

## Case Study

# *Baby Funerals*

*“Small coffins, decorated with grisly photographs of dead babies and their ages – ‘three days’, ‘four days’, written usefully for the English-speaking media – are paraded through the streets of Baghdad on the roofs of taxis, the procession led by a throng of official mourners.”*

*– The Observer (London)*

People the world over are moved by the suffering and deaths of innocent children, and where possible, the Iraqi regime attempts to link images of child deaths to the policies and actions of its adversaries. They have blamed thousands of child deaths on United Nations sanctions, not the Iraqi regime’s policies that caused those sanctions. They also claimed that exposure to depleted uranium from spent munitions used in the Gulf War had caused many deaths and deformities in children. To support these claims, they have staged mass children’s funerals, and to stage those funerals, they need dead children. There is only one problem, according to defectors, journalists, and participants in these funerals: To have enough children’s remains to make a proper show, the regime has to collect and store them.

A *BBC Correspondent* documentary aired on June 23, 2002, exposed how the Iraqi regime staged these processions: Instead of burying dead children immediately in accordance with Muslim custom, Iraqi authorities hold the bodies in cold storage until enough bodies are available to conduct a “parade of dead babies.”<sup>15</sup> In one such event, the Iraqi regime exhibited some 60 coffins, decorated with large photographs of the deceased, around Martyr Square in Baghdad while government-controlled demonstrators chanted anti-U.S. slogans and demanded the elimination of UN sanctions, all for the benefit of foreign reporters who were present.

On camera, an Iraqi identified as Ali, described as a former member of Saddam’s inner circle living in northern Iraq, related the account of a taxi driver who had explained to him how it worked: “He went to Najaf [a town 100 miles south of Baghdad] a couple of days ago. He brought back two bodies of children for one of the mass funerals.”<sup>16</sup>

Ali continued: “The smell was incredibly strong. He didn’t know how long they’d been in storage, perhaps six or seven months. The drivers would collect them from the regions. They would be informed of when a mass funeral was arranged so they would be ready. Certainly, they would collect bodies of children who had died months before and been held for the mass processions.”<sup>17</sup>

In a separate article, the program’s host reported, “A second, Western source went to visit a Baghdad hospital and, when the official Iraqi minder was absent, was taken to the mortuary. There, a doctor showed the source a number of dead babies lying stacked in the mortuary, waiting for the next official procession.”<sup>18</sup>