

**Remarks by Lukman Faily
Iraqi Ambassador to the United States
At an Event Commemorating the Victims of Halabja
Washington, D.C.
March 26, 2014**

Good afternoon and thank you all for coming.

On March 16, 1988, the government of Saddam committed the largest chemical attack against civilians in history. For five hours, military aircrafts dropped chemical bombs on the city of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Almost 5,000 people lost their lives. Some 7,000 to 10,000 more were injured. And nearly half of the inhabitants of Halabja were exposed to toxic chemical agents.

Today, we remember that attack. And we condemn this crime against humanity by calling it by its proper name – genocide.

Halabja is symbolic of what our entire society endured. I welcome this opportunity to commemorate the victims. And I want to thank all those who are speaking here today:

- Minister Falah Bakir from the KRG government, General Jim Jones, and, of course, a special thanks to Representatives Chris Van Hollen and Marsha Blackburn, who, together introduced House Resolution 422.

House Resolution 422 recognizes Saddam's mass murders of the Kurds as genocide. As the Iraqi government's representative to the United States, I urge the members of the House of Representatives to sign on as co-sponsors.

After decades of dictatorship, war, ethnic and religious strife, international isolation and domestic devastation, we are striving to rebuild our country for all of our people – regardless of ethnic origin, religion, or political affiliation. We all suffered from dictatorship - from my very own community of Faily Kurds, to the Marsh Arabs, to the unidentified victims found in mass graves –Saddam's legacy touched us all.

Our journey from dictatorship to democracy begins by seeking and speaking the simple truth. In fact, we have enacted our own counterpart to House Resolution 422. In March 2011, the Iraqi Parliament passed a resolution recognizing Saddam's operations against the Kurds in Halabja, as an act of genocide.

In addition, in February 2010, the Iraqi High Criminal Court recognized the Halabja massacre as an act of genocide.

As we face the facts about the past, we are striving to build a better future. We cannot and should not forget what happened, neither as individuals nor as a collective. We need to take heed from the past and ensure that it is not repeated.

For everything we have endured over the past 11 years, the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people agree that we are better off now than under Saddam's brutal dictatorship. We are grateful to the American troops who served in our country, some of whom made the ultimate sacrifice.

Today, we are seeking to heal the ethnic, sectarian and regional rifts. We are striving to bring together all Iraqis – Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Christians, Turkmen and other minorities – and in spite of terrorism -- we are working to build a society where every community has a voice and where grievances can be heard and differences can be resolved, through open debate and voting, not violence. Only through working together can we build a more just and harmonious society that utilizes our vast wealth in resources to bring about a peaceful and prosperous existence for us all.

As we move forward, a crucial milestone will be our parliamentary elections on April 30 – our fourth since 2003. We are committed to conducting these elections as scheduled. This will strengthen our democracy and discourage violent extremism. And most importantly this will help to build a future where atrocities will never happen again.

Thank you all for commemorating this tragic event at this important venue.