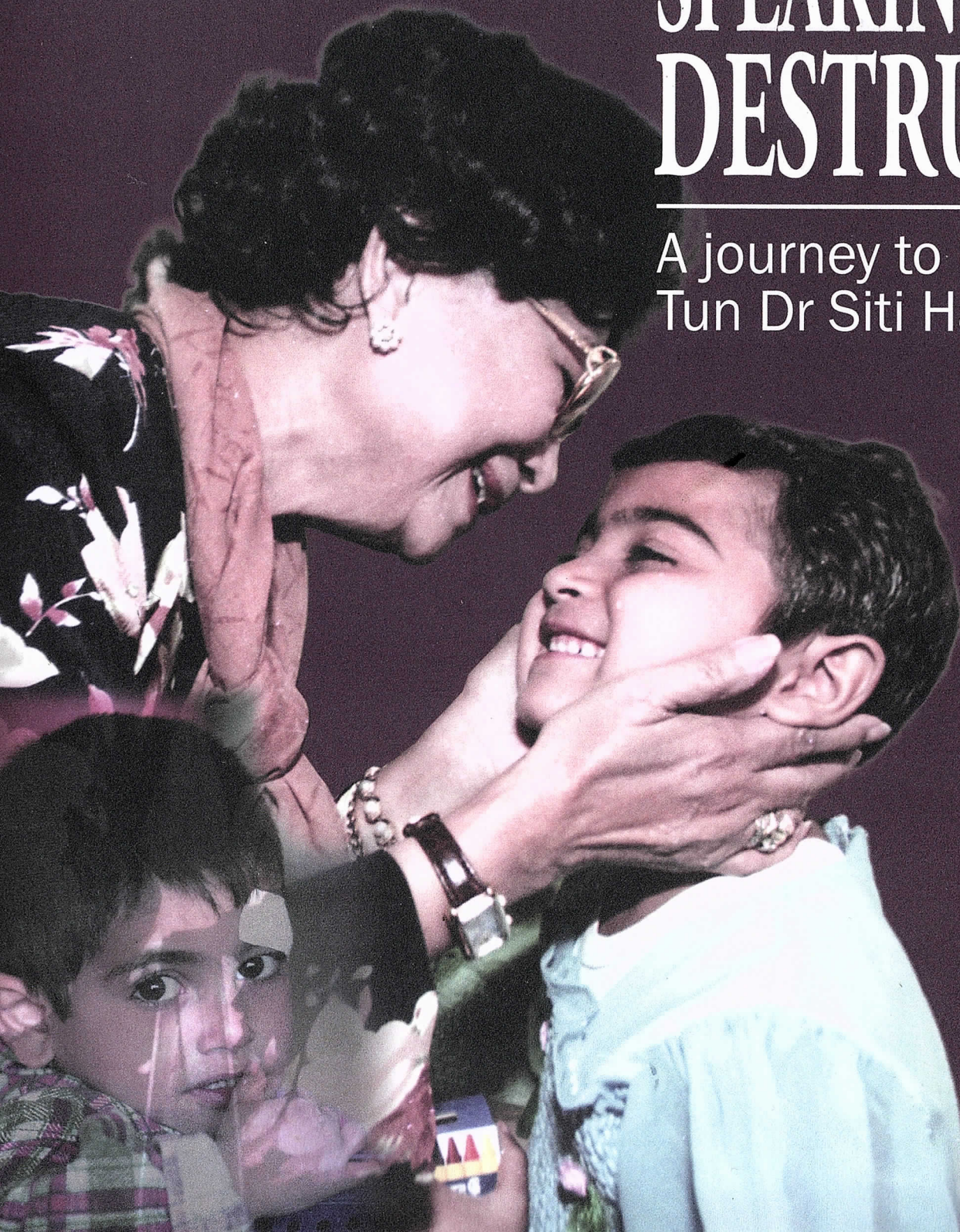


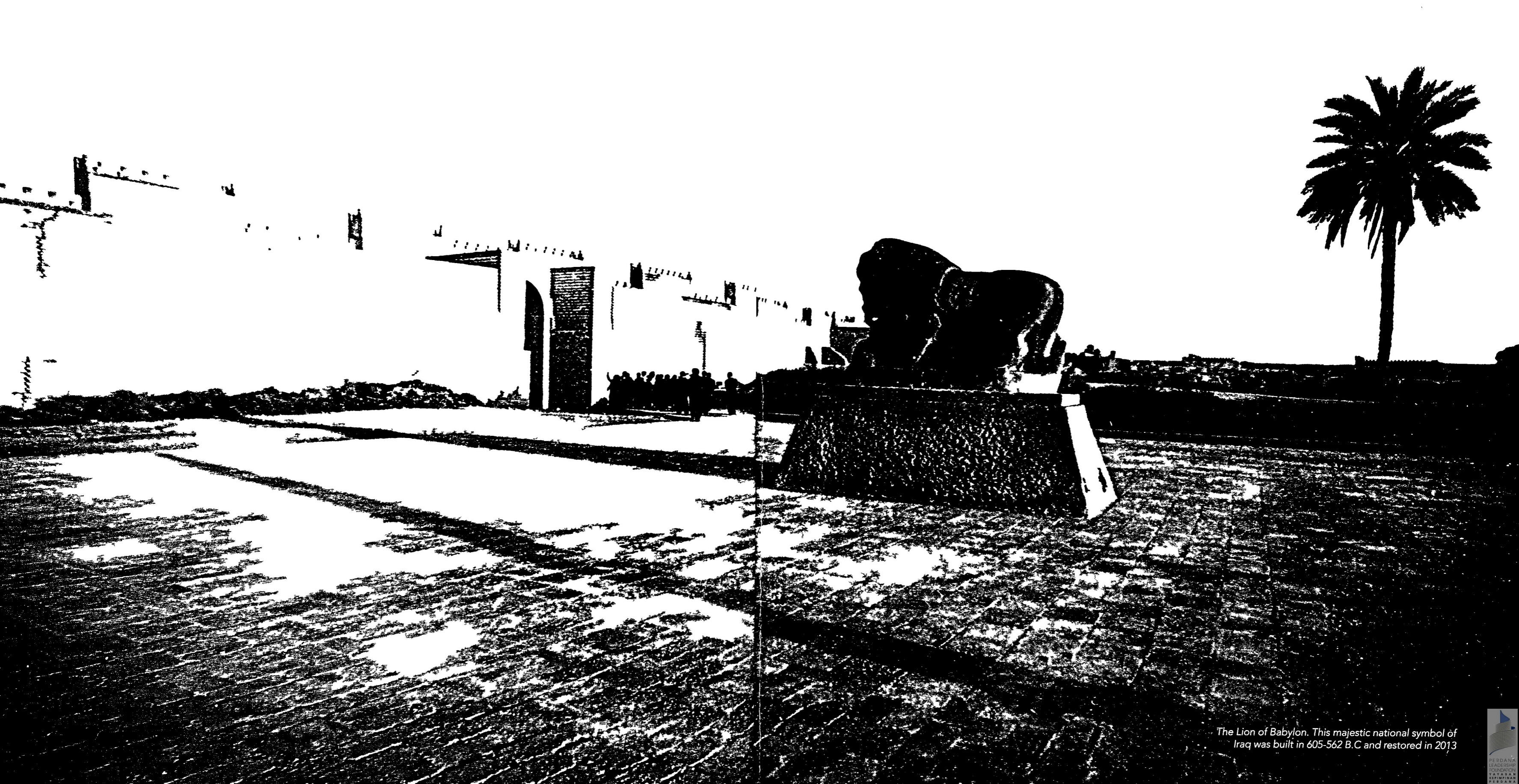
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# SPEAKING OF MASS DESTRUCTION...

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A journey to Iraq as seen by  
Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali





*The Lion of Babylon. This majestic national symbol of Iraq was built in 605-562 B.C and restored in 2013*

**SPEAKING OF MASS DESTRUCTION...A journey to Iraq as seen by**

Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

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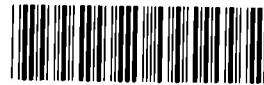
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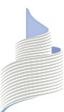
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# SPEAKING OF MASS DESTRUCTION..

