranians turned up and asked us to settle down in a nearby school , forty or fifty people to each classroom .All the governmental buildings were occupied by

refugees but still there was a large number of people waiting outside.

Every day newcomers were arriving .They were telling us horrendous stories about what they had witnessed in Halabja .They were describing horrific scenes .They saw:

- Children bleeding from their mouths.
- People with their eye-balls half hanging out of their heads.
- People with their ear burst or they had become deaf and dumb.
- A mother with her fetus just delivered and both were dead .
- Corpses decomposing quickly after the chemical raids.

These stories were new to us .What we knew was that many people had fallen motionless and in some cases we had even stepped on them to escape .The whole thing made my husband more anxious about his dear mother .Whenever new arrivals came ,he jumped out of the room ,searched for her or

asked others about her but there was no trace of her whatsoever.

In spite of all this unfolding tragedy ,the Iranian soldiers became very unfriendly with us .In the beginning ,I mean at the border they were nice and friendly .But inside their country they started treating us as POWs .We needed permissions to leave our refuge place . We could only go out for limited times ,telling them where we were going to and how long we planned to stay .The same restrictions were applied to our visitors .Many applications to leave or to visit were denied.

Our situation was by no means easy .Many people wished to return home without caring what might happen to them if they did.

A new stage of our stay in Iran started . After staying for one month at that school ,we were moved to a newly build camp .There , each family was given a tent .This new camp was called` Saryas .It was under full military control .There were military posts all around

the area and when a visitor or guest came they called us to meet them .

One of the military points was" Tablighat ")information desk .(From there the name of the guest and the host was paged .We were always listening to hear the name of my mother in law .Indeed my husband Akram was getting very impatient ,he was crying every night just like a motherless child.

It was difficult to trace other survivors due to two other reasons .Firstly ,the length of the border between Tawella and Halabja was very long ,and secondly ,the large number of people crossing the border were housed in many different camps that had to be opened . Thus ,tracing survivors was not easy .In some cases ,members of one family were put into different camps because they crossed the border at different points .Even they themselves had no information about each other.

We spent another month waiting for our mother .Then a huge surprise took place :an

Iranian soldier called our names and said that we have a visitor and mentioned the visitor's name .It was my husband mother's name .My husband wasted no time ,he ran outside .His feet stumbled and he fell on the rope of the tent .However ,nothing could stop him ,he resumed running through the passage of the tents .I followed him too .Eventually the long-awaited reunion took place .I kissed her both hands and thanked God for her survival.

We took her to our tent .I can't describe our happiness .I thought that our neighbours and friends would share that moment and come to congratulate us .To our surprise nobody bothered .My explanation is that they were all afflicted with missing their own loved ones . They had no reason to celebrate .I was the only one to share the feeling of relief of my husband .Thankfully ,our two months of deep sadness was over and we didn't need to listen to the messages paged from the Tablighat center anymore.

After a short rest ,my mother in law told us what had happened to her .She had thought that we were hit by the gas attacks and killed . Therefore ,she started checking every corpse with similar clothes to ours and had looked closely at the burned corpses .Then she followed all the routes that led to the border with Iran .She was disappointed and returned to Halabja and kept looking for her family in vain.

One day Iranian helicopters came and landed in Halabja .They asked the remaining inhabitants to accompany them to Iran to get medical treatments in special centers opened for that purpose .My mother in law accepted the offer and flew to Iran .Even there she started looking for us ,asking everybody she met ,and searching all the camps set up for Halabja refugees until she found us in Saryas.

Days and weeks passed before she regained her peace .She couldn't stop crying about what had happened to those innocent victims . However ,her biggest dream had come true

and she was reunited again with her family . As a matter of fact ,other people came and asked her to tell them what happened after they have left the town and if she met with any of their relatives .

My mother-in-law had spent days and nights looking for the corpse of Akram .Once she came across a dead body that looked a lot like her son ;after a long lament ,she realised the fingers were different and it wasn't her son's corpse anyway !She continued searching among the injured people and unburied corpses for almost two months .She was stricken by a kind of mental derangement .I think her only chance of survival was in being found by the Iranians who took her to safety .As I have mentioned before ,it took two weeks for her to resettle into normal life with us .I was feeling guilty when she had promised not be separated from us no matter the situation .I felt guilty

because I had fled with my children out of the cellar without even thinking of her.

