

March 20 - April 28, 2000
Palais des Nations, Geneva

Written statement submitted by Franciscans International addressing the Human Rights Situation facing children in Iraq (E/CN.4/2000/NGO/59)

"Are the children well?" This question commonly used as a greeting among peoples of the Pacific Islands is a poignant reminder that the well-being of children should be the preoccupation of all of us. With this in mind, Franciscans International and Dominicans for Justice and Peace together with the Justice and Peace Promoters of the Dominican Order in the United States, along with other signatories, bring to the attention of the 56th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the situation of children in Iraq. Our first grave concern is that the UN imposed sanctions and embargo on Iraq is adversely affecting the health and well-being of Iraqi children. Furthermore, these policies violate their rights as guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations of 1948 (Universal Declaration), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (Convention).

Specifically, this presentation would like to bring attention to the violation of the rights of Iraqi children to:

- Develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity (art. 27 of the Convention), (art. 3 of the Universal Declaration).
- The guaranteed benefits of social security and the entitlement to grow and develop in health; to this end, special care and protection shall be provided to both child and mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services (articles 24, 27 and 31 of the Convention), (art. 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration).
- Receive education (article 28 of the Convention), (art. 28 of the Universal Declaration).
- Be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brother/sisterhood and in full consciousness that their energy and talents should be devoted to the service of humankind (article 29 of the Convention).

"Are the children well?"

Prior to the events of 1990 and 1991, (Resolution 661 of the UN Security Council on the trade and embargo restrictions against Iraq on occasion of the Gulf War), Iraqi children enjoyed a fairly good standard of living. Reports from UNICEF depict Iraq as having achieved high levels of growth in most sectors of social and economic development, placing them in the highest percentile among developing nations in the 1980's. However, it is apparent from more recent documentation submitted by various agencies connected with the United Nations, that the cumulative effects of war-related destruction as well as the restrictions imposed on the economy and trade of Iraq have dramatically altered the ability of Iraq to provide for the well-being of Iraqi children in the decade of the 90's.

"Are the children well?"

The UN Report on the Current Humanitarian Situation in Iraq, 30 March 1999, compares the state of Iraq before and after the events of 1990-91. This report provides the basis for our concern as well as our hope that the 56th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights will intercede on behalf of the Iraqi children and advocate for a lifting of the embargo and sanctions against Iraq. It appears from the data abstracted from the report which is cited below, the lifting of UN Security Council Resolution 661 is essential if Iraq will ever be positioned to ensure a decent quality of life for its people, especially its children.

Economic and Social Indicators:

Prior to the events of 1990-91, Iraq's social and economic indicators were generally above the Middle East regional and developing country averages. With oil accounting for 60% of the country's GDP and 95% of its foreign currency earnings, Iraq's economy was heavily dependent on the external sector and sensitive to oil price fluctuations. In 1991, Iraq's GDP had fallen by nearly two-thirds owing to an 85% decline in oil production and the devastation of the industrial and service sectors of the economy. Although Iraq is now beginning to export more oil, the revenue remains insufficient due to a negative correlation linking low oil prices, delays in obtaining spare parts for the oil industry and a general obsolescence of the oil infrastructure. If and when sanctions are lifted, it will take a long time before the infrastructure is repaired and the economy recovers.

Food and Production Availability

Up to 1990, Iraq's domestic food production represented only one third of total consumption for most essential food items. The remaining two thirds was imported. Due to its relative prosperity, Iraq had the capacity to import this large quantity of food requirements at an estimated cost between 2.5-3 billion dollars a year. Since the events of 1990-91, Iraq has had difficulties in providing for the nutritional needs of the Iraqi people. Some of this is related to problems in increasing domestic production as spare parts and chemicals are difficult to obtain or restricted under resolution 661. Spokespersons for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization have stated that when the water supply system was pounded during the Gulf War bombing, Iraq's ability to irrigate was seriously diminished. The combination of high salt content in the soil, rapid evaporation due to high temperatures and a lack of materials needed for irrigation has rendered much of Iraq's soil barren. Also, the lack of external trade relations, which are necessary to import food, is an element that has contributed to the food shortage. According to the World Food Program (WFP), in 1995, the average cost of basic food was 850 times more than in 1990. This inflation contributes to exacerbate the problem.

