

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

THE TRAGEDY OF HALABJA

HON. NEWT GINGRICH

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 17, 1998

Mr. GINGRICH. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to submit into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD this editorial by Dr. Christine Gosden from the Washington Post of March 11, 1998. I believe that this editorial helps put the terrible effects of chemical and biological weapons into perspective and clearly illustrates why Saddam Hussein is a mortal danger to this planet. We must never allow ourselves to forget the ghastly horrors of Halabja and Saddam Hussein's willingness to inflict the horrors of chemical and biological weapons not only on the Iranians, but on his own people.

The editorial follows:

[From the Washington Post, Mar. 11, 1998]

WHY I WENT, WHAT I SAW

(By Christine Gosden)

We have all talked so long and so reflexively about "weapons of mass destruction" that the phrase has lost much of its immediacy and meaning. It has become, like "nuclear devastation" and "chemical and biological warfare," an abstract term of governmental memos, punditry and political debate. For many it calls forth neither visual imagery nor visceral revulsion.

Two Sundays ago, the TV program "60 Minutes" got a good start on changing that when it broadcast the story of the Iraqi city of Halabja 10 years after its civilian population had been the target of a chemical attack by Saddam Hussein. That population is mainly Kurdish and had sympathized with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. The gassing of its people was in retaliation for that sympathizing.

"60 Minutes" has given us permission to make still pictures from the film, which was originally shot, both in 1988 and 1998, by the British film maker, Gwynne Roberts. The "60 Minutes" staff also helped us to get in touch with the remarkable Dr. Christine Gosden, a British medical specialist, whose efforts to help the people of Halabja it documented. Dr. Gosden, who went out to Halabja 10 years after the bombing, agreed to write a piece for us, expanding on what she saw in Iraq. People around the world have seen the evidence of deformity and mutation following from the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It shaped their attitude toward the use of atomic weapons. Maybe if more evidence of the unimaginable, real-life effects of chemical warfare becomes available, a comparable attitude toward those weapons will develop.

On the 16th of March 1988, an Iraqi military strike subjected Halabja, a Kurdish town of 45,000 in northern Iraq, to bombardment with the greatest attack of chemical weapons ever used against a civilian population. The chemical agent used were a "cocktail" of mustard gas (which affects skin, eyes and the membranes of the nose, throat and lungs), and the nerve agents sarin, tabun and VX. The chemicals to which the people were exposed drenched their skin and clothes, affected their respiratory tracts and eyes and contaminated their water and food.

Many people simply fell dead where they were, immediate casualties of the attack; estimates put these deaths at about 5,000. A few were given brief and immediate treatment, which involved taking them to the United States, Europe and Iran. The majority of them returned to Halabja. Since then, no medical team, either from Iraq, Europe or America or from any international agency has monitored either the short- or long-term consequences of this chemical attack. Gwynne Roberts, a film director, made the award-winning film "The Winds of Death" about the attack in 1988. I saw this film, and it had a tremendous effect on me. Gwynne revisited Halabja in 1997 and was concerned that many of the survivors seemed very ill. He could not understand why no one had tried to find out what was happening to them. He convinced me that this was something I had to do.

Why would a female professor of medical genetics want to make a trip like this? I went to learn and to help. This was the first time that a terrible mixture of chemical weapons had been used against a large civilian population. I wanted to see the nature and scale of the problems these people faced, and was concerned that in the 10 years since the attack no one, including the major aid agencies, had visited Halabja to determine exactly what the effects of these weapons had been.

My medical specialty was particularly apt. My principal field of research is directed toward trying to understand the major causes of human congenital malformations, infertility and cancers including breast, ovarian, prostate and colon cancers. I am carrying out studies on a group of about 15 genes called tumor suppressor genes, which include breast/ovarian cancer genes BRCA1 and BRCA2, colon cancer genes and the Retinoblastoma and Wilm's tumor genes associated with childhood cancers. When these genes are disrupted or mutate, they have a number of effects. Alterations lead to congenital abnormalities or pregnancy loss. Their role after birth is to try to prevent cancers from forming. Later in life, loss or mutation may lead to infertility and cancers.

I was particularly concerned about the effects on the women and children. Most of the previous reported exposures to chemical weapons and mustard gas had involved men involved in military service; chemical weapons had never been used on this scale on a civilian population before. I was worried about possible effects on congenital malformations, fertility and cancers, not just in women and children but in the whole population. I also feared that there might be other major long-term effects, such as blindness and neurological damage, for which there is no known treatment.

