

# Mass Graves of Hussein Regime

USAID officers were among the first to visit Iraq's mass grave sites. More than 270 sites have been reported.

In early in May, 2003, Sloan Mann of USAID went down to Hillah to investigate some sites suspected of concealing mass graves. "I went there two days after the mass grave was discovered," Mann said. "When I showed up, people were randomly digging through the site... Children walked

barefoot in the grave. There were many families. Some were in mourning. Some were curious onlookers."

Spread out across the desert floor of Iraq's largest military base was a scene of horror: parents, wives, brothers weeping over the white cloth bundles that contained all that was left of their loved ones: bones, an identity card or an occasional watch or piece of jewelry.

Seized from their beds in the night at hundreds of Kurdish villages in the 1980s, or rounded up in broad daylight by Saddam's troops in the Shiite cities of the south in the 1990s, most victims had vanished without a

trace. Rumors of mass killings, shootings at the edge of mass graves, now proved horribly true.

What Mann found was one of the first of Iraq's mass graves. By January, 2004, 270 suspected mass grave sites had been reported, of which 53 were confirmed. Some graves hold a few dozen bodies; others go on for hundreds of meters, row after row of bodies. No one knows how many dead these graves hold. British Prime Minister Tony Blair said the toll is 400,000, while Human Rights Watch said 290,000.

Mann was one of the abuse prevention officers USAID sent to Iraq in the spring of 2003

Iraqis and U.S. aid workers dig up the first of hundreds of thousands of bodies left in mass graves by Saddam Hussein's regime.



Iraqis search for relatives and friends among victims found in a mass grave in Musayib, 75 kilometers southwest of Baghdad. The victims are thought to be from the 1991 uprising

against the Iraqi government. Wrapped in white cloth, they lie in a nearby youth center as they are identified by relatives on the bases of identity documents, clothing or jewelry found with the bones.



An Iraqi woman grieves over the remains of two family members, found in a mass grave site at Musayib.

## Human Rights

to prevent revenge killings, attacks on vulnerable people or other abuse in the wake of the conflict.

Within a month of his visit to Hillah—he would later evaluate sites at Radwaniya Prison, Musayib, and at three locations around Mahaweel—the Agency was making grants to help Iraqis preserve the sites and exhume the bodies for proper identification.

Agency grants were made to the Free Prisoners Association, the Lawyers Association and human rights groups to buy computers and compile lists of the missing, to track suspected grave sites, link victims to their families, and safeguard documents relating to the torture, disappearance, and execution of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians.

**“Above all, if people in Iraq and around the world hope to learn from the crimes of the past, the mass graves of Iraq must be documented, reported and never forgotten or denied.”**

Andrew S. Natsios,  
USAID Administrator

**There are three categories of mass graves:**

● **Over-run sites:** disturbed by people seeking the remains of their missing relatives and friends. Since they are already dug up and it would be hard to stop people from completing their searches, USAID trains Iraqis to help the community emotionally and to collect whatever information is possible.

● **Humanitarian exhumation sites:** Professionals teach Iraqis how to put the bones together, identify remains and determine how victims died.

● **Full criminal investigation sites:** Between eight and 20 sites are to be selected for use in the Iraqi Special Tribunal established by the Iraqi Governing Council to try cases of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide.



Thomas Hartwell

DART abuse prevention officer Jean Geran inspects mass grave near Basrah. Human Rights Watch estimates the site may contain several hundred people.

Iraqis identify the remains of a victim from a mass grave in Musayib. Some 270 mass grave sites have been reported throughout the country.



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A man holds out an ID card found in a mass grave in Musayib, 50 miles southwest of Baghdad.



Sally Hodgson/Dept. of State