Her return proved to be very beneficial .She loved my children and could look after them . That meant that would be free to cook ,to bring water from the camp's tanks and keep our tent tidy .Saryas camp was established beside a mountain covered with trees .We had to collect the branches to use for cooking .I did that together with Akram :it was somehow our leisure time.

Bad rumors were spreading around like ocean waves .We heard that the Kurdistan was bombarded with chemicals .But then there was the Iraqi propaganda that Halabja was rebuilt again and those who returned home would get good compensation .We also heard that if didn't go back voluntarily the Iranian government would hand us over to them as prisoners .Bad rumors were traveling fast ,any hint in any tent would be heard everywhere .

The war of propaganda continued .Some said that if we were to say we had been attacked by the Iraqis ,we would be taken abroad and given asylum .Others were saying that if we were to accuse the Iraqi regime , then the regime's treatment of the Kurdish people would be even harder .We also heard that Baghdad's regime had issued a decree of amnesty for all the Kurds .We could never hear the truth because we hadn't even brought a small radio set with us.

In general ,our people were upset with the lack of Iranian help and we were looking forward to being granted real amnesty from the Ba'ath regime .Nevertheless it was a terrible choice ,how could we trust the regime that had poisoned all these innocent people ? Others were wishing to be freed from the camp and wanted to go back home and live the way they wanted without letting the tyrannous regime know our whereabouts.

The main problem with the Iranians was the strict restrictions applied on the camps .

For example ,they didn't let us leave the camp and visit our relatives who had been admitted to Iranian hospitals .When a small group was allowed to leave the camp ,the next group had to wait for their return before they could leave the camp.

One day the rumor spread that the Iraqi government was now looking after Halabja and any victims that came back from the Iranian side .They told us that the war with Iraq was over and that the Ba'athist regime had promised Tehran to rebuild war-damaged homes and compensate the afflicted people . We were told that Iranians were cooperating with any who wanted to return to their homeland .This time the news looked more reliable as it came from official sources . Therefore ,people lined up and registered their names to voluntarily go back.

Three days later ,a large number of Iranian vehicles arrived at the camp .They were accompanied by members of the Red

Crescent organization ,among them were the doctors who treated us when we stayed in the camp .This gave much more assurance to the people that we were safe and would be returned to our Halabja .To be honest ,we preferred the ruin of our city than the camps of the Iranians .The presence of the Red Crescent doctors encouraged many others to register their names to return back home.

However ,there were others who said that as long as Saddam Hussein remained alive they would never enter Iraq again .As for those who registered voluntarily ,they found vehicles ready for them and were taken to the Tawella border point .On the other side of the border ,they saw many vehicles with Iraqi plate numbers waiting for them .This made the people more confident that there really was a bilateral agreement in place to take them back to their own towns.

As for myself ,the longing of returning home made me forget the pains I was suffering from .There were sick people who

couldn't walk to the other vehicles ,they were helped by volunteers and put into busses and lorries which made their way inside Iraq .It is worth mentioning that some injured people had died in the Saryas camp and their corpses were given to their relatives at the border.

Our convoy started moving inside Iraq .We were directed by Iraqi troops .We had been told that those soldiers were there to protect us .However ,we felt a great relief through being in our homeland again .The convoy was led by the Iraqi army .We had been told that they were there to protect us .We were moving fast and we didn't stop at Tawella , nor at Biara or Khurmali .That was strange because many of the returnees were from those towns .They didn't take us to Halabja either .After a short while ,we found ourselves in a town called Sayed Sadik ,east of the main city of Sulemaniyah" .They are going to have to pay us compensation money for us to stay here in Sayed Sadik ",I said to myself .I was even asking myself whether everybody can

tell the right amount of his or her loses .Will they even tell the truth ?As for myself ,I was going to tell the whole truth .

