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Palais des Nations, Geneva

Dominicans for Justice and Peace and Dominican Leadership Conference, in conjunction with Franciscans International, express their serious concern about the gross and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Iraq.

Nearly two and a half years after the armed intervention by the coalition forces in the country, the Iraqi people remain victims of extreme violence and are deprived of their basic rights on an ongoing basis. The violence affects all sectors of the population, in particular the civil population and especially the most vulnerable in society. In addition to being a grave violation of the right to life, the insecurity that prevails is also an obstacle to the success of efforts for the reconstruction of the country and for ensuring respect and enjoyment of basic rights and freedoms.

A recent study reported that nearly 25,000 Iraqi civilians, police officers, and army recruits have been killed or wounded since the war began in March 2003. Hundreds of suicide car bombs have exploded over the past 18 months killing well over 2,000 people, mainly civilians. The US Defense Department reported that so far 14,181 US and Coalition forces have been killed or wounded in Iraq.

Access to health care and education is also threatened since hospitals and schools are often the targets of aggression and fighting. Our members who are involved in the fields of health and education in Iraq are seriously concerned about the consequences of such deprivations and violence not only for the present but also for the future of young Iraqis. The Iraqi people are regularly deprived of necessities such as gas and electricity. More seriously, the level of violence in Iraq generated by the lack of any effective state control is such that the daily life of all is in constant jeopardy.

Therefore, one of the major priorities of the new Iraqi authorities and the occupying forces remains the re-establishment of security in the country and the protection of the civilian population without regard for their community or religious affiliation.

In the present stage of the ongoing conflict, respect for the fundamental principles of the Geneva Conventions and international human rights law in general must be guaranteed if any significant advances are to be made. Other major long-term challenges facing Iraq are the re-establishment of the rule of law and putting an end to the high level of impunity.

In an editorial response the day after the July 19th killing of 3 Sunni Muslim members of the country's constitutional commission, the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* has decried the "tragic rhythm of horror" in Iraq. The newspaper observed that daily life in Iraq has been "tragically scarred by the latent violence that sows mourning and pain," *L'Osservatore Romano* wrote that the suicide bombings and frequent assassinations are tearing the fabric of society, and threatening to create a situation for which there is no effective solution. *L'Osservatore Romano* called for new political and diplomatic efforts by international leaders to curb the violence

Since the United Nations terminated the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Iraq at the end of the war in March 2003, there is no UN special procedure for monitoring the human rights situation in Iraq. More importantly, since the withdrawal of the United Nations from Iraq in August 2003 as a result of the tragic bombing of its Headquarters in Baghdad, there is no United Nations presence on the ground in Iraq to monitor violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We therefore strongly urge the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights to consider initiating a debate at this session on the urgent matter of the escalating human rights violations in Iraq. Also, in conformity with its mandate, the Sub-Commission should also consider bringing to the attention of the Commission on Human Rights, either in a communication or in the summary records of the session, the urgency of establishing at minimum a special procedure for monitoring the human rights situation in Iraq.