

Panel discussion on

Human Rights in Iraq

16.00 to 17.00 Thursday, 10 March 2016

Room 27 United Nations – Geneva

Speakers:

Ali Shallal Al-Qaisi

During the occupation of Iraq following March 2003 invasion, the United States Army and the Central Intelligence Agency committed a series of human rights violations against detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison. These violations included physical and sexual abuse, torture, rape, sodomy, and murder. Ali Al-Qaisi, is one of the victims of the U.S. torture, his photo at the prison, is the most famous image from 2003 torture scandal. He is going to speak about his and his friends suffering during their captivity under U.S. custody.



Mustafa Kamel

Journalist and Editor in Chief of Wijhatnadhra, an electronic newsletter. Mustafa Kamel is going to speak about the forced displacement in Iraq and the plight of the millions of Iraqi civilians who have been forced to leave their homes as a result of terrorists and governmental attacks against the residential areas in their cities and villages. He is going to show a short video and photos taken during his recent visit to the refugee camps north of Iraq.



Moderator: Mr. Jan Lonn, Secretary General of ISMUN, Former Chair of Swedish Network Against War

Organizers: International-Lawyers.org, International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD), Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations (ISMUN), International Educational Development, Inc, Arab Lawyers Association- UK, BRussells Tribunal, Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), Organization for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, and Moubadron for Human Rights



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SUMMARY

New World Disorder The Need to Break Through an Imposed and Enforced Silence



“The number assigned to me was 151’716. This number of prisoners reached 1.2 million and none of these people was able to avoid torture and mistreatment at the hands of the U.S. soldiers and their contractors.” Mr Ali Shallal Al Qaisi, former Abu-Ghraib prisoner

The organized side event on 10 March 2016 during the 31st session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations Offices in Geneva, Switzerland, was chaired by Mr. Jan Lönn.

The aim of such event was that of addressing two particular phenomena that highly affect the population of Iraq, and that constitute a grave breach of human rights and States obligations: mass displacement and torture.

Although such issues have largely been debated and documented in the past by many human rights organizations, nonetheless, with this side event the organizers wanted to highlight the immense importance of continuing to tackle these violations since they are still ongoing at present, and to do so by providing the perspectives and opinions, as well as, the knowledge and personal experiences of two prominent speakers: Mr. Ali Shallal Al-Qaisi, a survivor of the inhuman torture practices within the Abu Ghraib prison and Mr. Mustafa Kamel, a respected journalist as well as the editor in chief of wijhatnadhar online platform.

This report will, therefore, briefly present their interventions in regards to the above mentioned matters, starting with Mr. Kamel’s analysis of the phenomenon of mass displacement and its implications as far as the demographic changes in Iraq are concerned, following with Mr. Al-Qaisi’s tragic torture experience at Abu Ghraib prison at the time of the 2003 infamous U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Their interventions have not just provided us with the unique points of view of insiders’ firsthand experiences as they described some of the facts on the ground, but they have also presented us with an even more disturbing picture of the human rights situation in Iraq, where IDPs are ever so neglected and where the

number of detainees subjected to torture and other inhuman treatments by the U.S. has unthinkableably exceeded the million.

Mr. Kamel's presentation focused on the phenomenon of mass displacement that is ongoing since 2003 in Iraq and provided a broad picture of the situation in this regard. He started by reminding representatives of the international community how Iraq and the Iraqi people have suffered from numerous human rights violations since the U.S. invasion; arbitrary detention, mass arrest, systematic and widespread torture, attack on civilians and on civilian infrastructures, hospitals, universities, museums and so on. He stressed, however, that the phenomenon which he wanted to discuss that day, had not been witnessed before in the modern history of Iraq: forcible mass displacement and demographic change.

The displacement and demographic change in fact started after the 2003 US-led invasion, and it has grown dramatically since 2006, especially with the rise of Iranian backed pro-governmental sectarian militias who took control of the State security and armed forces.

This has caused the displacement of more than 3 million of Iraqi citizens inside and outside Iraq for sectarian reasons. Mr. Kamel provided two examples of such crimes committed against particular groups in Iraq. He firstly mentioned the displacement of members of the Sunni-Arab tribe of Sa'dun, who have been living in Basra and Dhi-Qar for hundreds of years and who have been forcibly displaced by the militias 700 km away from their original place of residence, to the province of Salahuddin. In another example he mentioned that the target of militias had been the Christian components of the Iraqi society, who were subjected to forcible mass displacement operations. In late 2015 and beginning of 2016, "al Hashd al-Shaabi", the popular mobilization forces made of Iranian backed pro-governmental militias, took control over a number of houses belonging to Christians in several areas of Baghdad, following their forced eviction.