What I found was far worse than anything I had suspected, devastating problems occurring 10 years after the attack. These chemicals seriously affected people's eyes and respiratory and neurological systems. Many became blind. Skin disorders which involve severe scarring are frequent, and many progress to skin cancer. Working in conjunction with the doctors in the area, I compared the frequency of these conditions such as infertility, congenital malformations and cancers (including skin, head, neck, respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, breast and

childhood cancers) in those who were in Halabja at the time with an unexposed population from a city in the same region. We found the frequencies in Halabja are at least three to four times greater, even 10 years after the attack. An increasing number of children are dying each year of leukemias and lymphomas. The cancers tend to occur in much younger people in Halabja than elsewhere, and many people have aggressive tumors, so that mortality rates are high. No chemotherapy or radiotherapy is available in this region.

I found that there was also a total lack of access to pediatric surgery to repair the major heart defects, hare lip and cleft palate or other major malformations in the children. This meant that children in Halabja are dying of heart failure when children with the same heart defects could have had surgery and would probably have survived in Britain or the United States. It was agonizing for me to see beautiful children whose faces were disfigured by hare lip and cleft palate when I know that skilled and gifted surgeons correct these defects every day in North America and Europe.

The neuropsychiatric consequences are seen as human tragedy on every street, in almost every house and every ward of the hospital. People weep and are in great distress because of their severe depression, and suicidal tendencies are alarmingly evident. The surgeons often have to remove bullets from people who have failed in their suicide attempts. In collecting data from the Martyrs Hospital in Halabja, the doctors said that they are not able to see patients with psychiatric and neurological conditions because there is a lack of resources and there is no effective treatment. Many people have neurological impairment or long-term neuromuscular effects. Most people cannot afford even the cheapest treatment or drugs and so are reluctant to come to the hospital. At present, even for those with life-threatening conditions, there is no effective therapy for any of these conditions in Halabja.

On the first day of my visit to the labor and gynecological ward in the hospital, there were no women in normal labor and no one had recently delivered a normal baby. Three women had just miscarried. The staff in the labor ward told of the very large proportion of pregnancies in which there were major malformations. In addition to fetal losses and perinatal deaths, there is also a very large number of infant deaths. The frequencies of these in the Halabjan women is more than four times greater than that in the neighboring city of Soulemanyia. The findings of serious congenital malformations with genetic causes occurring in children born years after the chemical attack suggest that the effects from these chemical warfare agents are transmitted to succeeding generations.

Miscarriage, infant deaths and infertility mean that life isn't being replenished in this community, as one would expect if these weapons had no long-term effects. The people hoped that after the attack they could rebuild the families and communities that had been destroyed. The inability to do so has led to increasing despair. Their lives and hopes have been shattered. One survivor described being in a cellar with about a hundred other people, all of whom died during the attack. Not only do those who survived have to cope

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

with memories of their relatives suddenly dying in their arms, they have to try to come to terms with their own painful diseases and those of their surviving friends and relatives.

For instance, many people have more than one major condition, including respiratory problems, eye conditions, neurological disorders, skin problems, cancers and children with congenital malformations and childhood handicaps such as mental handicap, cerebral palsy and Down's syndrome. The occurrences of genetic mutations and carcinogenesis in this population appear comparable with those who were one to two kilometers from the hypocenter of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs and show that the chemicals used in this attack, particularly mustard gas, have a general effect on the body similar to that of ionizing radiation.

Ten years after the attack, people are suffering a wide spectrum of effects, all of which are attributable to long-term damage to DNA. A radio broadcast was made the day before our arrival to ask people who were ill to come to the hospital to record their problems. On the first day, 700 people came; 495 of them had two or more major problems. The cases we encountered were extremely sad.

The people of Halabja need immediate help. There is a need for specialists (such as pediatric surgeons), equipment and drugs. Even more basic than this, though, is the need for heat, clean water and careful efforts to safeguard them against further attacks. We have to realize that there is very little medical or scientific knowledge about how to treat the victims of a chemical weapons attack like this effectively. We need to listen, think and evaluate with skill, since many of these people have had exposures to strange combinations of toxic gases. They have conditions that have not been seen or reported before. We may severely disadvantage a large group of vulnerable people and deny them effective diagnosis and treatment if we are intellectually arrogant and fail to admit that we have virtually no knowledge about how to treat the problems resulting from these terrible weapons, which have been used to more powerful and inhumane effect than ever before.

The pictures beamed around the world after the attack in 1988 in newspapers and on TV were horrifying. One picture was of a father who died trying to shield his twin sons from the attack. The statue in the road at the entrance to Halabja is based on that picture. This is not a traditional statue of someone standing proud and erect, captured in stone or bronze to represent man triumphant and successful, but of a man prostrate and agonized dying in the act of trying to protect his children. A deep and lasting chill went through me when I entered the town and saw the statue, and it settled like a toxic psychological cloud over me. This proved hard to dispel; it intensified as I met the people, heard their stories and saw the extent of the long-term illnesses caused by the attack. The terrible images of the people of Halabja and their situation persist and recur in my nightmares and disturb my waking thoughts. Perhaps these thoughts persist so vividly as a reminder to me that the major task is now to try and get help for these people.