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**The Delegation:**

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Datin Noorhayati Kamaluddin  
(The late) Datin Siti Aishah Ghazali  
Datin Dr Mizan Adiliah Ahmad Ibrahim  
Datuk Dr Raj Karim  
Tan Sri Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin  
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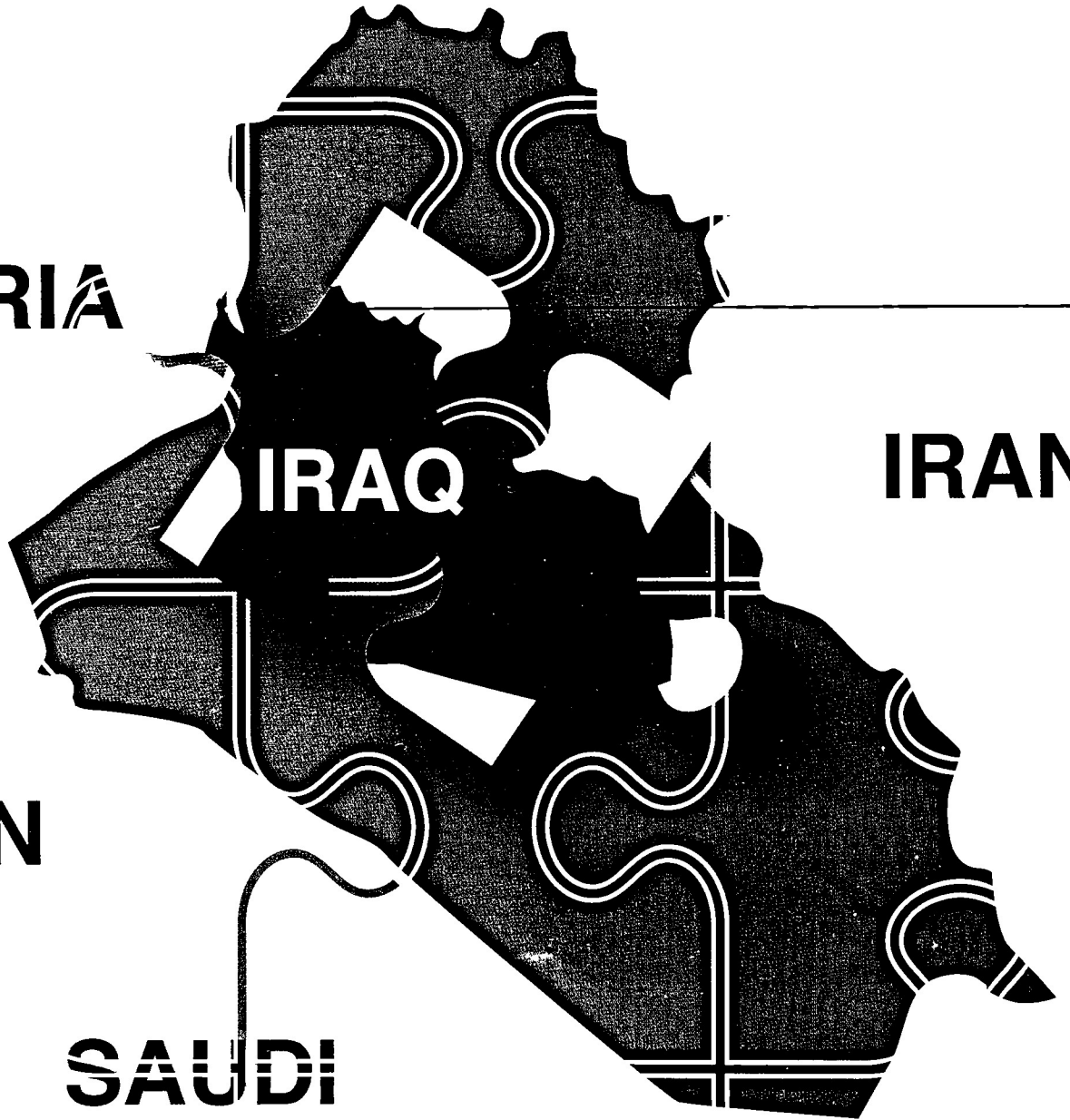
**SYRIA**