We passed by Sayed Sadik but the bloody convoy didn't stop at all .Tittle-tattle started again .People were telling what was in their mind .Nobody could understand the reason or guess what was happening to us .I calculated many things in my mind .Do they try to deceive us officially ?No ,no it's just the leading driver who has taken a wrong direction because he is not from this area .But why was no one showing him the right way ? These questions and hundreds of others were striking my mind .

While we were at the border ,the Iraqi troops ordered our men to take separate vehicles .But my mother-in-law was too quick and stuck beside my husband refusing to be separated from him - as she had promised him in the Iranian camp .The soldiers tried to separate them but they failed .They laughed at us and let all of us travel together .Here my

mother-in-law seemed to look proud for what she had achieved .The next place we reached was Sulemania City.

We were taken to the government house of the city .We were all gathered in a large courtyard .Men ,women and children were kept there for more than twenty days .The soldiers were far from being polite .They swore at us and used very bad language . They lashed our men with whips .They kept us in the heat of the sun without letting us having a rest under the shade of the walls . Now my mother-in-low began to feel guilty , saying that it was her mistake not to letting men and women be separated ,otherwise women and children might have been set free .They were torturing men because they were accused of talking to foreign journalists and blaming Saddam Hussein's army for gassing the Kurdish people .

Saddam's men were rather frustrated because their criminal behaviors were revealed by Kurdish refugees who were

interviewed in Iran by foreign reporters and because the photos of chemical victims were actively shown on international television . Several times the soldiers said that they had photos of those who made bad propaganda against the " progressive patriotic government of the Arab Ba'ath party ".In an attempt to deceive the people they told the crowd that if the traitors would surrender themselves voluntarily ,they would receive a better treatment and be spared a very painful punishment.

The humiliation continued .They gave us such a hard time that we regretted coming back to our homeland .The promises of taking us back to Halabja and helping us rebuild our normal lives were never respected .We didn't know what would happen to us or where they were taking us .As the soldiers were so spiteful ,we didn't dare ask them the simplest question.

Once ,by chance ,we met a friendly soldier . He told us that we were to be taken to a

place where they look after camels .This answer was strange to us .However ,we found a Kurdish soldier who told us that the place was somewhere near Erbil ,and that the rest of the Halabja survivors were gathered there .While in Iran ,we were given the impression that there was a bilateral agreement between the governments of Iraq and Iran that would allow us to be taken to our homes in Halabja ,but now they were taking us to a place that we had never heard about.

However ,as the courtyard at the Sulemania Government house was so inhabitable ,we wanted to be transferred anywhere with some family privacy .However ,one day the guards told us that we will be transferred on the following day and asked us to be ready for that .It wasn't difficult to get ready - we didn't have anything to pack .Next day in the early morning ,they awakened everybody and put all the men in one line and all the women in another .Akram's mother tried to remain with

her son but she received some punches and was thrown aside .My husband and the other men were separated and taken .We couldn't do anything at all .My mother-in-law tried again but she was hit harder.

Two types of vehicles were standing ready : some big travelling buses and smaller military cars with sealed windows .The military transporters were filled with men and the buses were left for women .In vain ,we started weeping loudly and crying out for our men .We didn't know what was happening to them or to ourselves .Some stronger women tried to comfort us by saying that we would just be taken to the other Kurdish city of Erbil . Tough arguments went on between the women .Some were worried about the ill-fate awaiting us ,others were optimistic that nothing would happen as long as we didn't do anything wrong.

The convoy reached Tasluja 10 ,kilometers west of Sulemania ,the crossroads to Erbil and Kirkuk .There the buses took the Kirkuk road .

Once more loud weeping started among us . There were no more arguments ,we were all terrified ,we had all lost our hope of staying alive .Nobody could argue about that .We prayed of God to put some mercy in their hearts and to make them changing their mind and take us to Erbil .We had nothing else we could do apart from praying and asking help from our God.

In addition to our troubles ,we were concerned about the fate of our men .Since our departure from Sulemania we hadn't seen their vehicles at all .I felt that my mother-in-law was getting more upset than anybody else .I heard her saying" ,God let my die with my son ".Her tragic story started again , nothing in the world could stop her missing her dear son .Our children were asking for their father too .They missed him a lot .They have never been separated from him in the last six months .My oldest son started asking me why we were being separated !