"Are the children well?"

The prevalence of malnutrition in Iraqi children under five years of age almost doubled from 1991 to 1997. One in four children is malnourished, a rise of 73% since 1991. Almost the entire child population of Iraq has been affected by a shift in their nutritional status toward malnutrition. Since 1990, the rate of anemia among Iraqi women has risen to 70%. Low-birth weights, (less than 2.5kg), also rose as a predictable effect of maternal malnutrition. The WFP reports that the monthly food baskets distributed in Iraq last only 20 days. As such, the food

baskets are obviously an inadequate solution to the growing problem of malnutrition. Before 1991, with an extensive network of water treatment plants, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates indicated that 90% of the Iraqi population had access to an abundant quantity of safe drinking water. WFP estimates that since 1991, access to potable drinking water has dropped to 50% of the 1991 level. Even lower levels of available drinking water are experienced in the rural areas of Iraq. A significant cause of the illness and death of children under 5 years of age seems to stem from the massive deterioration, since 1990, in Iraq's sanitation and drinking water systems.

Health care

Prior to 1991, according to WHO, health care reached approximately 97% of the urban Iraqi population and 78% of the rural residents of Iraq. The health care system was based on an extensive expanding network of health facilities linked by reliable communication and a large fleet of service vehicles and ambulances. Since 1991 shortages of water and power supply, lack of transportation and the collapse of the telecommunications system have degraded the functional capacity of the health care system further. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) analysis points out those power shortages due to the continuing effect of war damage and deterioration has effected power shortages up to 6 hours a day. The shortage of electricity has been adversely affecting the water supply and health services.

"Are the children well?"

According to WHO, communicable diseases and malaria, which had been under control in Iraq, came back in epidemic proportions in 1993, rendering the health care situation in Iraq, precarious. The inability to provide the drugs necessary for treatment is contributing to the spread of disease. Children, the most vulnerable members of the society, are hardest hit by these conditions. The under-five mortality rate has tripled since 1990.

Education

As described by UNICEF, from the mid 1970's to 1990, the Government of Iraq made sizable investments in the education sector. By 1989, the combined primary and secondary enrollment rates stood at 75%. Illiteracy was reduced to 20%.

"Are the children well?" Since 1991, school enrollment for all ages has declined to 53%. In Central and Southern Iraq, 83% of school buildings have suffered serious damages and are in need of rehabilitation. UNICEF indicates that substantive programs in reducing adult and female illiteracy have ceased and either stopped altogether or have had serious cut-backs. The rising number of street children and children who work is related to the increasing rates of school dropouts. More and more families are forced to rely on working children for household income. Figures from UNESCO indicate that dropouts in elementary schools have increased from 95 692 in 1990 to 131 658 in 1999.

The rights of Iraqi children that are guaranteed by the Universal Declaration and the Convention have been seriously compromised in the decade of the 1990's. In a significant way, the lasting

effects of the Gulf War and the UN policies such as Security Council Resolutions 661 and 986 (Oil for Food), have had calamitous effects on Iraqi children. It is time that this problem be addressed through an intervention. The international community has made a commitment to ensure that every child "be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brother/sisterhood." How can we ensure this right for Iraqi children unless we address those policies and practices that are severely compromising their happiness and health? The question that we must face as we address this concern is before us: "Are the children well?" May our response direct our conscience and our actions on behalf of the children of Iraq.

Franciscans International and Dominicans for Justice and Peace together with the Justice and Peace Promoters of the Dominican Order in the United States, along with other signatories recommend that the UN Human Rights Commission strongly urge the international community to lift the sanctions and embargo on Iraq and advocate for immediate measures to stop and reverse the downward pattern of life experienced by Iraqi children.