SIERRA CLUB SUPPORTS THE TROPICAL FOREST PRESERVATION ACT

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 17, 1998

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to my colleagues' attention a letter from the Sierra Club dated March 13, 1998, in support of H.R. 2870, the Tropical Forest Conservation Act of 1998.

There is widespread and growing bipartisan support for this bill, which now has over 40 cosponsors. Members of the environmental community have also voiced their support. The Sierra Club, on behalf of its 550,000 members, praises H.R. 2870 as an "innovative solution" to tropical forest preservation.

I hope my colleagues will join me in support of this important bill when it comes before us this week.

The letter follows:

SIERRA CLUB,

Washington, DC, March 13, 1998.

Re:H.R. 2870, tropical forest debt swap bill.

Hon. Robert Portman,

Hon. John Kasich,

Hon. Lee Hamilton,

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVES PORTMAN, KASICH AND HAMILTON: On behalf of the 550,000 members of the Sierra Club we are writing to support the early passage of your Tropical Forest Debt for Nature Swap legislation. As you know, primary forests are under assault in almost all countries. Tropical forests are being destroyed at the rate of 50 to 100 acres per minute, or 40 to 50 million areas per year—an area the size of the State of Washington. If we do nothing to stop this destruction, the majority of these lush forests may be irreparably damaged within our lifetimes.

While the causes of this destruction are complex, your legislation demonstrates that innovative solutions to their preservation can be found. H.R. 2870 follows in the tradition of the successful Enterprise for the Americas Act which led to the establishment of national environmental trust funds in many Latin American countries. These trust funds—managed by non-governmental organizations—have empowered local citizens to initiate hundreds of environmental protection projects throughout Latin America. Your bill will bring this creative initiative to the rest of the tropical countries. If properly funded, the trust funds should greatly facilitate the development of long-term solutions, designed to preserve the remaining primary tropical forests.

We welcome this initiative and urge its quick passage into law. Thank you for your leadership in helping to slow the destruction of these treasure houses of biological diversity.

Sincerely,

LARRY WILLIAMS,
Director, International Program.

LET STARR SHINE

HON. GERALD B.H. SOLOMON

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 17, 1998

Mr. SOLOMON. Mr. Speaker, it is tragic enough that doubts abound about the integrity

and motivations of many of our elected officials in the eyes of the people of this country. It is even more unjust when those doubts are planted by people we should trust. Recently, the Clinton Administration has deflected the public's attention away from the accusations against the President and toward Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. All of the president's people are repeatedly attacking Mr. Starr and distracting him from doing his job. What makes this a tragedy is the fact that Mr. Starr is merely performing the duties legally delegated to him. Kenneth Starr is a man of impeccable integrity. He should be allowed to continue his investigation without undue interference or political attacks. In that way only, will he be able to discern the truth. I have enclosed two relevant editorials. The first was written by four outstanding former attorneys general, and was published on March 11 in the Wall Street Journal. The second article was found in The Poughkeepsie Journal, a Gannett newspaper that serves some of my constituents in Dutchess County, New York.

[From the Wall Street Journal, Mar. 11, 1998]

LET STARR DO HIS JOB

(The following statement was issued last Thursday by four former U.S. attorneys general. A related editorial appears nearby)

As former attorneys general of the United States, we oppose the Independent Counsel Act. We believed in the past, and we believe now, that the United States Department of Justice is capable of investigating all criminal and civil matters involving the United States government. We also believe that the Independent Counsel Act raises serious constitutional issues involving, among other things, separation of powers and due process. However, we also believe in the rule of law. In *Morrison v. Olson*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Independent Counsel Act is constitutional. Moreover, in 1994, after the law had lapsed, Congress reauthorized the Independent Counsel Act, and President Clinton signed it into law. Therefore, the Independent Counsel Act is today the law of the land, and it must be enforced.

As former attorneys general, we are concerned that the severity of the attacks on Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and his office by high government officials and attorneys representing their particular interests, among others, appear to have the improper purpose of influencing and impeding an ongoing criminal investigation and intimidating possible jurors, witnesses and even investigators. We believe it is significant that Mr. Starr's investigative mandate has been sanctioned by the Attorney General of the United States and the Special Division of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

Further, Mr. Starr is effectively prevented from defending himself and his staff because of the legal requirements of confidentiality and the practical limitations necessitated by the ongoing investigations.

As former attorneys general, we know Mr. Starr to be an individual of the highest personal and professional integrity. As a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and Solicitor General of the United States, he exhibited exemplary judgment and commitment to the highest ethical standards and the rule of law.

We believe any independent counsel, including Mr. Starr, should be allowed to carry out his or her duties without harassment by government officials and members of the bar. The counsel's service can then be judged, by those who wish to do so, when the results of the investigation and the facts underlying it can be made public.

GRIFFIN B. BELL,