

A delicate moment
The Editors

On April 9, 2003, the United States military liberated Baghdad. As tanks rolled into town, many Iraqi people experienced their first taste of freedom ever. The same people repressed for years under the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein tore down statues that glorified the man who had reduced Iraq to a pariah prison-state. Decades before, Hussein took a nation with a reasonably bright future and subjected it to the worst horrors of the twentieth century: systematic torture and execution chambers, collective punishment, conscription of youth to fight against the many enemies Hussein made for himself, the use of chemical weapons against his own people, the eradication of villages, the general sense of fear that stems from living in a police-state that taps phones, documents private correspondence, stifles and eliminates opposition, and completely destroys possibilities for prosperity, thus reducing a once flourishing nation to penury.

As Brandeis professor and Iraqi dissident Kanan Makiya expressed: “It was the end of the republic of fear. Two Iraqis with whom I was camping out in Washington, D.C., woke me up at 5 a.m. yesterday so we could watch the images of a free Iraq. Tears rolled down our cheeks uncontrollably.”

The sense of freedom is one of the most powerful emotions a person can feel, the realization that one can think, say and write whatever one wants without having to fear fascist thugs waiting to haul one away to unspeakable dungeons and certain death. The very idea that a people who have suffered for so long have found the light again is simply impossible to convey in words.

By all accounts, this is a universal feeling experienced by people as diverse as the Poles, Czechs, East Germans, Hungarians, French and Africans. The dates of liberation echo through history: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the decolonization of African nation after African nation, the end of the Occupation in France in 1944, and now – the end of the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein.

It is almost impossible for Americans who have known liberty since 1776 to appreciate the sheer joy of a people freed. But, as citizens of the nation that is the last greatest hope of humanity, the American nation shares in the jubilation of the Iraqi people. We sincerely hope that Iraq will soon join the community of free nations.

The future of Iraq is certainly unknown. In his novel *The Plague*, Albert Camus describes the joyful but tenuous moment separating oppression from reconstruction: “And everyone was out and about to celebrate those crowded moments when the time of ordeal ended and the time of forgetting had not yet begun.” It is now that moment for Iraq. However, the true task is institutionalizing freedom, or else risk lurching back to tyranny.

Rebuilding is a difficult task; many of the world’s acclaimed scholars disagree on the blueprints for Iraq’s future. And to the extent that Iraqi and Coalition policy-makers continue to waver on the best course of action, the moment is immensely delicate.

We hope that the Iraqi people find their way. And we celebrate with them in their liberation.