Signing Organizations:

The Dominican Justice Promoters of the United States

Dominican Leadership Conference of the United States, Executive Committee

Dominican Sisters International, Coordinating Council, Rome, Italy

Confederation of Dominican Sisters of Latin America and the Caribbean

United Nations NGO Representative Dominican Leadership Conference, USA

Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, United Nations Representative

Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Kenosha, WI, USA, Leadership Team

Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, NY, USA, Executive Team

Dominican Sisters, St. Mary's Congregation, New Orleans, LA, USA, General Council

Dominican Sisters of Hope, Ossining, NY, USA, Leadership Team

Dominican Sisters of Cabra, Region of Louisiana, USA

Dominican Sisters of the Presentation/USA Province

Dominican Sisters of Edmonds, Washington, Congregation of Holy Cross, USA

Dominican Sisters of Great Bend, KS, USA, Leadership

Dominican Sisters of San Raphael, San Raphael, California, USA, Leadership Team

Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine de' Ricci, Elkins Park, Pa, USA, General Council

Dominican Sisters, Congregation of the Sacred Heart, Houston, Texas, USA

Dominican Sisters of St. Mary's of the Springs, OH USA, Leadership Team

Dominican Sisters, Tacoma, WA, USA

Adrian Dominicans, Great Lakes Chapter, Detroit, MI, USA

Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic, New Orleans, LA, USA

Grand Rapids Dominicans, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, Leadership Team

Sisters of St. Dominic, Akron, OH, USA

Sisters of St. Dominic, Blauvelt, NY, USA, Leadership Team

Sisters of St. Dominic, Caldwell, NJ, USA, Leadership Team

Sisters of St. Dominic, Congregation of the Holy Cross, Amityville, NY, USA

Sisters of St. Dominic, Racine, WI, Leadership Team

Oxford Dominican Sisters, Oxford, ILL, USA

Sinsinawa Dominians, Southern Province, USA, Leadership Team

Sinsinawa Dominicans Justice and Peace Office, River Forest, IL, USA

Springfield Dominican Leadership Team, Springfield ILL, USA

Dominican Province of Canada

Parable Conference, River Forest, ILL, USA

NETWORK, A Catholic Social Justice Lobby, Washington, DC, USA

Fellowship of Reconciliation, Nyack, New York, USA

8th Day Center for Justice, Chicago, ILL, USA

PAX CHRISTI, USA

Intercommunity Center for Justice and Peace, NY, USA, Executive Board

Brothers of the Sacred Heart, Elmhurst, NY, USA

Capuchin Franciscan Friars, Brooklyn, New York, USA

Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn, New York, USA

Franciscan Handmaids of Mary, New York, New York, USA

Franciscan Sisters of Peace, Haverstraw, New York, USA

Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, St. Bonaventure, New York, USA

Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, Garrison, NY, USA

Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, Brooklyn, NY, USA

Carmelite Sisters of Charity, Washington, DC, USA

Congregation of Christian Brothers, New Rochelle, NY, USA

Congregation of the Infant Jesus, Rockville Center, NY, USA

Congregation of St. Joseph, Brentwood, New York, USA

Congregation De Notre Dame, Ridgefield, CT. USA

Daughters of Divine Charity, Staten Island, NY, USA

Daughters of Wisdom, Islip, New York, USA

Holy Cross Brothers, New Rochelle, NY, USA

Little Sisters of the Assumption, New York, New York, USA

Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, New York, New York, USA

Paulist Fathers, Scarsdale, New York, USA

Redemptorist Fathers and Brothers, Esopus, New York, USA

Religious of Jesus and Mary, Highland Mills, New York, USA

Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. Louis, MO, USA

Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Tarrytown, New York

Religious Sisters of Mercy, Hartsdale, New York, USA

School Sisters of Notre Dame, Wilton, Conn, USA

Sisters of Charity, New York, New York, USA

Sisters of Divine Compassion, White Plains, NY, USA

Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Jamaica, New York, USA

Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, Monroe, Ct., USA

Sisters of Mercy, Brooklyn, New York, USA

Sisters of St. Agnes, Fond du Lac, WI, USA

Sisters of the Presentation of BVM, Newburgh, New York, USA

Sisters of the Presentation, Staten Island, New York, USA

Sisters Servants of Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, Pa, USA

Society of the Holy Child, Drexel Hill, PA, USA

Society of Jesus, New York, New York, USA

Society of St. Ursula, Rhinebeck, New York, USA

Ursulines of the Roman Union, Bronx, New York, USA

Dominican Province of St. Albert the Great, Chicago, IL USA