

STATEMENT OF WITNESS

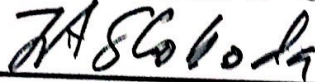
(Criminal Justice Act 1967, ss 2,9/M.C. Rules, 1968, r.58)

Statement of: John Sloboda
Age of witness: Over 18
Occupation of witness : Researcher (and Co-founder of Iraq Body Count)
Address : Iraq Body Count, 86-90 Paul Street, London EC2A 4NE

This statement, consisting of 7 pages signed by me, is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false or do not believe to be true.

Dated the 17th July 2020

Signed



Signature witnessed by (Name)

PAUL LAURENSEN

This statement is made as a joint statement by both co-founders of Iraq Body Count.


1. ABOUT IRAQ BODY COUNT

Iraq Body Count (IBC) is an independent NGO which carries out the only comprehensive monitoring of credibly-reported casualties in Iraq consequent to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, published on its constantly updated website, iraqbodycount.org. IBC's documentary evidence is drawn from cross checked media reports of violence leading to deaths, or of bodies being found, and is supplemented by the careful review and integration of hospital, morgue, NGO and official figures or records.

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This detailed and rigorous work means that when substantial new data sources and datasets are released, IBC is in a unique position to be able to accurately assess the new information such sources provide, by meticulous comparison with what is already known, a process which we began with reference to the Iraq War Logs as soon as they were made available to us.


This gives us particular authority to address such questions, an authority that has been recognised by a large range of national and international bodies, including both the UK and US governments, the European Union, the International Criminal Court, the World Health Organisation, the World Bank, the European Asylum Support Office, and the global media. IBC data was also the principal source of information on civilian deaths cited in the official Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot Report, 2016) commissioned by the British Government.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF IRAQ WAR LOGS


New hitherto unrevealed information about civilian deaths in conflict is always important, because protection of civilians is the universally accepted precondition of lawful armed conflict, and the deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime. It follows that any information available about civilians who were NOT protected, but instead met a violent death, is information of the utmost gravity and significance.

Such information adds to the body of knowledge about what actually happened. It gives dignity to the memory of those killed, and contributes to processes of truth, justice, and reconciliation. Knowing how one's loved ones died is a fundamental human need. Casualty information recorded on a larger scale also uncovers patterns and trends which can reveal, for instance, the vulnerability of particular sections of the population to armed violence, or modes of killing which disproportionately affect civilians. Thus, data about

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civilian deaths is not only important for those who have lost relatives and friends, but also to the actors in conflict who have the duty to devise better means to protect civilians from the ravages of war.

What IBC's analysis shows is that the Iraq War Logs contained a vast amount of information about civilian casualties of the Iraq War not previously known, and not subsequently made public by any other means.


Our detailed analyses, reported in full in a series of 2010 publications on our website, revealed that:

1. The Iraq War Logs contain an estimated 15,000 previously unknown civilian deaths.
2. The majority of these new deaths came from small incidents of one to three deaths – that is, the very kinds of incidents that attract least reporting, particularly so in times of intense conflict.
3. We estimated that the Iraq War Logs describe hitherto unreported details of 23,000 violent incidents in which Iraqi civilians were killed or their bodies were found.
4. A further 2,000 events exclusive to these logs concern the deaths of Iraqi police and other security forces killed after capture.
5. From the 860 (of 390,000) logs systematically analysed, we were able to add to the IBC database 61 previously unspecified incidents, 109

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hitherto unreported victim names, and new victims.

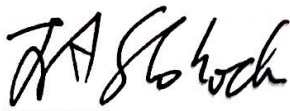
Since 2010 further analysis by IBC has raised from 61 to more than 3000 the number of incidents in the IBC database sourced solely from the Iraq War Logs.

One way of measuring the perceived public importance of the civilian deaths revealed in the Iraq War Logs is through the number of press and media reports since late 2010 which specifically reported the 15000 previously unknown deaths that the Logs were estimated to contain. A google search using the search terms [15000 deaths Iraq + "War Logs"] provides a rough measure of global significance, and reveals over 40,000 distinct web URLs, with dates ranging from 2010 to 2020. As an equally rough indicative comparison, there are around the same number of URLs for the search term "Iraqi deaths". This indicates that public awareness of civilian deaths in Iraq has been increased by the release of the Iraq War Logs to an extent that no other single event since has been able to do.

