

A Lone Woman Testifies To Iraq's Order of Terror

By Peter Finn
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BAGHDAD -- She was walking hurriedly, as if in a trance, oblivious to the weakness in her legs, not seeing the bewildered looks of the American troops trailing her, not hearing her own cries of anguish. Jumana Michael Hanna, tears streaming down her face, had slipped into the darkest recesses of memory.

Hanna, a 41-year-old Assyrian Christian from a formerly rich and prominent Iraqi family, returned last week to the well of her nightmares: the police academy in Baghdad, a sprawling complex of offices, classrooms, soccer, polo and parade grounds -- and prison cells, some of them converted dog kennels, according to American officials who now control the campus.

This is the place where in the 1990s Hanna was hung from a rod and beaten with a special stick when she called out for Jesus or the Virgin Mary. This is where she and other female prisoners were dragged outside and tied to a dead tree trunk, nicknamed "Walid" by the guards, and raped in the shadow of palm trees. This is the place where electric shock was applied to Hanna's vagina. And this is where in February 2001 someone put a bullet in her husband's head and handed his corpse through the steel gate like a piece of butcher's meat.

Hanna has come back here to help the new occupation authorities in Iraq find the men who tormented her. After she identified some of the men through a series of photos of officers in the new Iraqi police force and provided other corroborating information to American and Iraqi officials, on Saturday morning an Iraqi police anti-corruption squad detained three men, including a brigadier general. U.S. and Iraqi officials are talking to a fourth man and seeking his cooperation. As of yesterday, none had been formally charged, but the investigation is continuing.

"For two months I've been here and heard the rumors about what happened to women, but no one came forward," said Bernard B. Kerik, the senior policy adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and former police commissioner in New York City. "This is the first case where someone has given us information that appears to be credible and that we can corroborate and act on. A lot of Iraqi women will see that we are serious. This is an event that will lead to closure for a lot of people -- and justice."

Hanna, who agreed to the use of her full name, is just one of hundreds and possibly thousands of women who were tortured and sexually assaulted by the agents of the last government, human rights officials said. For those who survived, their ordeal was often left unspoken, swept behind a cloak of family and societal shame. That will make prosecutions extremely difficult, American officials said, and makes Hanna's determination to expose her jailors all the more dramatic for an occupying authority eager to build a clean, new police force.

A month ago, homeless and seeking assistance from Americans for her mother, her two children and herself, Hanna went to the Baghdad Convention Center. A leadership conference was underway for about 60 officers in the reconstituted Iraqi police force. There, in the crowd, she said she saw the man she and the other female prisoners knew as the Major. She recalled he was the man who had laughed at their pain as he inflicted more and more of it, the man who extinguished his cigarette on Hanna's leg on the day she was ordered released. "Pain that no one can imagine," said Hanna. "Terrible, terrible pain. Pain that steals your honor."

Hanna fled the convention center in a blind panic, wandering aimlessly through the streets. Nearly two weeks later, she made her way to the Human Rights Society of Iraq, housed in a two-story building near the Ministry of Justice. Activists there told her that the U.S. occupying authorities in Iraq would want to know about her jailors, especially if they had returned to the police force.

And so, trembling, Hanna stood last week at the arched entryway of the police academy, seeking justice but fearing what lay beyond. Between tears and bouts of breathlessness, her story tumbled out in fragments as she guided her hosts, U.S. officials working to rebuild the Iraqi police force, from one scene of torture to another.

She pointed to a wall in a cell and said it hid a stairwell; the academy's Iraqi commissioner later confirmed its existence, U.S. officials said. At one moment, she walked through an open yard trying to find a second tree trunk, just like the first one, "Walid," but used only to tie prisoners for beatings with sticks or cable wire. She was convinced it was there, but no one could see a second trunk. And, finally, there it was, hidden behind some wild reeds and heaped brush. The guards called that one "Haneen," she said.

"We'll nail the bastards," said Dennis Henley, the American director of reconstruction at the police academy.

Among those detained Saturday morning was the one-star brigadier general, who Hanna identified as taking part in her initial detention in November 1993. U.S. officials have not been able to identify the Major, who was Hanna's principal tormentor, and whose family name Hanna does not know. U.S. officials hope the detentions will provide further leads, Kerik said.

An Iraqi judge and an Iraqi female prosecutor were assigned to the case by the Ministry of Interior. U.S. officials said they planned to offer security to Hanna, who has been sleeping in an abandoned school on some nights in recent weeks because her friends were not able to house her entire family. She remains afraid that her future testimony could endanger her and her children.

