

28 January 2007

'No Regrets' Chemical Ali Tells Genocide Trial

BAGHDAD — "Chemical Ali", a cousin of Saddam Hussein and lead defendant in the genocide trial of six former regime officials, on Sunday defended having ordered a military campaign against Iraqi Kurdish villagers.

Ali Hassan al-Majid, who earned his nickname for allegedly ordering the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds, and his co-defendants were back in the dock on charges of slaughtering 182,000 Kurds in the so-called Anfal campaign of the late 1980s.

A defiant Majid said he had not made any "mistake" when issuing orders during the campaign that saw thousands of Kurdish villages methodically bombed and men, women, and children killed.

"I am the one who gave orders to the army to demolish villages and relocate the villagers," he said. "The army was responsible to carry out those orders. I gave the army instructions."

In a tone which at times was stern, Majid said he was not defending his actions. "I am not defending myself. I am not apologising. I did not make a mistake," he told chief judge Mohammed al-Oreibi al-Khalifah.

Majid faces a possible death sentence on charges of genocide, while the others are being tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

His statement came after an Iraqi prosecutor presented what he said was documentary proof which linked the former defence minister to "chemical strikes" in Iraqi Kurdistan and orders for demolishing dozens of villages.

As the session commenced, a healthy looking Majid held a copy of the Koran in one hand, and again occupied the seat previously used by Saddam, who was the chief accused until his execution on December 30 for crimes against humanity.

The prosecutor, who was not identified, presented a series of letters and telegrams he said were written by senior ministry officials of the former regime.

In one telegram, military intelligence officials in Sulaimaniyah, a Kurdish city in northern Iraq, told the eastern military command: "We would like to point out that a group of journalists visited the sites of chemical strikes. More such journalists are expected."

The prosecutor emphasised the words "chemical strikes."

Reading from the documents, he also claimed dozens of villages had been destroyed on orders of Majid.

"We have taken necessary steps to demolish villages as ordered by Ali Hassan al-Majid," read a telegram sent from a northern military intelligence official to the defence ministry.

It added: "Please confirm more villages to be demolished."

The prosecutor also submitted a letter from the eastern command signed by an unidentified brigadier general that read: "We have demolished all villages by tanks."

Another eastern command document, labelled "top secret" and addressed to military intelligence, said: "Attached please find names of 14 villages that were demolished."

Another document listed 21 villages demolished while a third spoke of "that village which was referred to has been demolished by chemical weapons".

Among the other documents was one which detailed how people were relocated from their villages.

"Children who were even less than nine years old were separated from their parents," the prosecutor said. "How can these people say they followed Iraqi laws? Nobody separates children from their parents."

In response, Majid said: "The orders were given as the region was full of Iranian agents. We had to isolate these saboteurs. We know that Iran had taken a lot of our land ... almost more than the size of Lebanon," he told the court.

But he denied knowledge of detention centres where Kurdish witnesses have testified they were detained and where torture and summary executions were carried out.

"Believe me. I did not know these camps till I came here in this court. I swear by Allah ... I did not know of any detention facility," he said.

Before the trial was adjourned until Monday, the judge pointed out that some Anfal attacks took place even after a ceasefire ended the war between Iran and Iraq on August 8, 1988.

"We had to be very careful with Iranians," Majid answered. "You know historically what they have done with Iraq."

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