3. THE NEED FOR THE RELEASE OF THE IRAQ WAR LOGS

We cannot comment on the intentions of the US Government, however we can attest that, in relation to the new information contained within the Iraq War Logs, almost no subsequent information has emerged from either official or unofficial sources to add to (or even corroborate) the hitherto unknown information provided within the War Logs. Thus, 10 years on, the War Logs remain the only source of information regarding many thousands of violent civilian deaths in Iraq between 2004 and 2009.

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If there are other sources of information or analyses being held within the US government regarding the deaths of the civilians in Iraq that were revealed in the Iraq War Logs, they are certainly still being withheld from the public.

It has always been IBC's position that civilian casualty data should always be made public; the way in which this is achieved must be approached carefully and responsibly. The natural justice seen by many in this position may be one reason why the US government's failure to release this data itself has attracted such attention and controversy.

An often-repeated charge of the US government regarding the release of the Iraq War Logs is that this could have endangered lives, including of Iraqi as well as US citizens, by exposing their identities or role. However, according to reliable reporting on the matter, the US government has never been able to demonstrate that a single individual has been significantly harmed by the release of these data. This is not least because the War Logs were highly redacted prior to their release by Wikileaks, ensuring that information that could identify and possibly endanger the living was not available in the version publicly released alongside IBC's analysis in October 2010.

It could well be argued, therefore, that by making this information public Manning and Assange were carrying out a duty on behalf of the victims and the public at large that the US government was failing to carry out.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON THE STEPS TAKEN IN RELATION TO PUBLICATION OF THE IRAQ WAR LOGS

IBC approached WikiLeaks (WL) when a possible release of documents similar to those for Afghanistan began to be mentioned in media reporting, and discussed this with Julian Assange in depth and on several occasions prior to release. We wanted to impress upon him that as researchers who had

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been documenting civilian deaths since the beginning of the war, we would be well-placed to cross-check the logs against existing reports of civilian casualties, identifying those which were unique to the logs and others which were already derivable from other sources. We were also concerned to ensure that study of the war logs in relation to civilian casualties be conducted with rigour, given that there existed (and still does exist) many instances of extremely poor research and the publication of wild claims which do not stand scrutiny, and tend to throw the whole enterprise into disrepute. While neither we (or, to our knowledge, WL) have ever claimed that any documentation of this sort for Iraq is (or could be) comprehensive and capture all conflict deaths, what we can reasonably work towards is ensuring that those deaths and details we do publish, truly occurred.

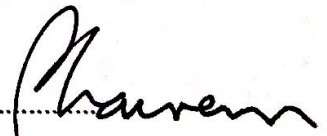
JA was receptive to and appreciative of this approach, and we agreed to work together with him, and the various news media that were part of the wider collaboration, with IBC focused on information relating to casualties and in particular, civilian deaths.

Much of what we have stated further above, and our gratitude to JA and WL as well as Chelsea Manning, we have already put on the public record. What we have not stated publicly before today concerns another crucial matter, the ways in which complex (and innovative) steps were taken to publish the important content of the Iraq War Logs in the most responsible way. We were aware that the publication of the Afghan War Logs previously had constituted a very challenging exercise, beyond any previous experience, and that as a result of the steep learning curve for all those concerned, we knew that ways should be found to prevent confusion and provide as many safeguards as possible. Although it was clear that there was considerable pressure upon Julian Assange and WikiLeaks to publish as quickly as possible, none of WikiLeaks' media partners were able to suggest a means by which the Logs

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could be redacted in circumstances where there was a full tranche of 400,000 Logs – of which only tiny samples could be redacted and edited by hand. IBC was able to provide a technological solution which allowed a substantial proportion of the content of each log to be published in a redacted form where necessary. This involved the development of specific software by which a painstaking exercise could be progressed automatically, starting with redaction and working back from that towards unredaction of data. This process took enormous amounts of time. It was painstakingly approached by us and by Julian Assange and his WikiLeaks colleagues. It was apparent that they were under multiple pressures to hit the “publish” button sooner, but stood firm by the principle of adhering to the best solution that could be conceived of to ensure that the released information could not cause danger to any persons.

In sum, throughout our pre-release dealings with Julian Assange and his WikiLeaks colleagues, he showed consistent understanding of and commitment to the same principles of rigour and adherence to responsible publication that we as an organisation consider it imperative to adhere to.

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