

MANNA *in the wilderness*

Spring 1998

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Volume 12, Number 3

Las Vegas Bishop Opposes Sanctions Against Iraq

Most Reverend Daniel F. Walsh, Bishop of Las Vegas, joined 54 other U.S. Roman Catholic Bishops in courageously opposing sanctions against Iraq, moving them into direct confrontation with U.S. foreign policy. Led by Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, the plea fell five votes short of the two-thirds majority needed at a November conference of the U.S. Catholic Bishops. Bishop Gumbleton had just returned from a delegation to Iraq delivering medical supplies and gathering information in open and public violation of U.S. law. Members of the delegation (Voices in the Wilderness) have been threatened by the U.S. government with "up to 12 years in prison and \$1 million in fines."

The following article is reprinted from the January-February 1998 issue of *The Catholic Worker*.

Rick McDowell belongs to Voices in the Wilderness (1460 W. Carmen Ave., Chicago, IL 60640, (773) 784-8065), whose

goal is to end the U.S. led U.N. sanctions against the people of Iraq.

by Rick McDowell

When I returned to Iraq in late May of 1997, nearly six months since the implementation of UN Resolution 986 ("Oil for Food"), I expected to see improvements in the availability of food and medicine. I found, instead, a deterioration of all conditions necessary for the sustenance of life. Traveling to Iraq for the third time in nine months, I encountered a resigned hopelessness amongst the people, a population historically known for its resilience.

Seven years of the most comprehensive sanctions in modern history have reduced Iraq and its people to utter destitution. The United Nations Security Council's economic sanctions, invoked only ten times since the inception of the United Nations, and applied eight times since the end of the Cold War, constitute an extension of the devastating Allied bombing campaign of 1991.

For the 6th time since January of 1996, a delegation from Voices in the Wilderness, a campaign to end the US-supported UN economic sanctions against Iraq, traveled to Iraq in public violation of US law. The delegation visited hospitals in Baghdad and the southern port city of Basra. Members met with UN and relief officials, doctors, government workers, religious leaders, and Iraqis from all walks of life. Our findings of increasing suffering, death and desperation throughout Iraq are confirmed by recent UN reports.

"The hidden nature of the war being waged against Iraq is tragic. Editorials seldom appear, and we see no front-page stories, even though these sanctions have caused the deaths of more than one million people, constituting one of the greatest human rights abuses of our time."

-Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization reported in December of 1995 that more than one million Iraqis have died—567,000 of them children—as a direct consequence of economic sanctions. UNICEF reports that 4,500 children under the age of five are dying each month from hunger and disease. An April 1997 nutritional survey, carried out by UNICEF with the participation of the World Food Program (WFP) and Iraq's Minister of Health, indicates that in Central/Southern Iraq, 27.5% of Iraq's three million children are now at risk of acute malnutrition.

The UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs reports that Iraq's public health services are nearing a total breakdown from a lack of basic medicines, life-saving drugs and essential medical supplies. The lack of clean water—50% of all rural people have no access to potable water—and a collapse of waste water treatment facilities in most urban areas are contributing to the rapidly deteriorating state of public health.

Airborne and waterborne diseases are on the rise, while deaths related to diarrhea diseases have tripled in an increasingly unhealthy environment. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports a six-fold increase in the mortality rate for children under five, an explosive rise in the incidence of endemic infections, such as cholera and typhoid, and a markedly elevated incidence of measles, poliomyelitis and tetanus. Malaria has reached epidemic levels. The WHO further states that the majority of Iraqis have subsisted on a semi-starvation diet for the past several years.

The use of depleted uranium during the Gulf War—which may be a contributing factor of Gulf War syndrome—may also be linked to increases in childhood cancers, including leukemia, Hodgkin's disease, lymphomas, congenital diseases and deformities in fetuses, along with limb reduction abnormalities and increases in genetic abnormalities throughout Iraq.

The vaunted "Oil for Food" resolution is a failure, its promise of food and medicine having proved to be too little, too late. According to the WFP, by the end of May, 1997, Iraq had exported 120 million barrels of oil and received 692,000 metric tons of food, 29% of what had been ex-

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ENGRAVING BY FRITZ EICHENBERG

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pected under the deal. Of the 574 contracts submitted to the Sanctions Committee for exports of humanitarian supplies to Iraq, 331 were approved, 191 placed on hold, 14 blocked, and 38 were awaiting clarification.

Of the \$2 billion in Iraqi oil revenue authorized for a six-month period, 30% is designated for war reparations, 5 to 10% covers maintenance and repair of the oil pipeline, and 15% is earmarked for humanitarian supplies for the Kurdish population in northern Iraq. About \$800,000 is available for Central/Southern Iraq or approximately 25 cents per person per day for food and medicine. Regardless, UN Resolution 986 does not provide for critically needed parts to repair Iraq's water, sanitation and medical infrastructure, which was devastated during the Gulf War. The importation of such basic items as chlorine, fertilizers and pencils is prohibited.

