



Anfal survivors with mementos of their missing relatives, Sumud/Rizgary

Under the auspices of the Anfal Memory Forum initiative, women Anfal survivors are joining together to collectively transform their memories of violence and loss into proposals for the memorial's design. Alongside this psychosocial aspect, they transcend their role as waiting and mourning women by entering into dialogue with other social groups, and engaging in the public debate over the memorialization of Anfal. By doing so - by deploying their own images, narratives, strengths, and resources - they challenge the dominant national Kurdish discourse about Anfal, which largely depicts them as passive victims.

The project combines psychosocial support with the political empowerment of women Anfal survivors, creating a forum for exchanges between Anfal survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq and other groups of victims and survivors throughout Iraq. This will contribute to a far-reaching debate about how best to deal with the Iraqi past, with the vital participation of survivors of violence.

The German based NGO HAUKARI e.V. is accompanying and supporting women Anfal survivors in developing the memorial site in Kurdistan-Iraq, and in related projects in Germany.



Women Anfal survivors, Sumud/Rizgary

HAUKARI - Association for International Cooperation is a German based charity organization founded in 1995.

HAUKARI e.V. supports and assists women in situations of violence and crisis and women victims of political violence with a specific focus on Anfal surviving women.

HAUKARI e.V. supports initiatives for exchange and dialogue between the different ethnic, religious and political fractions in Iraq.

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HAUKARI e.V. accompanies the project in Kurdistan-Iraq and Germany since 2009. The project is supported by the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa) with means of the German Federal Foreign Office.

November 2010

HAUKARI e.V.
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Memorial Forum for Anfal Surviving Women

Sumud/Rizgary, Kurdistan-Iraq



The Anfal operations 1988 and surviving in the aftermath

Under the code-word “Anfal” (The Spoils), in 1988 the Iraqi Army destroyed thousands of villages in the Kurdish North of Iraq. The civilian population was concentrated under army control, whereupon more than 100,000 men and young women were separated out, deported, and killed. Their individual fate remains uncertain until today. Elders and women with children were detained for months, then settled in so-called “collective towns” under military control.

After the Kurdish region achieved de facto autonomy in 1991, many of the Anfal survivors, and especially women with children, remained in the collective towns, living amidst uncertainty and material hardship. Their suffering, after the violence and loss they had experienced, was prolonged by their precarious economic circumstances and their unclear social and legal status in a traditional patriarchal environment. Lack of a male breadwinner was a powerful obstacle to developing new life perspectives and coping strategies.



Ceremony for the funeral of 187 Anfal victims from a mass grave in Najaf, Sumud/Rizgary April 2009

After the fall of the Ba’ath-regime in 2003, the economic situation of these women has improved. They have received pensions and housing from the Kurdistan Regional Government. Meanwhile, the main perpetrators of the Anfal genocide have been sentenced by the Iraqi High Tribunal. Yet only a small number of the estimated 300 mass graves of Anfal victims have been opened, and until all the bodies of victims are exhumed and identified, Anfal survivors will not be able to find certainty and a measure of peace. Today, they are pressing for a prompt forensic excavation of the mass graves; for punishment of remaining perpetrators and their accomplices; and for social and political acknowledgement of their specific experiences during and after Anfal.

The legacy of the Ba’ath-regime

Ongoing violence in Iraq, and the increasing fragmentation of Iraqi society along ethnoreligious lines, delay and impede the process of dealing with the past on a regional and national level. For all the different ethnic, religious, and political factions, past victimhood and current patterns of violence are central to legitimating sectarian claims for power sharing on a national level. Victims of violence, past and present, are often played off against each other, and receive insufficient assistance from the authorities.

Throughout Iraq, survivors of violence and relatives of victims feel marginalized and alienated from the political process. The absence of a meaningful debate about the past only deepens the political, ethnic, and religious conflicts in Iraq.

The Anfal Memory Forum Project in Rizgary

With the Anfal Memory Forum project, women Anfal survivors in the former collective town of Sumud - today renamed Rizgary - in southeast Kurdistan are actively engaged in a public debate over how to deal with the past. Their goal is a self-designed and self-administered memorial site to represent their specific experiences as women during and after Anfal, to validate their suffering as well as their strength and pride, and to serve as a place to share their grief and achieve symbolic closure. They plan to give faces and names to their disappeared relatives by exhibiting photos, documents, and artifacts, thus preserving the memory of their loved ones for future generations.

The memorial site will also be a space for dialogue with other social groups in Kurdistan and Iraq.



Meeting of women Anfal survivors with artists in Rizgary, May 2010

While the building will be constructed by the Kurdistan Regional Government, women Anfal survivors will play a key role in designing and then administering the memorial site. The municipality of Rizgary has supplied a construction site, while the Kurdistan Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Regional has agreed to start construction of the memorial in 2011.

More than 100 women Anfal survivors are meanwhile engaged in the initiative for the Anfal Memory Forum. In meetings with local artists and architects, they discuss the design for the building and the exhibitions. They lobby and negotiate with the Kurdistan Government. In public meetings, they elicit broad support for the project - not only from their female peers, but from men and young people of the region.



Women Anfal survivors at the memorial site of the former Nazi concentration camp for women, Ravensbrück; Germany, April 2008

On several occasions, women Anfal survivors, artists, and other project supporters have come to Germany, visiting memorial sites for the victims of the Holocaust, and discussing possibilities for site design with German artists, architects, and representatives of other memorial sites.

Currently, local artists are engaged in taking photos of Anfal survivors holding images or other mementos of their disappeared relatives. Three thousand of these photos will line the entrance wall of the memorial site.

Fifteen local artists have also designed statues of Anfal women and their children; one of these will become the central women’s statue at the memorial.