A Dangerous Love Affair

The torment of Jumana Michael Hanna began as a love story in the summer of 1993. She was the only child of a venerable Iraqi family. She met Haitam Jamil Anwar, then a 30-year-old wood carver, son of immigrants from pre-independence India. It was an unsuitable match for Hanna's mother and, much more dangerously, Saddam Hussein's paranoid state.

Their first encounter was at Anwar's workshop when Hanna brought an old ornamental box inlaid with fine Iranian stones to the Indian craftsman for repair. He was funny, charming and flirtatious, she remembers. There was a promise that the box would be ready in two days and an immediate attraction that left her giddy afterward. The courtship began when, upon her return for the box, Anwar asked if he could see her again.

Because of Iraq's tribal traditions, where each marries his own, Hanna said she felt forced to hide her relationship from her mother. "I wanted her to marry an Iraqi man, a Christian man, not a foreigner," said Hanna's mother, Jeanne d'Arc Jacob Bahnam, 73, the daughter of an iron merchant who married a pharmacist from her own community. Her husband died in 1974.

The family lived in a fine house in Baghdad's Karrada neighborhood, were members of the exclusive and largely Christian al-Hindia club, and vacationed in the United States and Europe. Wealthy and well-known, Hanna didn't lack suitors, her mother said. But she rejected them. She wanted, Hanna said, to fall in love.

On Aug. 15, 1993, Hanna and Anwar eloped and were secretly married by a sympathetic priest. In Iraq, however, the country's citizens needed state permission to marry a foreigner and the newlyweds had broken the law. A trip to the immigration authorities in Baghdad might have solved the problem, but Hanna, confident of her status as a member of a prominent family, went instead to the Olympic Committee in hopes that she could shortcut the bureaucracy. The Olympic Committee was the personal fiefdom of Hussein's eldest son, Uday, a psychopath and serial rapist whose penchant for cruelty and violence led him to even run afoul of his father when he bludgeoned to the death one of Hussein's close associates. The Olympic Committee building, now a burned-out ruin abutting the police academy grounds, was a symbol of the venality of Hussein's rule.

Hanna arrived at the building at 10 a.m. on Nov. 15, 1993. It was the beginning of a prison sentence of two years, three months and seven days without the approval of any court of law. Through much of that first day, she waited in one room after another on the promise that a meeting about her problem was imminent.

In the last room, where she was held for several hours, the door was locked. At sunset two men entered. She recalled they said they had to take routine security precautions in advance of a meeting with Uday Hussein. They slipped a black hood over her head and tied her hands behind her back. The anxiety, which had mounted through the day, flared into terror.

'They Took My Honor'

She was taken down to a lower level in an elevator and then along a passageway that seemed narrow because of the way the two men bumped against her. She was pushed into a room and tied, spread-eagle, to a bed.

"All of this period, I didn't resist," she said. "But on the bed, I knew. I said, 'I am like your sister; please don't do this.' I started to beg. They said if our sister married an Indian and started a

network against the government, we would kill her. I kept praying, calling for Jesus and the Virgin Mary. I prayed to Muhammad. They damned them all."

"They raped me twice that first day," she continued. "I don't know the persons. Two of them. I couldn't see them. They kept raping for four days as well as I can remember. They took my honor."

A guard, who was not one of the rapists, took her periodically to a bathroom and washed her himself because he said he couldn't untie her. He lifted the hood to allow her to smoke a cigarette before taking her back to the room in which she was held. "I thank him for this small favor," Hanna said.

On what she believes was the fifth day, another man entered the room. She recalled he railed at her about a British spy network. He told her she had wanted her papers stamped so he would stamp them. He applied electric shock to her vagina; she lost consciousness.

Hanna awoke in what she thought was a veterinary clinic for dogs because of the sound of barking. She was, in fact, in a room adjacent to the police academy kennels. A woman applied alcohol to her vagina in a crude attempt to clean it. Hanna was given a painkiller and put in a cell with 17 other women where she was kept for 10 days before she was questioned again.

"We were one body and soul," she said of the women in the cell. "We helped each other." All of the women, she said, had been detained or kidnapped and then raped, some for as long as six months before they were discarded by their captors and brought to the police academy. She remembers, in particular, a Christian girl, a 16-year-old from Baghdad who said she was kidnapped outside her school. She was beautiful, "like Barbie the doll," said Hanna, who speaks some English and French.