We had something to drink and to eat in the busses .But the men did not receive anything .A little food stuff had been put into the women's buses .This increased the anxiety for Akram's mother ,she thought he would be suffering with not having anything to drink .My daughter Bahar realized the situation and begged us to take some water to him .In an attempt to calm here down ,I told her that their vehicles also had drinking water.

We passed by Kirkuk ,but we did not stop there either .I was not familiar with city ,but I knew the convoy was going south .All of sudden we came across the men's vehicles . They had stopped to wait for us so we could continue the mysterious journey together .We couldn't get out and have a word with them . The journey continued and they followed us . We travelled the whole day without having any break .It was September but it was still so hot ,the heat made us more exhausted . What a cruel situation ,nobody showed any

sympathy to us .The sun set and the night was terribly dark .The sky was not clear and I couldn't see a single star .This reminded me of the saying that“ ,The Kurds do not have even a star in the sky ”.

The uneasiness of the children was as painful as the chemical wounds .They didn't stop asking what was happening to us and where we were going ,and why they were not travelling with their father .We had no choice but to tell them lies .We tried to gain time , telling them that their father was gone to bring toys and dolls for them.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when we saw some lights in the desert .I wasn't wearing a watch but the other passengers told us what the time was .The light was coming from a huge old building .It looked like a castle .It was the only building in the area .The walls were very high .Thanks God the exhausting journey came to an end . We were told to get off and leave the buses . We entered the building ;it was unbelievably

big inside" .It's big enough to accommodate half of the population of Halabja ",I said to myself.

The building was composed of three floors . There were many other people inside .We didn't know who they were or where they had come from and whether some of them had come from the same places like ourselves .We couldn't tell whether the inhabitation of the castle were civilians or military troops ,we didn't know if they are Iraqis or whether we had already entered another country after one day and one night traveling .All we had to do was wait until the morning .On that particular night we didn't enjoy the dawn .The daybreak was gloomy and murky.

However ,we had to wait in that hall till the morning .The place smelled terrible ,it was as bad as a rotting corpse .Afterwards we learned that all the other people in the building were unlucky Kurds as well .They were in their traditional Kurdish clothes .They

looked pale and weak .As for my part ,I had no doubt that we were in a big prison . Moreover ,they took us to a special wing .I was keen to know why all these people are here and how long they have been imprisoned there .My husband Akram realized from their clothes that they were not from Halabja or Hawraman.

In the beginning they did allow us to talk to them .A few hours later some elderly people came and told us that they were from the Jaff tribe from Qaradagh ,a town south of Sulemania ,and that they had been given very little food and undrinkable water !It wasn't difficult to realise how true their words were - they were looking so disheveled and unshaven !In fact ,our children were not willing to mix with them.

They narrated their sad stories about their suffering in this prison .They said that at the beginning ,the hall had been full of people but later on many of them died because of lack of food ,water and medical care .They said the

death rate is awfully high among them ,and the dead bodies were just thrown out to wild animals .This explained the bad smell around the place .It made us reevaluate our wrong decision that we had made in the Iranian camp .It was nothing compared to this big empty prison !At least the people there had edible food and good drinking water .No-one starved there or was left without medical care.

We all shivered with fear when we heard that people had died in groups and that their corpses had been simply thrown out to the dogs .The stories about the humiliations that these poor people faced were unbelievable . Torture ,starvation ,dehydration and exposure to the extreme heat were simply means of mass killing .However ,worse than hearing of these deprivations was our having to face them !On the very same day of our arrival ,we were ordered to go out into the yard and wait for hours under the burning sun !The number of the prisoners was incredibly high .I

wondered how many people were put into a single room and then how many rooms were actually in that building .Keeping in mind that the prisoners had said that their numbers had reduced by more than half because of the slow ongoing deaths and most of the remaining survivals were like zombies . However ,we were forced out into the yard to get some drinking water .

