

Position Paper on Sanctions Against Iraq

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council opposes the disproportionate and indiscriminate economic sanctions against Iraq and has urged the Australian Government to reconsider its policy of supporting these sanctions and to instead work at the international level for the urgent lifting of the sanctions.

According to Catholic moral teaching, all coercive measures, whether military in nature or not, must observe the letter and the spirit of humanitarian law. As with other coercive measures, sanctions should not have indiscriminate or disproportionate effects on the civilian population. The suffering and premature deaths of untold numbers of children and rising numbers of maternal deaths in Iraq bear witness to the failure of the UN imposed sanctions to meet these criteria.

"Not far from [Bethlehem and Nazareth], 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 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."

**Pope John Paul II
Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 1998**

"The balance sheet of several years of sanctions against Iraq reveals a minimum of political dividends as against a high human price paid primarily by women and children. The food rationing system provides less than 60% of the required daily calorie intake, the water and sanitation systems are in a state of collapse, and there is a critical shortage of life-saving drugs."

The State of the World's Children 1996, UNICEF

"I can find no legitimate justification for sustaining economic sanctions under these circumstances. To do so in my view is to disregard the high principles of the United Nation's Charter, the Convention on Human Rights, the very moral leadership and the credibility of the United Nations itself."

**Denis Halliday
Former UN Assistant Secretary General and Humanitarian Relief Coordinator for Iraq**

"The surveys reveal that in the south and centre of Iraq - home to 85% of the country's population - under-five mortality more than doubled from 56 deaths per 1000 live births (1984 - 1989) to 131 deaths per 1000 live births (1994 - 1999). Likewise infant mortality - defined as the death of children in their first year - increased from 47 per 1000 live births to 108 per 1000 live births within the same time frame. The surveys indicate a maternal mortality ratio in the south and centre of 294 deaths per 100,000 live births over the ten year period."

1999 Iraq Child and Maternal Mortality Surveys by UNICEF

"The people of Iraq have suffered under a sanctions regime that is unrelentingly punitive of the people of Iraq who are hardly to blame for the actions of their government. The comprehensive application of an economic embargo in a manner that ignores the fundamental humanitarian needs and rights of 22 million people to basic health care, food and shelter is unacceptable. This is not new information. It has been amply documented by competent UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international non-government organisations that the majority of the Iraqi people are denied the bare level of sustenance that is necessary to live a life of human dignity. The World Council of Churches has consistently received reports over the past decade on the deteriorating conditions of the population, especially of children, from its member churches and the Middle East Council of Churches Ecumenical Relief Service in Iraq."

**Konrad Raiser
Secretary General of the World Council of Churches**

"The deteriorating nutritional status of children is reflective of events which are occurring in Iraqi society - lack of purchasing power and high prices for basic food items, poor water and sanitation quality, and high burden of infectious and parasitic diseases. Since 1991, shortly after the inception of the sanctions, the nutritional status of children in Baghdad has significantly deteriorated ... The deterioration in nutritional status of children is reflected in the significant increase of child mortality which has risen nearly fivefold since 1990."

Terminal Statement of the Technical Cooperation Programme Evaluation of the Food and Nutrition Situation in Iraq by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN, 1995

Why the ACSJC Opposes Sanctions Against Iraq

1. The fact that the leadership of Iraq has posed a threat to international peace and security and places obstacles in the path of restoring peace does not justify bringing the entire population to suffer because of the decisions of the leadership. Impunity of atrocities and crimes cannot be tolerated but justice demands that only the guilty be punished for their wrongdoing, and not the innocent. As Pope John Paul II said in his address to the Diplomatic Corp accredited to the Holy See on 10 January 1998 "The weak and the innocent cannot pay for mistakes for which they are not responsible".
2. As Archbishop Renato Martino, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations said in New York on 19 October 1999 when addressing the Second Committee of the 54th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on the use of sanctions: "The existing mechanism of economic sanctions causes only additional sufferings on the population in general and especially on members of vulnerable groups of the society, such as children, women, the sick and the elderly ... The measures imposed by [the United Nations] should not cause starvation or death to any single person anywhere in the world. Nor should an entire age group of children suffer from serious health damage or lack of schooling. Neither should the sick be deprived of due care and medicine. Provocation of such consequences is inhuman and immoral."

In fact, as the United Nations Publication *The State of the World's Children* noted in 1996: "The balance sheet of several years of sanctions against Iraq reveals a minimum of political dividends as against a high human price paid primarily by women and children. The food rationing system provided less than 60% of the required daily calorie intake, the water and sanitation systems are in a state of collapse, and there is a crucial shortage of life-saving drugs". In 1999 surveys of child and maternal mortality in Iraq conducted by UNICEF and the World Health Organization revealed that in the most populated parts of Iraq, children under five are dying at more than twice the rate they were ten years previously.

3. The primary aim of sanctions is not to punish, but rather to coerce the targeted government into a change of behaviour. As coercive, though non-military measures, sanctions must observe the letter and the spirit of humanitarian law. As with other coercive measures, they should not have indiscriminate or disproportionate effects on the civilian population. Sanctions should not destroy the ability of a people to attain the achievement of essential internationally recognised human development targets. Sanctions that damage the functioning of essential services, or inhibit their effective maintenance, cannot be justified.
4. Iraq has suffered under a rigid leadership; it has gone through the dangers and miseries of a conflict and finally has been brought to suffer under economic measures. This brings humiliation and exclusion to a population which is psychologically shaken and economically impoverished. By weakening the fabric of civil society, economic sanctions can delay the long-term possibility of establishing a democratic and participatory society in the targeted State.

This statement has been adapted from the Intervention by Archbishop Renato R. Martino, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations before the Second Committee of the 54th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on Item 99 (Sustainable Development and International Economic Cooperation), New York, 19 October 1999.

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) is the national social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia. It advises the Bishops on social justice issues in Australia and overseas; undertakes research and advocacy on such issues; educates the Catholic community about the Church's social justice teachings and their application; and facilitates the development of social justice networks within the Catholic Church in Australia.

The work of the ACSJC falls into three areas: building social justice networks; education and formation; and research, advocacy and public policy.

The ACSJC is made up primarily of lay people and its membership is drawn from each of the ecclesiastical provinces of Australia. The ACSJC is responsible to the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference (ACBC) through the ACSJC Chairman, who is also a member of the Bishops Committee for Justice, Development and Peace (BCJDP). Two other members of the BCJDP also sit on the ACSJC along with the BCJDP's executive Secretary who is an ex officio member of the ACSJC.

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Further Reading:

www.unicef.org for the latest UNICEF studies on Iraq
www.vatican.va for Papal statements and Holy See interventions at the United Nations
Colin Rowat, "UN Agency Reports on the Humanitarian Situation in Iraq" can be downloaded from www.cam.ac.uk/societies/casi
Transcripts of a number of speeches by Denis Halliday can be found at www.leb.net/IAC

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