

Hussein Admits He Ordered the Execution of 148

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By [EDWARD WONG](#)

BAGHDAD, Iraq, April 6 — Bombarded with questions during the first cross-examination in his trial, Saddam Hussein admitted Wednesday that he had signed an order of execution for 148 men and boys with only a cursory glance at the evidence.

The testimony appeared to bolster the case of the prosecution in a tumultuous six-month trial that has been plagued by problems ranging from assassinations to political in-fighting, and that is still widely seen as illegitimate by international observers and human rights advocates.

The chief prosecutor, Jaafar al-Mousawi, is trying to build a case showing that Mr. Hussein and seven co-defendants are responsible for the torture and executions of men and boys from the Shiite village of Dujail, where a small group of guerillas tried to assassinate Mr. Hussein in 1982. The victims were rounded up shortly after the assassination attempt and sent off to prisons where they eventually were killed. The defendants are also charged with destroying the livelihood of the village by razing orchards near the site of the attack.

Shortly before a lunch break on Wednesday, Mr. Mousawi asked Mr. Saddam, the only defendant in the dock during the session, how he could have taken only two days to review evidence before signing an execution order for 148 people.

"That is the right of the head of the state," Saddam replied, standing behind a lectern in a black suit, swiveling his head between the prosecutor and the chief judge, Raouf Abdel-Rahman.

He said that he had complied with any requirements in the Constitution mandating that he review the documents. "But it was not possible for me to read everything," he said.

Mr. Mousawi, dressed in black robes with a ceremonial red sash around his neck, continued to press Mr. Hussein, presenting documents that appeared earlier in the trial and asking Mr. Hussein if indeed he had signed off on them. In one document, the word "yes" was written next to a recommendation from security officials saying that 10 juveniles should be executed in a secret manner. Mr. Hussein acknowledged he had written the word "yes" in the margin.

The documents with Mr. Hussein's signature were presented to the court by prosecutors in a session on Feb. 28. At the time, the prosecutors did not bring forward handwriting experts to authenticate the signatures of Mr. Hussein and other defendants, and court judges did not make clear what standard of evidence they were using. Mr. Hussein's admission on Wednesday that he had signed the execution orders and written some of the most damning remarks seemed to confirm the authenticity of the evidence.

Today, prosecutors cross-examined Awad al-Bandar, the former head of the Revolutionary Court and one of Mr. Hussein's seven co-defendant in the case, about the judicial process that led to the death sentences for 148 people convicted of trying to assassinate Mr. Hussein in 1982.

Prosecutors are trying to show that the Revolutionary Court held only a cursory trial for the defendants.

Mr. Hussein did not appear in court today.

On Wednesday, despite making damaging admissions and occasional lapses into fatigue, in which he leaned over at his podium, Mr. Hussein maintained control of the courtroom for much of the afternoon.

He relentlessly needled the judge over the tribunal's legitimacy, criticized the current Iraqi government for allowing bodies to pile up in the street from sectarian violence, and boasted of his role in a failed 1959 assassination attempt on Abdul-Karim Qasim, the Iraqi president.

Mr. Hussein argued that the Dujail victims had plotted against him at the behest of the Iran, which Iraq was fighting at the time. He also admitted to ordering the destruction of the orchards around the village, saying they had become so dense that guerrillas could hide in their midst.

In the mid-afternoon, one of Mr. Hussein's lawyers, a Lebanese woman named Bushra Khalil, stood up with posters of naked men in Abu Ghraib who had been abused by the Americans in the infamous scandal, leading bailiffs to escort her out as she yelled at the judge.

"I want to show you what Americans do to prisoners," she said. "What have you done about the Americans?"

The court was adjourned at 4:45 p.m., after nearly six hours in session. With Mr. Hussein's testimony at an end, the trial will soon enter its final phase, in which the judges will review formal charges and hear arguments from the defense team. Mr. Hussein faces a possible death

penalty, as does his half-brother, Barzan al-Tikriti, the former head of intelligence, and several other defendants.

Another set of tribunal judges is about to review a new set of charges brought against Mr. Hussein, for genocide against the Kurds, to decide when that trial will start. Those charges were announced on Tuesday and involve evidence linking Mr. Hussein and six co-defendants to the killing of at least 50,000 Kurds in what is known as the Anfal campaign of 1988. The charges are the first to address the large-scale human rights violations that were emblematic of Mr. Hussein's rule, and that the Bush administration has been publicizing to justify its costly invasion of Iraq.

It is unclear whether the Anfal trial will overlap with that of Dujail, expected to run at least through May. One critical question is whether Mr. Hussein would be kept alive for Anfal and other trials should he be given the death sentence in the Dujail case. Many who despise him, especially Shiites and Kurds, say he should have been killed right after his capture in December 2003.

But Mr. Hussein remained defiant on Wednesday, using every opportunity to lambaste the court.

"Your title and post are illegal and illegitimate," he said to the chief judge. "How can you judge the president of Iraq who stood as a spear against all those who plotted against Iraq, those who tried to hurt the nation and its heroes?"

Kirk Semple contributed reporting from Baghdad.