

Justice for Terror

Christian conversations on eliminating the support base of terrorist movements.

U.S./U.N. Sanctions Against Iraq

Prayer

O God, most merciful and gracious

The poor cry out to you,
In you they find wealth.
The hungry turn to you,
In you they are satisfied.
The oppressed flee to you,
In you they find refuge.

O God, most merciful and gracious

May we hear the cry of the poor,
Let us provide justice.
May we acknowledge the hungry,
Let us share our bread.
May we live in solidarity with the oppressed,
Let us call them brother, sister.

O God, most merciful and gracious

Scripture

*A voice was heard in Ramah,
sobbing and loudly lamenting;
it was Rachel weeping for her children,
refusing to be comforted
because they were no more. (Jr. 31:15)*

Background

Over ten years after the 1991 bombing campaign on Iraq, the war continues against the civilian population in the form of economic sanctions. Economic warfare has taken the lives of over one million persons, the vast majority of whom are children under five years of age. Independent

agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN's own Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) continue to document the devastating impact sanctions are having on the civilian population. In 1996, UNICEF reported that 4,500 children were dying monthly. All of this in a population of 20 million persons

who, before 1990, enjoyed a highly developed lifestyle. One author of the FAO report appropriately called this genocide. The sanctions are a silent but more deadly form of warfare than the military campaign of 1991.

The 1991 bombing campaign systematically destroyed electric, water and sewage plants, as well as agricultural, food and medical production facilities. All of these structures continue to be inoperative, or function at sub-minimal levels, because the sanctions have made it impossible to buy spare parts for their repair. In 1991, the UN said that it would take \$21 billion just to repair the infrastructure. Many Americans are unaware that bombing has continued on a regular basis over the past decade.

Church Statements

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November 15, 1999

Since the end of the Gulf War, the U.S. Catholic Bishops and Pope John Paul II have repeatedly called for reducing, reshaping and quickly ending the economic sanctions against Iraq that have brought such suffering to the Iraqi people. Recently, I joined with other religious leaders in a call for "fresh thinking and new approaches" to end this intolerable situation.

After more than nine years of unparalleled and unmerited suffering, it is long past time to end the economic embargo against Iraq. Too many have suffered for too long. Efforts to mitigate the suffering inflicted by sanctions, namely the oil-for-food program, are important but insufficient. The comprehensive sanctions against Iraq have long since ceased to be a morally acceptable tool of diplomacy, because they have inflicted indiscriminate and unacceptable suffering on the Iraqi people. They violate a

fundamental principle of engagement in conflict - - states may not seek to destroy a government or a military by targeting the innocent. It is incumbent on the United Nations Security Council and the United States, as the chief proponent of sanctions, to terminate promptly the economic embargo against Iraq.

The grounds for strong international action were and are justifiable: reversing and deterring aggression against neighboring states, protecting domestic minorities, and preventing the development of weapons of mass destruction. But even honorable causes may not be defended with immoral means. Such is the case of embargoes that contribute to untimely death, chronic illness, and reduced life-expectancy among innocent civilians. The cumulative effects of the prolonged embargo mean that many of the most vulnerable are, like Rachel's children, no more.

We acknowledge unequivocally that the primary responsibility for resolving outstanding disputes between Iraq and the international community belongs to the Iraqi government. So too does that government bear primary responsibility for the failure of humanitarian efforts because of its deliberate diversion and misallocation of resources within Iraq. But the international community still bears a large measure of responsibility for the plight of the Iraqi people. As a UN Security Council panel reported earlier this year: "Even if not all suffering in Iraq can be imputed to external factors, especially sanctions, the Iraqi people would not be undergoing such deprivations in the absence of the prolonged measures imposed by the Security Council and the effects of war."

Given the effects of the embargo, the inadequacy of the oil-for-food program and related humanitarian exemptions to mitigate adequately the suffering of the Iraqi people, and the repeated resistance of political authorities to reshape the sanctions in morally necessary ways, the current

comprehensive sanctions are morally unacceptable and must be replaced by more humane arrangements. Political and military sanctions remain acceptable; comprehensive economic sanctions are not.

Our concerns with U.S. policy toward Iraq are not limited to the embargo. We remain deeply concerned about the ongoing air strikes against Iraq. The moral justification of such attacks is, at best, unclear, yet the risks to Iraqi civilians are real. We urge a halt to this form of low-level warfare.

It is time for a new approach to Iraq. We cannot turn a deaf ear to the suffering of the Iraqi people or a blind eye to the moral consequences of current U.S. policy. It is time to end comprehensive sanctions against Iraq, halt the ongoing air strikes, and find morally acceptable alternatives to contain the aggressive actions of the Iraqi government.

As our prayers are with the people of Iraq who are victims of their own government and of international policy. We pray also for U.S. and other world leaders as they struggle to match moral means and moral ends."

General Considerations for Sanctions

In their 1993 statement, *The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace*, the U.S. Bishops urged that comprehensive sanctions be used sparingly and with restraint, and proposed tentative criteria for evaluating decisions to impose sanctions:

- 1 They should be a response to grave and ongoing injustice, after less coercive measures have been tried, and with clear and reasonable conditions for their removal;
2. They must avoid grave and irreversible harm to the civilian population. Therefore, sanctions should be targeted, as much as possible, against those directly responsible for the injustice, and provision must be made to ensure

that the basic human needs of the population are met;

3. The consent of the population affected by sanctions is a moral consideration, although consent does not eliminate the need for humanitarian exemptions;
4. Sanctions should be part of a serious diplomatic effort to find a political settlement.

Pope John Paul II January 10, 1998

"Not far from there, an entire people is the victim of a constraint which puts it in hazardous conditions of survival. I refer to our brothers and sisters in Iraq, living under a pitiless embargo. In response to the appeals for help which unceasingly come to the Holy See, I must call upon the consciences of those who, in Iraq and elsewhere, put political, economic or strategic considerations before the fundamental good of the people, and I ask them to show compassion. The weak and the innocent cannot pay for mistakes for which they are not responsible. I therefore pray that this country will be able to regain its dignity, experience normal development, and thus be in a position to re-establish fruitful relations with other peoples, within the framework of international law and world solidarity. . ."

Archbishop Kassab of Southern Iraq

"Epidemics rage, taking away infants and the sick by the thousands. Those children who survive disease succumb to malnutrition, which stunts their physical and mental development. Our situation is unbearable! We appeal to people of conscience to work to end the blockade of Iraq."

Discussion/Action

1. Based upon the criteria proposed in "The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace" (see above) how would you evaluate the sanctions on Iraq?
2. What is our responsibility as Christians to those who are sick and hungry in an enemy state?
3. Be engaged politically. Share your views. Write the President and Congress.

Resources

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace* (1993) (section on sanctions), OPPS, 3211 Fourth Street, N.E. Washington, D.C. 20017. \$3.95.

USCC statements/ letters on Iraqi sanctions (8/91, 11/97, 2/98, 11/98, 9/99, 11/99) and Cuba sanctions (5/00, 7/00, 9/00) (www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/)

"Economic Sanctions and the Just War Doctrine," by D. Christiansen and G. Powers, in *Economic Sanctions*, edited by D. Cortright and G. Lopez (Westview Press, 1995)

Voices in the Wilderness: A Campaign to End Economic Sanctions Against Iraq
<http://www.nonviolence.org/vitw/>

Voices for Justice, Peace and Social Justice Ministry. www.paxjoliet.org

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