

## ❖ MARIA SANCHO

### Amna Suraka, Iraq

#### **“NOT TO FORGET”**

*A documentary exhibition about revolution and Kurdish people sacrifices.*

#### **The site.**

The museum is located in the Security prison of former Iraqi Regime of Saddam Hussein, in the city of Suleymanya, in Kurdistan.

Built in 3 stages started on 30th September 1979, during the 80's it was used as one of the most powerful instruments to impose terror in the population of Kurdistan.

It was meant to house the Security Directorate of Suleymanya, and different types of cases were addressed to it, according to the crimes the prisoners were accused of, that were generally called “Crimes against the national security”, and could include:

1. Espionage.
2. Treason (that could include contravention of censorship in press or art expressions such as theater).
3. Smuggling (it has to be understood in the context of the Iran-Iraq War).

The Prison purpose was to “collect” information on the case and then the prisoner would be sent to the Revolutionary Court in Bagdad, a military one, where sessions were held in camera and the right to defense reportedly was severely restricted. Regular judicial procedures did not apply in these courts, summary proceedings being common.

The reality on the ground was that the prison was used to arrest people either politically involved or not, and since the activity of this base was limited to “collect” the information of the case, the detainees were summated to the widest range of tortures imaginable, taken from the soviet “school” in most of the cases: electroshock, bitten with wires, with the hands tied behind, getting hanged by the shoulders and then soldiers would pull down prisoner clothes and hang them selves to increase the weight...

This would be done to adults, both male or female, wives or sisters would be tortured or raped in front of their husbands as part of the genocide<sup>1</sup>, but even kids would suffer same horror to obtain information from their parents.

Some of the detained lost their lives while tortured and for those who survived many were executed or went missing while in Bagdad, but there is no statistic done so far. The references

<sup>1</sup> “By special soldiers” as a survivor puts it.

available consist on the figures of people that were hold inside and were once noted: chamber # 1- 96 people, # 2 (for children)- 42, # - 36 people, # 78 people, women with infants chamber- 90 people, solitary confinement – 13 cells.

The recorded names of those who passed away as a consequence of the torture include members of all Kurdish political parties, but also of many who had no affiliation to any such activity but were accused under such charges, male or women. In many occasions and due to the extreme corruption of the regime, the instrument of terror of that prison was used by officers to extortion wealthy families to ask them for money.

#### **After 1991 Uprising and the creation of the museum**

When Iraqi's army was defeated in Kuwait by the allies, Kurds revolted against Saddam Hussein hoping to topple his regime, took control over Kurdish cities and Amnasuraka, as emblematic symbol, was taken after an extraordinary bloody battle, where women and children also participated, proving an intense rage.

Thousands of files were taken from the offices of the Security prisons all over Kurdistan, and sent in containers to the US, to be kept save and catalogued<sup>2</sup>. No further study on them is known in Kurdistan so far.

Internally Displaced People, mainly from the arabized region of Kirkuk, lived there up to 1996. After the policy of recovering of public buildings, the IDPs were resettled in more suitable places, and the NGO Kurdistan Save the Children came to protect the building. Its founder, Ms Hero Ibrahim, wife of the Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani (current President of Iraq), adopted the idea of turning it into a museum.

The name given was “Not to forget”.

#### **Near future plans**

Create an archive with the documents related to the crimes against Humanity by the regime of Saddam (prepare the staff that can take the task and carry it).

Create an space for remembrance and invitation to reconciliation through education and peace awareness activities (prepare educators and programs for the aim).

Create a living environment where victims of the genocide (= the whole society of Kurdistan) can heal the wounds of terror.

Support researchers who can analyze the process of Genocide and help people in and outside Kurdistan to understand what happened and why, to prevent anything similar from happening again.

<sup>2</sup> To see some of them, look at Iraq Research Project in [www.harvard.edu](http://www.harvard.edu)

If you think you can help in any of the matters, please contact us at: mariasanchof@gmail.com  
**Some background information.**

On the Kurdish Genocide the best report published so far is the one of Human Rights watch, Anfal, the Iraqi Campaign of Genocide against the Kurds. On the gendercide: the gendercide watch web site offers basic information. On current issues discussed by Kurds in English there are many such as www.kurdishmedia.com, kurdistanobserver, www.ikurd.net. All of them offer links to different Kurdish artists production.

### **Revolution National Museum and Kurdish Nation Victims Not to forget (The Red Security)**

The exhibitions that have been showed in the museum since its opening until now:

- Two Syrian photographers exhibition (Nadim Ado and Abdo Khalil) on 11/6/2002
- An exhibition on the Uprising anniversary by (Fayaq Hama Salih) on 7/3/2003
- An exhibition by a group of artists on the 15th anniversary of Halabja chemical bombardment on 16/3/2003
- A joint exhibition by six Kurdish plastic artists from Syria on 28/10/2003
- A joint exhibition by 65 artists on the anniversary of Halabja chemical bombardment in the name (Choral of Color) on 16/6/2004
- Annual exhibition of Anfal and Exodus on 14/4/2004
- Visual Documentary and Flower on 9/6/2004
- A plastic art exhibition by (Gidyano Aliko) in the name of (Freedom of Colors) on 11/9/2004 (A bridge between Kurdistan and us) by a French organization on 14/9/2004
- A joint exhibition of a group of artists in the name of (Peaceful Coexistence Festival) on 6/10/2004
- An exhibition in the name of (The Memories of Osman Qadir) on 5/12/2004
- A performance called (Installation) by Sherko Abbass on 15/1/2005
- A performance called (The Kingdom of the Lanterns) on 17/2/2005
- A theatrical performance called (An Epic from Anfal) directed by Bakir Rashid on 17/4/2005
- A photographic exhibition in the name of (The Memories of Abu Udey (Saddam) and I) by (Fayaq Hama Salih) on 20/4/2005.