After waiting a long time ,some tankers arrived .The prisoners rushed at them :they all wanted to get their share of water .But what kind of water was it ?I wouldn't have used it even to water my garden in Halabja .It was thick and muddy ,it looked more like sewage water .But the way people rushed showed how thirsty they were .We ,the newcomers didn't want to take it .We had already had had something to eat and drink . Then the time came to distribute food .The whole meal consisted of a piece of dry bread . I wondered how those elderly people could

chew the bread .Indeed ,some of them had lost their teeth as a result of malnutrition .

We thought about our life in Iran ,we had made a horribly wrong decision .In comparison with the situation inside this horrible jail ,Saryas camp was paradise !We didn't appreciate the care received from a country that we had launched a destructive eight year long war against .We didn't appreciate the medical care ,the fresh food , pure water or publicizing our national disaster by receiving reporters from all over the world . We forgot those young air-force captains who had risked their lives by transferring injured people from the gassed area to Iran .Our complaints of not letting people come to or leave the camp the way they liked was indeed improper .They did that for the sake of our security .We didn't listen to our experienced people who described the nature of the Saddam's regime and advised as not to risk our lives again .

Every day the scene inside the prison was repeated :piles of dead bodies were thrown from the rooms to outside the prison .There was no burial process ,no Islamic rituals or consolations .In addition to the daily routine of lining up to receive dirty water and dry bread we also experienced insults and beating at the hands of the soldiers .This situation reminded me the chemical attacks on our town .In our attempt to run to safety ,we ignored all those dead bodies fallen on the streets of Halabja .They were humans like us , but we couldn't help them ,we couldn't help the suffering people of the big prison either!

We started suffering too .We had to drink the same water and live on the same small pieces of bread .We too were subject to kicking and whipping with electric cables . Within a week we all felt sick ,my husband Akram was the first victim ,he just gasped twice and passed away.

Akram's sudden death was the biggest shock of my life .He used to be fit and a hard

working person .The way he sobbed and died was similar to the sudden death of chemical victims of Halabja in its first days .His death left a wound in my heart that will never recover .Pains and suffering from chemicals would be more bearable than his departure . Nobody expected a better fate .We were all going to die and to be thrown to the dogs . But these facts did not relief our pain ,we were all shocked ,we were screaming and wailing .Other prisoners came and shared or grief .My children were crying too .But the most affected person was Akram's mother . She was holding him in her hands .She never left him on the ground and she promised not to throw his corpse to the wild animals .She was kept on saying that she will bury him according to Islamic customs.

My mother-in-law fell into a nervous breakdown .She could not stop crying .She swore by God that she would dig a grave by her own nails if necessary so that the wild animals wouldn't tear his body apart .Hours

later ,she started talking crazily saying that she would rather eat him that leave him to the dogs .Indeed ,she started biting his dead body" .I would rather eat him ,I had better keep him inside my body than throwing him to the dogs ",she kept repeating it over and over .The people around us understood our tragedy .They broke the normal rules when people just say" ,Rely on God ...Thank the good God ...That was God's will "!They knew what the presence of a male meant for a family like ours in our situation.

My mother-in-law became worse and worse ,she lost her senses .Her cried and her movements slowed down .Then she became motionless and died early in one morning .She fulfilled her promise that she would never let anything separate them - not even death . Thus ,after a week of our arrival to that notorious prison ,I lost my dear husband and his mother .

I found myself facing the most terrible situation man can face .I had lost my husband

in the evening and my Mother-in-law in the morning .What could I do with two corpses and three small children in the most horrific prison of his highness the Mujahid President Saddam Hussein ?On the one hand I lost my house in Halabja and my husband in the middle of nowhere !All these ,my husband and his mother had to be thrown away.

Two guards came early in the morning and put the corpses in trolleys to take them away . They came back after five minutes and put the trolleys back in their usual places .I didn't dare accompany them and watch the wild dogs tearing the bodies of my dear ones .That night was a nightmare ,not only for me and my children ,but for all the detainees .They told us that one hundred other prisoners had died on the same night .The highest number of deaths during their stay at that prison.

