The Wounds Have Not Healed: Commemorating the 1988 Chemical Attacks on Halabja

Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights urges government of Iraq to rehabilitate survivors of Halabja massacre and their families.

Halabja (Iraq), 16 March 2015 – On the occasion of the 27th anniversary of the chemical attacks on Halabja, the Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights calls on the Iraqi government to provide victims with the much-needed medical and psychological care, financial assistance and rehabilitation they are entitled to.

Amidst the current refugee and IDP crisis in Iraq and the war against “IS” terrorists, old wounds of the Halabja people persist. Thousands of civilians were killed and many more irreparably injured, when the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein dropped chemical bombs on Halabja city in 1988. Officially recognized as a genocidal massacre, the survivors lack adequate compensation as well as medical and psychological treatment.

"Those who were exposed to the toxic gas still suffer from skin problems, infections of the respiratory system, tumors and chronic pain", says Salah Ahmad, founder and president of the Jiyan Foundation. "They of course need medical care but we should never underestimate their psychological distress. These people have witnessed horrific scenes of death and lost family members and friends. They have the right to an official recognition of their sufferings."

In 2010, with support from the German Foreign Office, the Jiyan Foundation and the Berlin Center for Torture Victims established the first rehabilitation center and outreach service for victims of chemical attacks in Halabja. Since its foundation, the Halabja center has treated 1,850 patients. The numbers reveal a sustained demand for rehabilitation services. As violence on such a large scale frequently impacts entire families and causes inter-generational trauma, the Halabja branch recently opened a department for affected children.

The Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights, originally established as Kirkuk Center for Torture Victims in 2005, is a human rights organization offering free rehabilitation services to survivors of torture and inhuman treatment in Iraq. The Jiyan Foundation is supported by the German Foreign Office, the European Union, the United Nations, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and private donors.