

Remarks at His Meeting with Iraqi Human Rights Victims

Secretary Colin L. Powell; USAID Administrator Andrew S. Natsios

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SECRETARY POWELL: Well, first of all, I'd like to welcome our guests here today. It's an honor for me to receive them at the State Department. These individuals bear witness to the cruelty of Saddam Hussein and to the cruelty of the evil regime which is no more. Instead, Saddam Hussein and his henchmen will be standing before the bar of justice, that justice to be administered by the Iraqi people.

The individuals who are here today did not have an opportunity for justice. Instead, they saw the horrors of this regime, either in the form of mass killings -- and one of our guests was at a mass killing at Anfal and saw many of his family members killed, his fellow Iraqis slaughtered. He survived, wounded, to tell the tale, and he bears witness to what happened at Anfal.

Another one of our guests was imprisoned, and during his imprisonment, he was beaten; there was no justice in Iraq. He was beaten and he saw members of his family killed. And now he has gone back to help his countrymen understand the nature of this terrible regime, and to help them reconcile themselves to the loss of their family members, and to help them recover family members who are lost and are in Saddam Hussein's mass graves.

And we're also very pleased to have a third individual with us who escaped from his country early, came to America, got an education, and has used his talents as a filmmaker to document all of this.

And I hope that during their stay here in the United States, they will speak to many audiences, they will speak to those Americans who might still have some doubt about the wisdom of President Bush's decision. And I think through their testimony, through their witness, they will dispel that doubt, because clearly, the regime that we eliminated last year was a regime that not only had the intention, capability and history of use and development of weapons of mass destruction, but they terrorized and tortured and murdered their own people. They didn't respect anyone's human rights inside of Iraq, and they fomented terrorism in other parts of the world.

And so I am honored to have these individuals here with the Department today, and I wish them all the best of luck as they continue to tell the story of this regime and what this regime did to its own people. And as they now, really, not only tell about the past, but as they look

to the future, as they build a new Iraq, founded on respect for the dignity of human beings, founded on the rock of democracy and openness, an Iraq that will no longer be a pariah in the eyes of the world, but instead, will be a model for the rest of the world of what free people can do when they're allowed to be free, and when they are governed by justice.

And so I thank them for telling the history of the past years, but also for what they are doing to prepare their people for the future. And I thank them for being here today.

ADMINISTRATOR NATSIOS: Thank you. I'd first like to mention, Jano Rosebani, that the Secretary just introduced, he did an hour-long documentary. AID helped provide grant funding for that. It's an hour-long documentary on the atrocities of the last 35 years; it was shown as a music -- in a film festival in New York, and people -- there was stunned silence in the room after it was over. It was one of the most moving documentaries that has ever been done on these atrocities, and he is a national figure in Iraq now.

I met Ibrahim in June of last year at his human rights center, and I didn't understand why it was so heavily guarded, and it's because Saddam's henchmen have repeatedly attempted to assassinate him since he started his NGO to protect human rights and to document the atrocities, to list the names of the people who have been massacred. They kept detailed documents of who they killed, when they killed them, and where they killed them. And they now have these records and they are cataloguing what happened.

We have been funding a series of new human rights organizations in Iraq that are dedicated to ever -- to preventing this from ever happening again in Iraq. There's a rich new civil society that's developing; unfortunately, it's never reported on in the West, but it's there, I meet with them, our staff meets with them, Ambassador Negroponte's meeting with them, and they are the new Iraq.

Taimour has now sought asylum in the United States after his family was massacred during the infamous Anfal campaign; he's a small businessman. His wife, Pravine (ph), is here as well. And he is the one living survivor of the Anfal -- that we know of, where virtually the entire male part of his family, 110 members of his extended family were massacred in one mass grave. They thought he was dead but he was the one survivor, and he's here with us today.

So I want to thank all of you for being with us and doing something very brave, and that is talking publicly about what happened in Iraq the last 35 years.

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