**IRAQ**

**IRAN**

**JORDAN**

**SAUDI  
ARABIA**



# table of **CONTENTS**

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FOREWORD  
BY YABIG TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD  
FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

MESSAGE  
BY ADNAN MALIK AL-GHAZALI  
FORMER IRAQI AMBASSADOR TO MALAYSIA

PROLOGUE  
IRAQ'S PASSAGE OF PAIN

CHAPTER 1  
VISION WITH A MISSION

CHAPTER 2  
ERA OF DESTRUCTION

CHAPTER 3  
SPILLS ON IRAQ'S LIFELINE

CHAPTER 4  
A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW

CHAPTER 5  
LEARNING THE HARD WAY

CHAPTER 6  
LIVES THROWN ASUNDER

EPILOQUE  
RISING FROM THE RUBBLE

# Foreword

**YABhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad**  
Former Prime Minister of Malaysia



**T**he turmoil that engulfed Iraq in the years of sanctions was catastrophic. The ones punished were the people and not the Government. Nor its leaders.

In authoritarian countries, the people have no way of pressurising the Government. So sanctions are often ineffective in achieving their objectives.

When Iraq withdrew from Kuwait, the sanctions should have been stopped. But no, they continued because the perpetrators supposedly wanted Iraq to disarm, to have a regime change and other reforms. And so, the people continued to suffer.

Calls to lift the sanctions remained unheeded and reports focused mainly on the alleged atrocities committed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein while the truth about their long-drawn suffering remained obscure from global scrutiny.

While I had no personal relationship with Saddam Hussein, I felt Malaysia should show compassion to the Iraqi people. If the theory behind the sanctions was that economic pressure on civilians would translate into pressure for a regime change in Iraq, it had certainly backfired.

As trade and financial resources were prohibited, Iraqis were deprived of basic needs and suffered malnutrition and diseases due to the lack of food and medicine. It was widely believed that the sanctions had caused a major rise in child mortality but there were reports

that tried to dispute this. Also, the bombing of a children's shelter in Baghdad that killed innocent people did not even merit a mention, let alone unleash an international uproar.

It was in view of these abominable affronts to humanity that the Malaysian Government decided to show support for the Iraqi people.

I had initially wanted to make the visit myself but was advised that my presence might be misconstrued. To avoid the political and diplomatic sensitivities that might ensue, I felt that an ostensibly humanitarian mission would be better placed.

My wife, Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali was the natural choice for this purpose. Together with 10 other women from various Non-Governmental Organisations,

they made the arduous journey to Baghdad to see for themselves the harmful effects of the sanctions on women and children.

The report they submitted upon their return compelled Malaysia to call for the lifting of the sanctions and strategic aid for Iraq.

Unfortunately, three years later, in March 2003, the United States and the United Kingdom decided to invade Iraq on the now debunked notion that Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The sanctions were lifted soon after but it was only to facilitate the US oil hegemony.

On reflection I must reinforce my stand which has never wavered – that sanctions should always be the last resort or never to be imposed at all.

Indeed, the physical obliteration of Iraq's edifices, symbolic of her rich history and culture, is something not even the Code of Hammurabi can put right. The misery left by the war and sanctions is what Iraqis have to live with for many years to come.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Tun Dr Siti Hasmah for her fortitude in leading the delegation there and the people who gave her mission their full support.

Their first-hand experience and observations then, and as encapsulated in this book, have been invaluable.

**YABhg Tun Dr Mahathir  
Mohamad**

Former Prime Minister of Malaysia

# Message

**Adnan Malik Al-Ghazali**

Former Iraqi Ambassador to Malaysia (1999-2002)



**I**t gives me great pleasure to be able to thank Malaysia's former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his gracious wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, for their gesture of solidarity and concern for my country in a time of need.

I remember being informed by the former head of the Foreign Ministry's West Asia Division, Tan Sri Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak, of Tun Dr Mahathir's decision to send his wife to Iraq on a humanitarian fact-finding mission. A number of specialists in various fields would be accompanying her as well.

When I sent my recommendations to Baghdad, I was pleasantly surprised by the positive response of *Ahlan Wasahlan* (welcome). Together with my wife, Afaf Malik, I met Tun Dr Siti Hasmah at Sri Perdana to discuss details of her intended visit, so our

people could make arrangements in the best possible manner.