Lacking spare parts and minerals needed to repair and maintain their water and sewage treatment facilities, the condition of many Iraqis is scarcely improved by the food they receive. The untreated water is contributing to disease and death. Without hard currency, the economy of Iraq, estimated to have the second largest oil reserves in the world, has collapsed. Average public sector wages, for the few who have employment, have fallen to less than \$5 per month, while hyper-inflation has caused the price of goods to rise astronomically. The Iraqi dinar, worth \$3 prior to sanctions, was worth .000625 in May 1997. Skilled workers, including doctors and engineers, have deserted their jobs to become taxi drivers or cigarette salesmen. Iraqi professionals are leaving the country in increasing numbers. With an estimated 80% of Iraqis affected by sanctions, families are selling household and personal possessions to purchase food and medicine. As the population struggles for survival, the social fabric of Iraq is disintegrating, as witnessed by the wide-

spread rise in begging, street children, crime and prostitution.

The people of Iraq have been on a roller coaster of hope and despair for seven years and seem to have settled into despair. For example, Frial, the manager of a small hotel, asked us to go home and tell our government to bomb Iraq for 42 more days and get it over with, for, she says, "We are dying a slow and painful death under sanctions." A young doctor at a Baghdad hospital said, "Our life is over." Another doctor, who has practiced for eight years and is forced to play God with the few life-saving drugs available, makes 3,000 dinar a month, or \$2, while a bottle of milk for his children costs 3,500 dinar. He asked, "What does your country gain from our suffering?" An Iraqi reporter despairingly stated, "The world is upside down, nothing makes sense anymore, it's all gone mad."

Most horrific is the pain in the eyes of the mothers who wait in hospitals, with their children—for far too many mothers it is a death watch. The children, born since the Gulf War and hardly involved in the politics of sanctions, suffer in silence, often without access to pain killers, drugs, antibiotics or hope. Some childhood cancers realized an 80% cure rate prior to sanctions. Now, without cancer-fighting drugs, the survival rate for children with these

same cancers is 0%.

The United Nations, chartered to protect civilian populations from the ravages of war, is instead, engaged in a war of collective punishment, a war of mass destruction directed at the civilian population of Iraq. The UN, at the insistence of the US, and contrary to international conventions and treaties, has created in Iraq, a zone of misery and death—with no end in sight.

Considering the horrific suffering and death of children and families in Iraq, the lack of public debate over the UN/US participation in this massive violation of human rights is astonishing. The toll of these sanctions on an entire generation of Iraqi children is incalculable. What are the implications of Iraqi children growing up traumatized by hunger and disease, if they survive at all? How can the deeds of one leader or even an entire government be used to justify this unprecedented, internationally sanctioned violation of human rights?

The scourge of sanctions on the people of Iraq must come to an immediate and unqualified end.

Over 21 Catholic Worker houses are fasting and praying for a peaceful and just solution to the Iraq crisis, please join us.

1997 Finances for Las Vegas Catholic Worker

INCOME	(January 1 to December 31, 1997)	average/month
Donations-	\$28,472	\$ 2,373
from IHN for utilities-	\$ 900	\$ 75
Other income-	\$ 233	\$ 19
TOTAL INCOME-	\$29,605	\$ 2,467
EXPENSES	(January 1 to December 31, 1997)	
Morning Breakfast to Homeless-	\$ 8,977	\$ 748
Hospitality House, Utilities-	\$ 3,358	\$ 280
Maintain & Repair-	\$ 2,215	\$ 185
Other House Costs*-	\$ 3,918	\$ 326
Direct Help to Needy-	\$ 1,162	\$ 97
Postage & Supplies-	\$ 1,169	\$ 97
Vehicle Expenses-	\$ 2,760	\$ 230
Staff Salary (\$20 wk/3 people)-	\$ 2,877	\$ 240
Foster Care House** (\$400 month)-	\$ 2,400	\$ 200
Other Expenses-	\$ 852	\$ 71
TOTAL EXPENSES-	\$29,688	\$ 2,474

(* includes \$2,100 fire/liab. insurance) (** since July 97)

PLEASE JOIN US:

Wednesday-Saturday, 6:00 a.m.:

Morning Prayer at the house

Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.:

Serve breakfast at Ethel Pearson Park (E and Washington St.) to the homeless.

Tuesday, 5:30 p.m.:

Mass or Liturgy at Catholic Worker house, potluck following.

Seven Days a Week:

Hospitality (IHN) to 3 to 5 homeless families, we need volunteers.

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