

Al-Jazeera says video shows slaying of British hostage Margaret Hassan

By ROBERT H. REID
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Al-Jazeera television said Tuesday it received a videotape showing the slaying of a woman believed to be hostage aid worker Margaret Hassan. Hassan's family in London said they believed the longtime director of CARE in Iraq was dead.

The station planned to broadcast parts of the video later Tuesday. CARE said in a statement, "It is with profound sadness that we have learned of the existence of a video in which it appears that our colleague Margaret Hassan has been killed. ... The whole of CARE is in mourning."

abducted in Baghdad on Oct. 19. Her captors later issued videos showing her pleading for Britain to withdraw its troops from Iraq and calling for the release of female Iraqi prisoners.

Jihad Ballout, an Al-Jazeera spokesman, said the station received the tape a few days ago but had not been sure of its authenticity.

"We invited British diplomatic officials to come and view it," he said. "It's now likely that the image depicts Mrs. Hassan."

Her four brothers and sisters said they believe Hassan is dead.

"Our hearts are broken," they said in a statement. "We have kept hoping for as long as we could, but we now have to accept that Margaret has probably gone and at

last her suffering has ended."

The family did not indicate why they now believed Hassan was dead, but said: "Those who are guilty of this atrocious act, and those who support them, have no excuses."

On Sunday, U.S. Marines found the mutilated body of what they believe was a Western woman on a street in a Fallujah during the U.S. assault on the insurgent stronghold. Besides Hassan, the only Western woman known held was Teresa Borcz Khalifa, 54, a Polish-born longtime resident of Iraq who was seized last month.

Al-Jazeera reported on Nov. 2 that Hassan's captors had threatened to turn her over to followers of Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Al-Zarqawi and his men have been blamed for numerous deadly car bombings and the slayings of foreign hostages, including three Americans and a Briton. More than 170 foreigners have been kidnapped in Iraq this year; more than 30 of them have been slain.

Born in Ireland, Hassan also held British and Iraqi citizenship. She lived in Iraq for 30 years and married an Iraqi.

Her family said: "Nobody can justify this. Margaret was against sanctions and the war. To commit such a crime against anyone is unforgivable. But we cannot believe how anybody could do this to our kind, compassionate sister."

"The gap she leaves will never be filled."



Margaret Hassan, the kidnapped director of CARE International in Iraq, appears in this image made from television in a videotape aired by the Arabic television station Al-Jazeera on Oct. 22. The family of Hassan, 59, said Tuesday they believed she was dead.

Officials say Saddam moved money to pay bombers' families

By DESMOND BUTLER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Saddam Hussein diverted money from the U.N. oil-for-food program to pay millions of dollars to families of Palestinian suicide bombers who carried out attacks on Israel, say congressional investigators who uncovered evidence of the money trail.

The former Iraqi president tapped secret bank accounts in Jordan — where he collected bribes from foreign companies and individuals doing illicit business under the humanitarian program — to reward the families up to \$25,000 each, investigators told The Associated Press.

Documents prepared for a hearing today by the House International Relations Committee outline the new findings about how Saddam funneled money to the Palestinian families.

Investigators examining the oil-for-food program felt it was "important for us to determine whether the profits from his corruption were put toward terrorist purposes," committee chairman Henry Hyde, R-Ill., said of Saddam's well-known financial support of suicide bombers.

Today's hearing, however, will focus

on a French bank that handled most of the money for the program. An audit by a U.S. regulatory agency of a small sample of transactions out of the \$60 billion U.N. escrow account managed by BNP-Paribas has raised serious questions concerning the bank's compliance with U.S. money laundering laws, investigators said.

"There are indications that the bank may have been noncompliant in administering the oil-for-food program," Hyde said in his statement to AP. "If, true these possible banking lapses may have facilitated Saddam Hussein's manipulation and corruption of the program."

While acknowledging that U.S. regulators have raised routine issues with BNP on compliance with banking laws, a lawyer for BNP said Hyde's statement was unfair.

"No departure from any standard caused or contributed in any way to the abuse at the oil-for-food program," the bank's lead counsel Robert S. Bennett said. "There are simply no connections."

The humanitarian program that let Iraq trade oil for goods was set up in 1996 to help Iraqis get food, medicine and other items that had been scarce

under strict U.N. economic sanctions imposed after the Gulf War. But investigators say Saddam made more than \$21.3 billion in illegal revenue under the program as well as by evading the sanctions for more than a decade.

Iraq had thousands of secret bank accounts throughout the world, including over 1,500 in Jordan. Money from kickbacks on oil-for-food deals, illegal oil payments from the Jordanian government and other illicit funds were paid into accounts held by a Jordanian branch of the Iraqi government-owned Rafidain Bank, investigators said.

According to employees of the Iraqi Central Bank and the Rafidain Bank, the former Iraqi ambassador to Jordan, Sabah Yassen, withdrew money from the accounts to make payments ranging from \$15,000 to \$25,000 to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers, Hyde said.

Palestinians have said Saddam paid more than \$35 million to families of Palestinians killed or wounded in the conflict with Israel that began in September 2000. Since then, Palestinians have carried out 117 suicide bombings, killing 494 Israelis and others.

Five congressional panels, including Hyde's, have been pressing a U.N.-

appointed independent inquiry to hand over internal U.N. documents for their own oil-for-food probes.

On Tuesday, former Fed chairman Paul Volcker reiterated his independent inquiry's refusal to share documents in a letter to Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn. and Carl Levin, D-Mich.

In the current highly charged atmosphere, Volcker said, the panel wants to avoid release of "potentially misleading and incomplete information that could impair ongoing investigation, distort public perceptions, and violate simple concerns of due process."

At today's hearing, Hyde's panel will question two BNP executives and plans to transfer documents for a possible investigation to the House Committee on Financial Services.

BNP held the sole escrow account through which all of the more than \$60 billion of Iraqi oil revenues generated through the program flowed while it was in place from 1996 to 2003.

BNP also wrote letters of credit for deals for the import of humanitarian goods which were approved by the United Nations and paid for out of the escrow account.

Investigators said evidence from



Charles Duelfer, left, author of a CIA report on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, appears before the Senate Governmental Affairs Permanent Investigations Subcommittee on Capitol Hill on Monday to discuss how Saddam Hussein abused the U.N. Oil-for-Food Program. At right is Lt. Col. Stephen Zidek, former procurement chief of the Iraq Survey Group.

documents subpoenaed from BNP in July and received from U.S. regulatory agencies suggests that the French bank — which has New York offices — failed to comply with anti-money laundering laws passed under the U.S. Patriot Act in 2001.

"Evidence seems to indicate that in

some cases, payments in the oil-for-food program were made by BNP at times with a lack of full proof of delivery for goods and other necessary documents contracted for in the oil-for-food program," Hyde said.

The U.N. Security Council approved all deals under the oil-for-food program.

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