### **Some of the prisoners messages kept on the walls**

- Love of no one could match the love of a daughter in the heart of an old father. May I become sacrifice to your white beard ; your eyes, full of blood and tears, were fixed at my eyes for the first time in this prison. Father, brother and two other sisters arrested on a brother's behalf.
- January 9/10 1991 cold, hunger and dirt have made us completely warn out. We have become very desperate. Unless God hear our calls, we would not get out of here.

- L – M – S Today, Saturday, December 8th 1990, I was arrested. My name is Karoukh. I am 6 years old.
- January 9/10th 1990 Thursday I wonder if a day comes when this room is not in my sight anymore and I am out. Oh, I am going insane without committing any guilt.
- Attention! My daughter is seven months old, they have taken her away from me and sent her home. Now I miss her very much. I do not know when I would get out to see her; my life is very bitter. I have not seen my daughter for 25 days. November 25th 1990.
- I do not know why the walls of the torture chamber will not collapse and become ashes and blood. Disadvantaged and poor, I am crying quietly in this room; my hands and fingers ache from exposure to electricity.
- On Sunday night, December 16/17 1990, two of my sisters and me were arrested and we were here on January 1st 1991 with our sister S/H/M Qaladizayee  
(تێدەكەت بۆ قاعەى تێنجه لێرەو تا ئێو دێرەى بە ئازاد مەجید دەست)
- You cannot drown me Gomasheen (name of a lake)
- I was arrested on July 28th 1990 in Kalar (a Kurdish town) (Hasan Ali HamaFaraj)
  - Violation of municipal laws Dler HamaRahman
  - Violation of municipal laws Saman Ali
  - Outspoken Assault - Mam Fariq
  - Outspoken Assault - Qadir Ali
  - Outspoken Assault - Jalal Mustafa
  - Letter - Ahmed Qadir
  - Peshmerga - Sabir Khdir
  - Letter - HamaShaswar
  - Outspoken Assault - Atta
  - Without charge
- On Saturday, April 7th 1990 this group was taken to The Revolutionary Court. God may keep an eye on them.
- To my dearest brother, Mr. .... 's group. Hope you would always be in success. Your Brother ...
- I was arrested on January 18th 1989. It is January 18th 1990 and am still here. Alas! for Omed, my son.
  - The mother Sulemany, Hair and head in blood, speaks
  - He says ' I am in fire and burning, Burning,
  - And chanting for the sons of those mountains'. Hama Dhahir

- On September 22nd 1989 Mr. Atta Ahmed and I were arrested after being informed on by Gharib Muhammed Rasheed Haji Mamandi, an intelligence agent.... Muhammed Dhahir Muhammed Tofiq.
- Do not shed tears of sadness for me as my body is reddened in blood. I am a martyr at the hand of tyrant but am glad to be a Peshmerga.
- My name is Muhsin (male name ) and am imprisoned in a corner of this prison. They came and took me at my house. I was 15 years old and made me 18 years old to execute me. Then I said 'mum, pa I am going to be executed by the Ba'ath party. I will not see you again.'
  - Rutherford: Identified light, Marie Curie and Pierre Curie: discovered radium, Einstein: wrote the relativity theory, Landsteiner: Discovered (analyzed) types of blood, Marconi: invented radio, Isnman: invented Kodak film, Edison: found electricity, Rigt Duya: Flew from Britain to France, Coren: Tested the first helicopter
  - She is a tall, beautiful girl
  - Bright- eyed as Wan Lake.
  - In front of the eyes of police
  - She sparked Nawroz fire
  - With the flames of her delicate body
- October 23/24th 1990; a complete hair shave for everyone, we were included in that on October 24th '90 with hall number 3 and 5.
  - I am indifferent about the enemy's execution platform
  - I put on the rope of the execution
  - I am a poor Kurdish laborer
  - I never regret what I did
- Time is unfaithful ,
  - Why did you part me so bitterly from my love
  - In life I was happy
  - Your beauty disappeared in front of my eyes
- Teacher Ahmed
  - I was arrested on April 12th '89. I came to confinement cells on November 10th '89. Till November 15th 1990 I am still staying here. I was taken to Baghdad on October 1st 1990. I was taken to court on December 12th 1990. It was postponed. Life is pain and pain is the beginning of life. Liberate us so as we gladly meet our relatives again. Sweetheart, dear miss Layla
  - I wish you would know
  - How many ready poems do I have
  - That become rendezvous for your look
  - Dear sweetheart I wish you would know
  - When I am hurt and dragged to the torture chambers
  - Even then, To what extent the fascists are scared of me
  - Dear Sweetheart, I have unshackled so many
  - Steel chains, I have scared to death

- So many executors
- Because I kept silent
- Because I kept silent. 1990
- Since I was arrested in November 5th 1989, I cannot use my hands anymore as a result of hanging. From the first day until the 14th, I have been hanged 20 times, my hands are still the same.
- And 15 times starting from 26th to the 30th, and on January 24th 1990, I was hanged three times.