For an ambassador representing a country under severe sanctions, to have the wife of the Prime Minister and a prominent leader in Asia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, pay a visit, was an honour indeed.

The fact that she has a remarkable standing in the Malaysian society for her involvement in humanitarian initiatives and social activism in the country, was an added prestige.

Tun Dr Siti Hasmah's trip was given a state visit status by the government of Iraq. It meant that our Foreign Ministry was responsible for her stay in its entirety. Together with the Ministry's Protocol Department, I coordinated a programme for Tun Dr Siti Hasmah and her delegation.

She was accommodated in the Presidential State Guest House and received by the top leaders in the country. The agenda we prepared

included an audience with our late President, Saddam Hussein, and Deputy Prime Minister, the late Tariq Aziz as well as their respective spouses Sajidah Tilfah and Violet Yousef Saeed. Also at the meeting was our late Vice President, Taha Yassin Ramadan. During the daily activities, I was tasked with accompanying Tun Dr Siti Hasmah.

Meanwhile, we made arrangements for members of her delegation to visit schools, hospitals, orphanages and old folks' homes to lend them an insight into the situation in the fields of education, health and life in general.

The joint programmes for the delegation, which was handled by Mr Akram Alsaadi, Deputy Head of the Protocol Department, gave our visitors ample exposure to the predicament of our people. The situation was indeed dire. More than 1.5 million Iraqis had died due to a shortage of medicine and lack of healthcare because of the sanctions

imposed. The Western media had disseminated mostly negative propaganda while the US continued its military aggression. The life of the average Iraqi family had been adversely affected because the basic necessities were beyond their means.

Thus the concern shown by Malaysia was highly appreciated. Many Iraqis followed closely the activities of the Malaysian delegation which were screened daily on the 8pm Iraq TV news. Some families even named their new baby girls Hasmah to show their respect for this great lady.

I consider the visit one of the most successful ones that I had witnessed throughout my long service in the Foreign Ministry, judging by the number of meetings, heartfelt welcome and impact on the public. There were the aforementioned high-level meetings as well as sessions with the country's women leaders including the head of the Iraqi Women's Union.

To top that, governments of other developing countries and international humanitarian and human rights organisations took note of these gestures. This was clear when a princess from Thailand's royal family and wife of the Prime Minister of Vietnam headed almost similar high-level humanitarian delegations to Iraq immediately after the Malaysian visit.

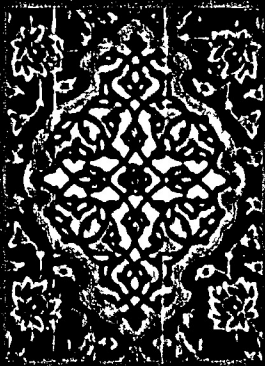
In retrospect, I would say that the visit from a friendly Muslim nation had a far-reaching effect. It was an indication that Iraq still had friends who cared even if it was from a moral point of view. And that spoke volumes.

