## **Mass Graves of Hussein Regime**

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

n early in May, 2003, Sloan Mann of US-AID 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



## Human Rights

to prevent revenge killings, attacks on vulner- "Above all, if people in Iraq and able 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.

around the world hope to learn from the crimes of the past, the mass graves of Irag must be documented, reported and never forgotten or denied." Andrew S. Natsios, USAID Administ<u>rator</u>

There are three categories of mass graves:

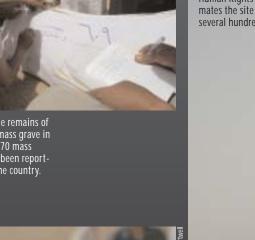
• Over-run sites: dis-turbed by people seeking the remains of their miss-ing relatives and friends. Since they are already dug up and it would be hard to stop people from complet-ing their searches, USAID trains Iragis to help the community emotionally and to collect whatever in-• Over-run sites: disand to collect whatever information is possible.

 Humanitarian exhumation sites: Professionals teach Iragis 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.



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





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

