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## Letter by Hussein, Written After Conviction, Urges Iraqis to Renounce Hatred

By [MARC SANTORA](#)

BAGHDAD, Dec. 27 — [Saddam Hussein](#), who is expected to make the short walk up the gallows stairs to his death here sometime in the next 30 days, said he was prepared to die and sure of his place in heaven as a martyr, and he called on Iraqis to unite, according to a letter that his lawyers said Wednesday had been composed by the former dictator.

Fears that the announcement upholding his death penalty on Tuesday would set off violence appeared not to be immediately borne out. But officials were still concerned about possible public reaction to the execution itself, and some speculated that the hanging would take place in secret and be announced only after the fact. American and Iraqi officials said nothing definitive about the execution's details on Wednesday.

Mr. Hussein is being held at Camp Cropper, an American base near the Baghdad Airport.

Although the site of the hanging has yet to be announced, the main execution center in Baghdad is near his cell. In a drab concrete building, a set of steel stairs leads to a platform, about 15 feet above the ground. There, nooses fashioned from hemp ropes are slipped around the necks of the condemned before a steel trapdoor swings down.

In his latest letter, Mr. Hussein displayed none of the bombast that had defined his court appearances. He was convicted Nov. 5 of crimes against humanity for his part in the execution of 148 men and boys in the northern town of Dujail, and he wrote his farewell letter at the time of his conviction, his lawyers said.

“I say goodbye to you, but I will be with the merciful God who helps those who take refuge in him and who will never disappoint any honest believer,” the letter said. “I call on you not to hate, because hate does not leave space for a person to be fair and it makes you blind and closes all

doors of thinking.” The letter, which was posted on a Baath Party Web site and received extensive coverage on Arabic TV news stations, seemed to cause little public stir here.

American forces continued Wednesday to focus on the Mahdi Army militia, loyal to the Shiite cleric [Moktada al-Sadr](#). In Najaf, which is the second holiest city for Shiite Muslims, American and Iraqi forces raided the home of a Sadr loyalist, Sahib al-Amiri, and shot him dead.

Mr. Amiri led a well-known social organization in Najaf called the Shahid Allah Foundation and was personally close to Mr. Sadr, Iraqi officials in Najaf said. While thousands of angry supporters marched in Mr. Amiri’s funeral procession, Mr. Sadr urged his followers in the city to remain calm. At the same time, he released a statement that praised attacks on American forces.

“We heard that Bush, the enemy of God, is crying over the killing of American soldiers in [Iraq](#),” the statement said. “We ask God to extend his crying. We tell him that the killing of any Iraqi by the hands of his Army is a source of pride for us.”

Americans handed control of security in Najaf Province to the Iraqis in an elaborate ceremony last week, but local leaders questioned the significance of the transfer if Americans could still direct raids there.

“When Iraqis were feeling happy about the approval of the execution of the dictator Saddam Hussein, they were surprised today with the raid on the house of Sahab al-Amiri and killing him in front of the eyes of his family and his children,” said Abdul Hussein al-Musawi, the head of Najaf’s governorate council. “This horrible act shows how reckless the raiding forces are.”

American military officials said Mr. Amiri was responsible for planning and directing attacks using improvised explosive devices. They said that the raid was conducted with the Iraqi Eighth Army Division and that Mr. Amiri tried to flee when soldiers entered the house. He ran to the roof, was pursued and then aimed an assault rifle at an Iraqi officer. At that point, a soldier shot him dead, the military said in a statement.

There was also increased pressure on Sadr loyalists in Baghdad on Wednesday. Throughout the day, American and Iraqi troops engaged in actions against militia members around the Sadr City district in the capital, according to witnesses and Iraqi officials. Clashes between Iraqi security forces and militiamen were reported in a half dozen other Baghdad neighborhoods. Government forces killed at least 32 people and arrested 39 more, Iraqi officials said.

Separately, around 2:30 p.m., a car bomb exploded near a restaurant downtown and killed at least 10 civilians, an Iraqi official said. One hour later, another car bomb exploded near a bridge, killing four more people, the official said. The bodies of 50 people, many apparently tortured, were found around the city.

In Anbar Province, where American forces are battling Sunni Arab insurgents, a marine was killed in fighting, according to the military.

In Washington on Wednesday, a District Court judge refused to intervene in the death-penalty case for Mr. Hussein, turning down a request by American defense lawyers to temporarily block the execution. Lawyers for Awad al-Bandar, a former Iraqi judge sentenced to death along with Mr. Hussein, had filed a writ of habeas corpus on his behalf in United States District Court seeking to halt the execution on the grounds that he did not receive a fair trial.

The lawyers, including Ramsey Clark, the former United States attorney general who served on the defense team in the Baghdad trial, maintained that the federal court had jurisdiction because Mr. Bandar was effectively being held in American military custody in Iraq.

The judge, Reggie B. Walton, rejected the claim, saying he did not have jurisdiction. But he did allow the defense lawyers to appeal the issue in hopes of persuading the American courts to intervene.

Noting that the Iraqis had set up the tribunals by which Mr. Hussein and Mr. Bandar were tried, Judge Walton asked, "Why should I step in and interfere with the operations of a sovereign nation?"

Mr. Clark said in an interview that he had filed the petition at the request of Mr. Bandar's son after Mr. Hussein refused to allow him to do so. In a conversation in Iraq at the time of Mr. Hussein's sentencing last month, Mr. Clark said he tried to persuade the deposed leader to appeal to the American courts to block the execution. "He said it would be interpreted as his seeking mercy from the United States," Mr. Clark said, "and he would never permit it."

*Iraqi employees of The New York Times contributed reporting from Najaf, and Suevon Lee from Washington.*

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