

December 6, 2005

At Hussein Trial, Witness Tells of Torture

By JOHN F. BURNS and ROBERT F. WORTH

BAGHDAD, Iraq, Dec. 6 - At the end of two long days of listening to witnesses accuse him of torture and assassinations, Saddam Hussein blew up at the judge today and shouted that he would not come back to "an unjust court" when it reconvenes on Wednesday.

Mr. Hussein's outburst came after nine hours of testimony today - the longest so far in the four-days of hearings. Today's session featured one woman who testified, her voice electronically altered to protect her identity, that Mr. Hussein's intelligence agents had tortured her and flung her into Baghdad's notorious Abu Ghraib jail in the early 1980's when she was just 16.

But as the judge and lawyers were discussing whether to reconvene on Wednesday, Mr. Hussein began complaining that he and his seven co-defendants had not been allowed to shower or change clothes in two days.

"Are you deliberately hauling defendants before the trial when they are exhausted?" Mr. Hussein screamed at the court. "This is terrorism."

When Chief Judge Rizgar Mohammed Amin said that the session would continue Wednesday, Mr. Hussein shouted: "I will not be in a court without justice. Go to hell, you and all the agents of America."

The judge said that because of the strict measures that had to be undertaken to get the defendants from their undisclosed location to the site of the hearings, it was best to continue for another day to hear from more witnesses.

Standing at a courtroom lectern, his notes spread in front of him, Mr. Hussein today delivered a long, rambling diatribe in which he complained about his prison cell, boasted that he had survived three death sentences, and excoriated America for running "a theatrical play which they call a trial."

But it was Mr. Hussein who seemed most attuned to the theatrical potential of his trial. He repeatedly stole the floor from the witnesses and the judge, who let him veer far from the subject, seemingly mesmerized.

The former ruler spoke after hearing witnesses testify for a second day at his trial, which resumed Monday. Unlike the witnesses at Monday's session - who several times got into furious, face-to-face exchanges with the defendants - today's witnesses spoke from behind a curtain that shielded their identities.

The woman who said she was tortured when she was 16 was identified only as Witness A. She recounted how security officers forced her to strip naked and gave her beatings and electric shocks at a secret police center.

"They lifted my legs up and beat me with cables," said the woman.

She said one guard told her she was lucky she had not been sent to the general security department prison, where "no one remains a virgin." She suggested that she too had been raped, but never said so.

"Is this what happens to the virtuous woman that Saddam speaks about?" she asked.

Later, she told how she was taken to Abu Ghraib, where torture and humiliation became routine. She recalled that guards used to pull on the penis of a deaf male relative with women and children watching. She said she had seen camels at the prison, and had envied them their freedom.

"God is great. Oh, God!" she moaned, briefly unable to continue.

After the woman said she had been held in Abu Ghraib prison, defense lawyers asked her whether dogs had been used or she had been photographed, in a clear reference to the scandal that broke out last year surrounding the mistreatment of Iraqi detainees by American guards at the prison. That tactic appeared to be a continuation of efforts by the defense team to transform the trial from a somber reminder of Mr. Hussein's crimes into a theatrical display of defiance.

Mr. Hussein listened impassively as Witness A spoke, taking notes on a pad. Later, other witnesses took the stand, all describing mass imprisonment, torture, and executions in the wake of an assassination attempt on Mr. Hussein the Shiite town of Dujail, north of Baghdad, in 1982.

Judge Amin asked all the witnesses whom they were lodging their complaints against. All mentioned Saddam Hussein, but none appeared to have direct knowledge that he had ordered the massacre, a key goal for the prosecution.

The judge often interrupted the witnesses, forcing them to keep to crimes they had witnessed. But he seemed less strict with Mr. Hussein and his fellow defendants, including Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti, the former ruler's half-brother.

Mr. Ibrahim cross-examined the witnesses at length, and greeted one of the fellow prosecutors as a fellow Baathist, in an effort to embarrass him and possibly have him removed from the trial. Standing and looking angrily at the judge, he gestured at Mr. Hussein, who sat in front of him, and said: "You should be true to yourself, your country, your leader. This man has 12 million followers in Iraq alone."

Later, Mr. Hussein delivered his own lengthy diatribe. He complained that the court had plenty of time for the witnesses, but little interest in knowing whether he was being mistreated.

"I live in an iron cage covered by a tent under democratic American rule," he told the judge. "You should come see my cage."

He complained that "the Americans and the Zionists want to execute Saddam Hussein," but insisted, again and again, that he was not afraid, and reminded the judge that he had been sentenced to death before.

"What does the execution of Saddam Hussein matter?" he said. "He has given himself to Iraq from the day he was at school and has been sentenced to death three times already."

Hassan M. Fattah contributed reporting from Dubai, United Arab Emirates, for this article, and Maria Newman from New York.



[Copyright 2005 The New York Times Company](#)