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Saddam genocide trial wraps up witness phase

By Reuters

A court trying Saddam Hussein for genocide against ethnic Kurds in 1988 agreed on Monday to a prosecution request to stop listening to more witnesses, a move that could speed up proceedings in the three-month trial.

Saddam, who is awaiting an appeal against a death sentence from a separate case for the killing of Shi'ite villagers in the 1980s, is on trial along with six co-defendants for the Anfal military campaign which prosecutors say killed up to 180,000 people.

The Anfal trial opened in a Baghdad courtroom on August 21 and has heard more than 70 witnesses in 27 hearings, most of whom have described the campaign that ravaged Kurdistan.

As a comparison, the court in the Dujail case for which Saddam was sentenced to hang, held 40-odd hearings during one year of proceedings, many of which were disrupted by Saddam's political tirades and defence counsel boycotts.

The chief judge in Anfal, who has indicated a readiness to get down to business, ordered proceedings to continue on Wednesday, when prosecutors are expected to present documents linking Saddam to the killing of Kurds, court officials said.

The nine-judge Appellate Chamber, which could amend both the verdict and the death sentence of the Dujail case, has unlimited time to make a ruling. The Iraqi High Tribunal rules say any execution must follow a final decision within 30 days.

The Shi'ite-led government, which has been accused of political interference, says Saddam should be hung this year.

But sources inside the Tribunal say an appeal ruling could be timed for some point next year to coincide with the end of the genocide trial so Kurds too would feel their grievances had been heard.

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