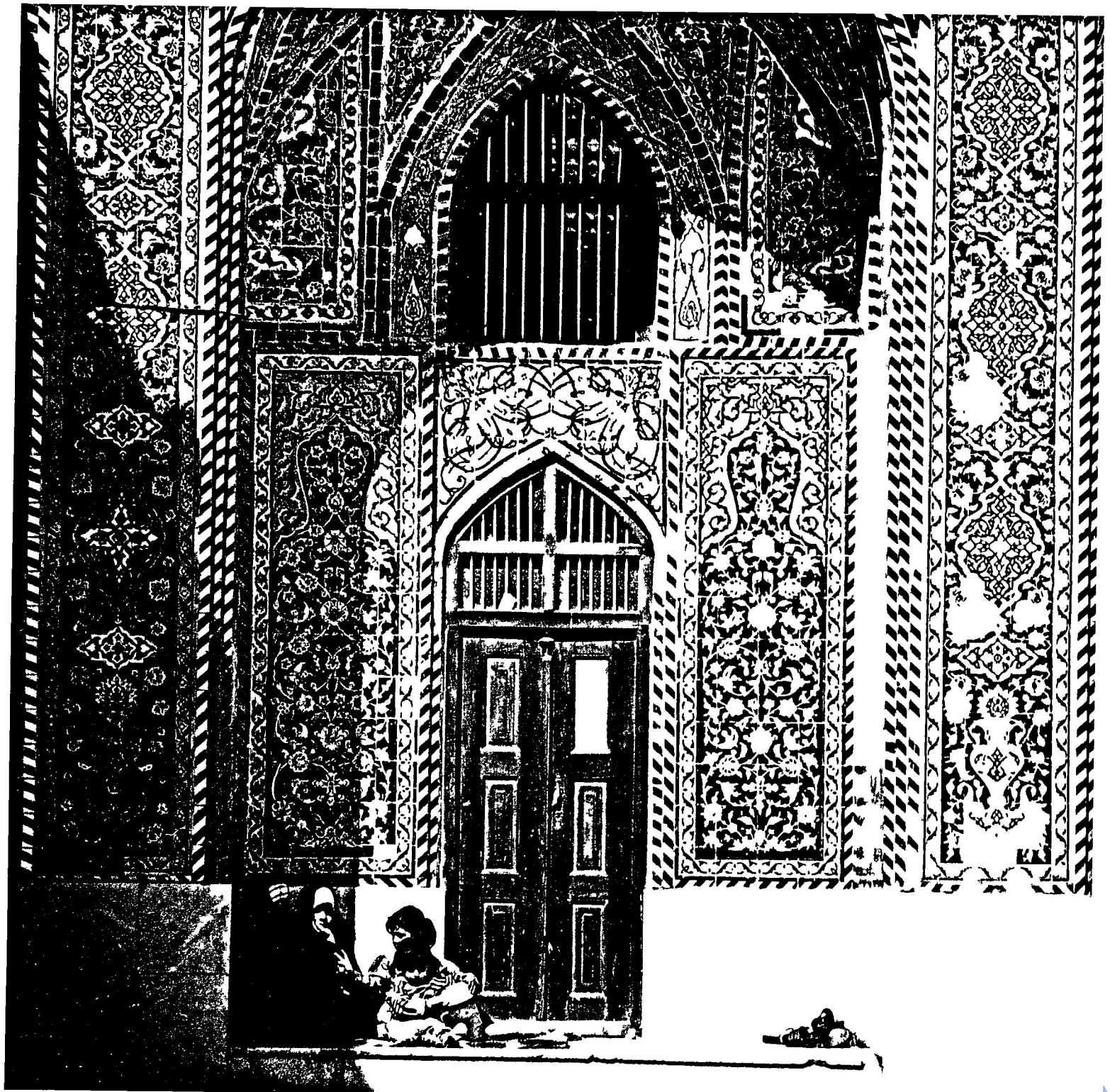
**Adnan Malik Al-Ghazali**  
Former Ambassador of Iraq to  
Malaysia



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# IRAQ'S PASSAGE OF PAIN





*Exquisite tiles are distinctive features  
of mosques and shrines in Iraq*

# PROLOGUE

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*We fight in fierce war within ourselves,  
What is the point of fighting with others?*

~Rumi

**O**ne of the world's most appalling examples of sanctions has been starkly manifested in all its human tragedy in Iraq. That the worm was turning became increasingly evident when human suffering continued, unabated.

Iraq is one of the world's oldest cultural histories. Her legacy from ancient Mesopotamia and even earlier, went on to shape and influence the civilisation of the Old World. Students of history will recall the evolution of the Babylonians,

Sumerians, Hittites and Assyrian, together with the regional ones of Hellenic, Persian and Ottoman as well as the unforgettable Islamic Golden Age in the 8th century under the Abbasid Caliphate. The history of this area has witnessed some of the world's earliest writings, literatures, sciences, mathematics, laws and philosophies.

Under the Caliphs, its capital Baghdad prospered with magnificent mosques and palaces, 100 book stores and the grandest library of its time. According to historian Paul Kennedy in his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers (1988)*, no city in medieval Europe could rival its splendour. Hence Iraq's well-deserved epithet "the cradle of civilization."

## 20 SPEAKING OF I. S DESTRUCTION.

It has generated timeless narratives – real or mythical – like the Tower of Babel, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Tomb of Alexander the Great and the Code of Hammurabi evolving into romantic notions of films like *The Thief of Baghdad* and *Sinbad the Sailor*.