Days passed like epochs .I turned into an indifferent person .I was not interested in anything ,not even willing to talk to other prisoners .Our only daily activity was to go to

out into the yard ,get the tin of water and few pieces of bread .Kicking and whipping us in the yard was a daily routine during the ration supply .I didn't care about torture and humiliations .I accepted all that to keep my children alive .The only story I listened to was when one of the prisoners said that one hundred people had died on the same night with my husband .The soldiers blamed the groups that came from Halabja for carrying a special virus from Iran otherwise the number of deaths wouldn't be that high .But the real reason was that they had put poison into one of the drinking water containers .The victims had all come from those who had drunk from that container .However ,this mass killing had forced the authorities to bury them in a mass grave dug by a bulldozer ,this meant that my husband and my mother in law had not been thrown to the dogs.

Torture of prisoners was practiced under the supervision of a man called Hajaj .I think

he was given that nickname after the cruel Umayyad ruler of Baghdad who had once massacred all the people going to Friday prayers to terrify and intimidate the whole population .Hajaj was only coming once a week or so because he had many other torture places to supervise .Some of our women who dared to look at the basement of the prison told me that it was full of skulls and skeletons .

Hajaj was torturing both men and women .I remember one particular day when he picked up Shwan Ahmmed) who now lives in London (and Star Haider) who now teaches in Tawella (and hanged them to the courtyard wall and whipped them until they had become unconscious .He thought that they were already dead and so he left them .But when the soldiers untied them ,they found they were still alive .The soldiers were too afraid of oppression to mention about it.

Two months had passed in that prison and the time for me to deliver my last baby was

getting closer .That troubled me even more . How can a woman like me give birth to a child in a damn place like that jail ?I started worrying about that too.

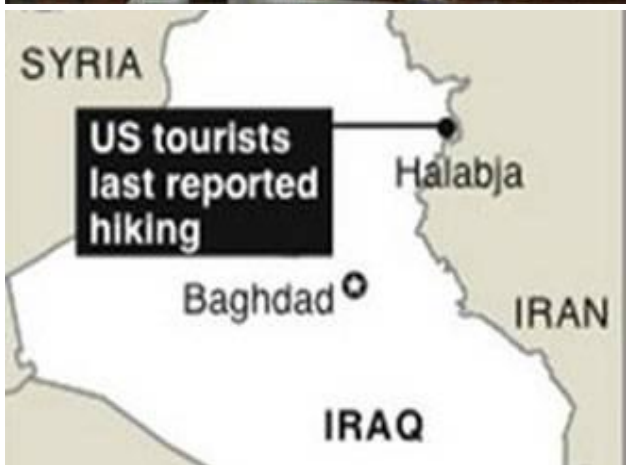
On another memorable day ,they had gathered a large number of prisoners together and said that they were to be taken to another prison .That frightened me greatly because I had heard that there were even worse prisons than ours .At the beginning ,we weren't within that group but later on they ordered us to join them .Eventually they took us to a city called Samawa which is situated in the south of Iraq .The prison there was actually more acceptable .We could have baths and wash our clothes and we had relatively good foods and drink there .We stayed there for only a few days and were asked to prepare for another transfer .This time ,the journey was much longer .It ended up in a filthy big camp with many halls .The elderly people started crying out" ,Topzawa concentration camp again "?!They recognized

it because they were originally separated from their other family members while they were held in that camp.

Thank God ,we stayed there only for one night and in the morning ,they took us back to the same courtyard of the Sulemania governmental house .After a short while ,we were all released .I knew a house of one of our relatives in the center of Sulemania .They helped me a lot and took me to the maternity department in one of the city's hospitals .I gave birth to my lovely last daughter we gave her the name Bahra .This name was recommended by my husband when I became pregnant in Iran.

I remained in Sulemania until the glorious uprising of our nation .Our harmless people could throw out all those big armies of the enemy .Later on ,I could go back to my city , Halabja ;I found it just as sad as the time I had left it on my way to the neighboring country of Iran!

























Arif Qurbany

Galawezh

An eyewitness Account of
Halabja and Anfal genocide