The phenomenon of displacement has witnessed a further wave in 2013. At that time the Iraqi armed forces attacked many places in which peaceful demonstrations were taking place with the demand for the release of arbitrarily detained prisoners, and the call to end executions. The attack by the governmental forces on the peaceful demonstrators resulted in several massacres such as in the cities of Hawija, Ramadi and Fallujah.

In Hawija, on 23 April 2013, militias and armed forces attacked peaceful demonstrators and killed 54 people and wounded more than 150.

Mr. Kamel also mentioned the massacre that took place in the mosque of Sariya in Baqooba on 17 May 2013, where the militias attacked peaceful demonstrators and people while they were praying, which resulted in 42 deaths and 60 wounded.

The most important and dangerous development took place on 30 December 2013, when militias and armed forces raided and attacked demonstrators in the city of Ramadi, where dozens of people were killed and many others wounded. After that, ISIS took control of a number of areas and cities, and Mr. Kamel insisted on the fact that this was only possible because of a precise governmental policy or strategy which intentionally aimed at leaving such places where demonstrations against the government were taking place, to the hands of the terrorist group and their attacks. In that regard, Mr. Kamel mentioned the report of the investigation committee put in place by the authorities after the fall of Mosul; this report clearly stresses the fact that the armed forces were ordered by Prime Minister Al-Maliki to withdraw from these places which subsequently let the cities get raided by ISIS. What occurred after was a dramatic increase in the number and size of militias, directly financed by the government.

Mr. Kamel insisted that Iraq is the only country in the world in which militias financed mainly by taxpayers kill its own people. He then presented evidence and pictures showing the massacres resulting from the attacks against civilian populated cities, including their hospitals (as in the case of Fallujah), as well as providing figures and numbers of casualties.

Moving back to the subject of displacement, Mr. Kamel said that both the government units and the militias participated in the reinforcement of this phenomenon. A wave of displacement took place since the beginning of 2014, in the province of Al-Anbar, mainly in the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah; another big wave, possibly the biggest so far, took place in April 2015 when 113'000 people were displaced from the city of Ramadi. The total number of displaced people from the province of Al-Anbar reached at that time 1.4 million, according to the International Organization for Migration. They accounted for 44% of the total number of displaced people in Iraq of which 52% were women. Not only were these people displaced from their homes,

but they were also barred entry into the city of Baghdad while attempting to cross the Bzayz Bridge (only access to the city) unless there was someone in the capital able to guarantee and facilitate entry for them. Because of this, an emergency camp has been erected near to the bridge, inhabited by more than 150'000 citizens, who face threats and attacks by the militias who have been abducting them even inside Baghdad after they were allowed entry. Mr. Kamel provided specific examples of such situations.

Mr. Kamel said that mass displacement and demographic change were taking place in Diyala as well. 54'000 inhabitants were, in fact, displaced while 80% of them were forbidden entry into their places of residence by the Iranian backed militias. He reported that such forced displacement in the province was directed against a specific ethnic group, the Sunni Arab component of the Iraqi society.

In the Province of Salahuddin, the number of displaced people has reached 450'000 and only less than 50% of them have been allowed to return to their homes while the others were forbidden even after the territories were retaken from ISIS.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens, if not more than 2 million, still live in areas occupied by ISIS, facing, therefore, a double problem: the brutality of the so called Islamic State and the indiscriminate attacks by the militias that are still occurring.

Mr. Kamel concluded by talking about his personal experience when he visited displaced people in the province of Erbil, where he was a witness to unprecedented levels of poverty. He described how the IDPs were living in extremely unsafe and precarious conditions, often in unfinished buildings, affected by harsh weather conditions, and lacking access to food, water, electricity and basic healthcare.

After Mr. Kamel's intervention, it was Mr. Al-Qaisi's turn to share his experiences and knowledge in regards to another appalling violation of Iraqis' human rights, which still represents a problem today, but is nevertheless yet to be tackled: the case of torture.

Mr. Al-Qaisi brought to the attention of the participants the outrageous practices of American troops within the infamous Abu-Ghraib Prison, providing us with the story of his arrest and detention alongside the heinous torture he endured.