Iraq was also blessed with one of the world's richest oil fields which provided approximately 95% of its foreign exchange earnings. Thus, for decades, its people were accustomed to a relatively affluent lifestyle. Although Iraq's war with Iran lasted 8 years, its tranquility continued.

However, all these came to a sorry end when the United Nations Security Council imposed strict sanctions on Ba'athist Iraq after its illegal invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990. The attack resulted in an immediate retaliation by the coalition forces led by the United States, forcing Iraq to withdraw.

Together with the compliance to withdraw, Iraq had to also pay reparation and eliminate all weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 661 which imposed the most debilitating sanctions ever applied against any nation since the Cold War (1947-1991).

Sanctions have been used therein. Apart from the UN, other bodies like the European Union had been known to impose them. They are largely employed as an alternative to armed conflicts. The principal purpose is to change the behaviour of the regime of the target country, individual or group with a view to improving their dynamics.

As at 1990, the UN had imposed sanctions on 12 occasions. However, the one imposed on Iraq was said to be the most prohibitive and unforgiving. It marked the beginning of the end of the Iraqis' normal existence.





*The entrance into the old city of Babylon*



Enforced primarily by the military, the sanctions on Iraq prohibited trade and foreign direct investments, saw a freeze on government and personal accounts abroad and imposed exacting regulations on foodstuff and medicines. The CIA estimated in a report that UN sanctions were blocking 90% of Iraqi imports and 97% of Iraqi exports.

### **IRAQ TAKEN TO TASK**

Iraq was also not permitted to export its oil and gas in the first five years of the sanctions. For a country that was in the top five for oil reserves and came second as oil producer after Saudi Arabia, this was devastating. A drawback of this departure was the reduction of its agricultural sector. This deficit had a catastrophic effect on Iraq's economy and food security levels. Deprived of basic necessities, the lives of the Iraqis spiralled downwards rapidly.

*The keeper of the shrine of the Four Caliphs who is a descendant of Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, a cousin and son in-law of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)*

It must be borne in mind that the original aim of the sanctions, which was to force Iraq out of Kuwait and recognise its national integrity and border, was accomplished by the Gulf War. However, the sanctions did not ease. In fact, attention was subsequently focused on destroying the purported weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the prevention of rebuilding Iraq's nuclear and chemical weapons capabilities. Despite the inspection by the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) of thousands of sites all over Iraq, no WMD and nuclear weapons were found. Yet doubts about Iraq's weapons' potential were still reported by UNSCOM to the UN.

Simultaneously, it was made clear through cryptic but clear messages by the then President of the United States of America Bill Clinton that the intention of the US was actually to

*Located in Central Baghdad, the iconic Victory Arch (officially known as the Swords of Qadisiyah) marks the entrance to the Grand Festivities Square and parade ground built to commemorate the (1980-1988) Iran-Iraq War*

– iStock

oust Iraq's President Saddam Hussein.

So what then was the real purpose of the sanctions? The goalpost kept changing, and it was this shifting rhetoric that has managed to keep the sanctions on for 13 years, causing complete devastation of the country.

Tan Sri Hasmy Agam, Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the

United Nations succinctly nailed it in a speech in 2000, saying, "How ironic it is that the same policy that is supposed to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destructions has itself become a weapon of mass destruction."

A good starting point in understanding the affliction suffered by the Iraqis is in appreciating the US Middle East Policy.



An-Najaf, the burial place of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib.  
This is also the centre of pilgrimage for Shi'a Muslims



# SPEAKING OF MASS DESTRUCTION...

A journey to Iraq as seen by Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali

This is an account of Iraq's devastation as a nation following the punishing economic sanctions imposed on it by the United Nations in August 1990.

Over a million people died and thousands more suffered unspeakable horrors of injuries and debilitating diseases caused by famine, malnutrition and lack of medicinal care.

In March 2000, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali led a humanitarian mission to Baghdad to witness the scale and extent of the catastrophe which befell Iraq. Her mission's report impelled the Malaysian government to stand up against the sanctions along with some other nations.

"Speaking of Mass Destruction..." is a documentation of these narratives.

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