

Hasan Wahhab Al Araji's statement for the Launch of the

Exhibition

Surviving Terrorism: Victims' Voices

Friday, 17 August 2018

My name is Hasan Wahhab Al Araji. I come from Iraq, a country that has experienced horror.

I, like other Iraqis, have lost many friends and relatives to these terrible attacks that have shattered countless lives across the city. The most devastating loss for me was my best friend Mohammed, who was abducted and killed by members of "al-Qaida in Iraq". His body was found among the heaps of rubbish in the street. He had been shot three times in the head and his hands were still bound.

My cousin Saif, who was a 24-year-old lawyer, was killed in a car bomb in what the media dubbed as "Bloody Sunday". We only buried the charred pieces of him that were left behind.

I found the body of my 31-year-old cousin Yahiya, riddled with shrapnel, after a suicide bomber targeted a mosque in our neighborhood. I remember sitting there sipping my tea before the explosion shook our entire neighborhood.

The continuous sudden deaths of my relatives and friends made me experience feelings of anxiety. I had difficulty sleeping and was unable to concentrate. I often displayed aggressive and nervous behavior. The feeling of insecurity compounded these effects and often led me to contemplate leaving and escaping Iraq forever.

I was descending into a joyless day to day life where I struggled to cope with the loss of my loved ones and the traumatic toll it took on me. I often feared and imagined losing my own life and that more of my loved ones would soon be killed.

It took me a very long time to return to normalcy. The trauma I experienced is tragically very common. This motivated and encouraged

me to play an active role in seeking to guarantee the rights of Victims of Terrorism by continuing to work with local and international human rights non-governmental organizations to fight the narrative of terrorism. I have taken part in documenting and reporting human rights abuses and violations against victims, particularly women and children in camps for Internally Displaced Persons, as well as delivering direct intervention and assistance. Part of my work has also focused on building the capacity of victims in different aspects. I feel empowered by my experience and exposure through my field work, to stand strong and fight the narrative of terrorism and be part of a positive message that encompasses peace and hope.

It is an unfortunate reality that today thousands of victims in Iraq are still suffering from the toll these terrorist acts have taken on their lives. The international community must hear their stories. The need for medical and psychological treatment for victims is dire. The men, women and children who for years have borne the brunt of instability and terrorism acts need

to be a priority, especially for the Iraqi government and the international donors.

Finally, I would like to urge the national authorities, UN agencies, and international community to work with local actors to determine and agree on an appropriate minimum package of support to victims. I would like stress the importance of the need to support and help victims through civil society and governmental bodies so that they can take a step towards rebuilding their lives.

Thank you.