On the 10th day, Hanna said, she met the Major, then about 35 years of age, a broad-shoulder man with curly black hair balding at the temples. "He wanted to know about a British network," said Hanna, who said he began by slapping her in the face. "He was sure I was working for the British. He gave me names, Iraqi names, men. I said, 'Yes, yes. I signed every paper he wants.' "

Over the next seven months, Hanna said, she implicated people she had never heard of in a spy network she knew nothing about. She was routinely beaten and she said the Major, in a grotesque joke, kept three sticks on a wall hanging under the names Jesus, the prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, whom Shiite Muslims believe is Muhammad's true heir. Whichever holy man a prisoner called out for determined which stick they were beaten with. The Major, she said, also routinely used electric shock and once set a police dog on her in a small room; the scar of the bite mark is still on her arm.

The Major "is a sadist," said Hanna. "He loves torturing, especially in the sensitive spot." But, she added, the Major never raped the prisoners. The women were sexually assaulted by other guards, particularly at night when they would come to the cells. "They choose a girl and take her to the yard," Hanna said.

Family Bled Dry

For months, Hanna's mother thought her daughter had simply fled with her new husband. But he had also been arrested. "I asked my relatives if they knew where they were," Bahnam said. "No one knew. I thought she had disgraced me."

After seven months, three men arrived at Bahnam's house and told her that her daughter had been arrested. They produced a handwritten letter from Hanna, secured by the Major, asking Bahnam to sign over her house to them in order to secure her daughter's release.

"I agreed," said Bahnam. "I asked for time and they said they would give me 15 days to get out." The house has since been sold and re-sold and is one of thousands of similar cases that may clog the Iraqi courts for years as victims of the last government seek compensation.

"I took my gold and went out," said Bahnam. "I went to a Muslim house and begged him and he said, 'You are welcome.' " That man, Ahmed Safar, who is still living in Baghdad, said he sheltered Bahnam because it was his obligation as a Muslim once she asked for his help. He had never seen her before she showed up at his doorstep.

Over the next 19 months, the security officers drained Bahnam of her remaining wealth, forcing her to convert her gold into cash -- about \$25,000 in all, she estimates.

In early 1996, Hanna and her husband, who had been held in a detention center directly across from the police academy, were finally released. Anwar's body bore the marks of torture and one of his legs had been broken while he was in custody, Hanna said.

Moving from rental to rental over the next few years, the couple subsisted on part-time jobs. They had two children, Sabr, a girl, and Ayoub, a boy, but they never had their marriage sanctioned by the state.

In January 2001, Anwar went to the Ministry of Interior to try and sort out his children's papers before they started school; he also needed the papers so their church would baptize them. He was arrested and taken back to the cells near the police academy where he had been held before.

"He never came home," Hanna said. On Feb. 14, 2001, Anwar's body was passed through the front gate of the detention center to Hanna after she had been summoned there. "I lost my mind," she said. "I was hysterical." A taxi driver agreed to take the body to her church, where Hanna washed and dressed her husband for burial. Anwar had been shot in the head.

With her husband's body, she was also handed a piece of government paper recognizing her as the two children's legal guardian. They could now be baptized and go to school.

Finding Her Tormentors

Last Wednesday evening, Henley and Gerald F. Burke from the U.S. occupation authority's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance took Hanna to a trailer near the former Republican Palace to examine photographs of officers who had joined the reconstituted police force since the fall of Baghdad.

As an American soldier scrolled through pictures on a computer screen, Hanna suddenly said, "Go back, go back." Klumb gave the mouse to Hanna, who stopped at one picture.

"This is Salah, this is Salah," shouted Hanna, dressed in black, as she has been since her husband's death. "He brought me to jail."

The computer showed a brigadier general, a smiling, gray-haired man, in the photo. Hanna said he was the man who detained her at the Olympic Committee when a hood was placed over her head before her supposed meeting with Uday Hussein.

Hanna continued to click through pictures. "No, no, no," she said.

And then: "Saddam, Saddam." She identified a police sergeant, the man who washed her in the bathroom at the Olympic Committee and gave her cigarettes.

Then she found two of the men who allegedly raped her and other women at the police academy, a police captain and a senior sergeant.

"They raped us, they raped us in the night," she said. The pictures continued to scroll, hundreds of them, and she identified two men who escorted her to interrogations but did not abuse her.

"This is Raad, Raad," she said at another point.

"He was responsible for the dogs. For the dogs." He was among those detained on Saturday. Hanna said that this man brought her and other women out to the tree trunk known as "Haneen." One of his preferred forms of torture, she said, was to order the women to strip, then tie them to the tree trunk, and smear wet sugar on them so the dogs would terrorize them as they licked it off their bodies. Hanna also identified his superior at the academy.

But Hanna failed to find the Major among the photographs. U.S. officials promised they would continue to look for him.

Once he is found, she said, "I will take off my black clothes."

Special correspondents Souad Mekhennet and Hoda Lazin contributed to this report.