Mr. Al-Qaisi demonstrated his efforts in promoting awareness and said "I am now working as a messenger of peace and a lobbyist for interreligious dialogue". It is worth mentioning that Mr. Al-Qaisi established an association of previously tortured detainees, which aims at preventing detainees and victims of torture from resorting to violence and rather using all peaceful, legal platforms to demand their rights.

Mr. Al-Qaisi first explained that the phenomenon of mass detention in Iraq was initiated by the United States and pursued by the Iraqi authorities who resorted to mass arrests and detentions against Iraqi citizens. He stressed that the roots of today's situation, the ethno-sectarian tensions and violence that is plaguing the country and the rampant criminality, are to be found in the policies put in place by the occupying power in 2003 and whoever assisted them in their project.

Mr. Al-Qaisi mentioned his personal experience before his arrest and the nature of his activities; he explained that he was against the occupation and was resisting it; "any person witnessing the occupation of his country should resist it and this is the right of any individual". He said that he resisted through peaceful means; he explained that he was collaborating with the foreign and local press headquartered in Baghdad at the time of the beginning of the occupation, trying to expose grave human rights violations committed by the occupying powers, specifically the use of prohibited weapons. His aim was to conduct journalists and reporters to places where he and his colleagues found bodies that presented evidence of injuries characteristic of certain prohibited weapons. He said that he brought about 35 delegations of journalists and reporters to such places and they were able to document what it was believed to have been the use of prohibited weapons.

Mr. Al-Qaisi stressed that the cause of his arrest and detention by the Americans was undoubtedly his activism. From the very first day of his arrest, he was subjected to the worst forms of treatments; at that point, he showed a wound on his neck explaining that an American soldier's dog "ate from that part". He mentioned the use of electricity during torture, and that he was hanged for 5 consecutive days without being provided with any food. All of this because of his peaceful resistance and public exposure of the crimes that the occupying powers were committing.

Mr. Al-Qaisi again reiterated that the worst forms of torture were inflicted upon him. He went on to explain that it was difficult to even talk about what happened there, as he did not want to hurt the sensitivity and sensibilities of the participants in the side event. All of what has been documented, reported, and exposed represents only a tiny fraction of the reality of what has and is still taking place in numerous detention centers and prisons in Iraq.

Mr. Al-Qaisi also presented the case of a kid, not older than 10 years old, who was taken to prison where the American guards forbid him from urinating for a certain period of time. At some point, they covered his eyes and eventually allowed him to urinate. After that, they uncovered his eyes only for the child to realize that he was in fact urinating on his father.

Women in American detention centers were taken as hostages; they were not guilty of any crime. He mentioned that he and other inmates witnessed the rape of women prisoners in the most horrible ways.

He then provided a further example of a translator from Titan Group Company who raped a child aged 9 years old in front of his father inside the prison. The name of the person is known, the facts are documented, and they presented the case to justice but were told that private security companies are not within the reach of any law. In fact the few individuals from the military police who were prosecuted only covered 1% of the crimes committed by private security companies' personnel.

Mr. Al-Qaisi said that the aim of private security companies is to make profit, their work is to extract information from prisoners and provide them to whichever organ or State is employing them. These companies were paid 21 billion USD as a result of the tears and suffering inflicted on Iraqis. However, after the Abu-Ghraib scandal and despite of it, the contract with these companies was renewed. He also spoke about the culture of mercenaries brought by these companies, and how their being outside the reach of law has increased the reproduction of the phenomenon and its perpetuation. He stressed that this was the policy of the occupying powers and this is, therefore, what we must be focused on; the American occupation that has torn apart the social fabric of Iraq. The American occupation and its massive, systematic and widespread violations and blatant disregard for human rights, bears the primary responsibility of today's situation.

Mr. Al-Qaisi explained that when he was arrested on 13 October 2003, the number assigned to him was 151'716 (which in fact represented the number of inmates in the American prison at the time of his arrest). This number reached 1.2 million and none of these people was able to avoid torture and mistreatment at the hands of the U.S. soldiers and their contractors.

Mr. Al-Qaisi said that he witnessed with his own eyes - and he apologized in case the following hurt the sensitivity or feelings of any participant - a female soldier interrogating a male prisoner and raping him using a Strap-on-Dildo after hanging him on a door.

He also was a witness to an Imam of the Great Mosque of the city of Fallujah, Sheikh Jamal Nazal who is an old man aged 80, being brought to the prison and being forced to wear a bikini. Along with him, about 60 of his relatives were detained too. Mr. Al-Qaisi concluded by asking himself, why did these sadistic behaviors take place?

VIDEO OF SIDE EVENT

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