

# The Link

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## THE CHILDREN OF IRAQ 1990-1997

By KATHLEEN KELLY

It is January 8, 1997. I am in a car driving from Baltimore to Washington, D.C. at 6:15 a.m. With me are Simon Harak, a Jesuit priest and theology professor, and Ardeth Platte and Carol Gilbert, Dominican sisters from Baltimore. We four will later meet Art Laffin, a Catholic lay worker, at the Senate Hart Office Building. Our plan is to enter the Senate confirmation hearings for Secretary of State nominee Madeline Albright.

Leslie Stahl went to Iraq for *60 Minutes*. On the program that aired May 12, 1996, she asked the United Nations Ambassador to explain U.S. policy in the context of the devastation she had seen among the children of Iraq. Ms. Albright responded:

"It's a hard decision, Leslie, but we think the price . . . is worth it."

We arrive two hours before the hearing. Already 30 people are in line. Tucked inside our coats are folded enlargements of pictures of Iraqi children I visited in August, 1996, children

whose sunken eyes plead for relief from starvation and disease.

The hearings begin and we hear mutterings that there is no room inside for members of the public. I feel disappointed and a bit silly, having raced from Chicago to D.C. on a moment's notice, apparently for naught. Much to our relief, after Secretary of State Warren Christopher is escorted out, the security guards allow the people in line to enter in groups of ten as the hearings proceed.

We are among the first 40 admitted. We have agreed beforehand that immediately after Ms. Albright concludes her remarks, we'll stand, one by one, to raise our pictures of the children and express our urgent concerns.

Ms. Albright stresses her commitment to universal human rights, but as regards Iraq she only affirms readiness to maintain a tough policy. As the applause subsides, I stand up.

"Ms. Albright," I call out,

"over one-half million Iraqi children have died because of U.S./U.N. sanctions. In May, 1996, you told *60 Minutes* that this was an acceptable price to pay in order to maintain U.S. interests in the region. Are you prepared to withdraw that dangerous statement?"

A security guard, Officer Goodine, is at my elbow. Senator Jesse Helms motions to him to remove me, but the young officer raises his hand politely as if to indicate "just a moment, let her finish," and he gently taps my arm. "These children are helpless victims," I call out again, moving into the aisle. "Ms. Albright, please, you could do so much good."

The officer leads me out as though he were ushering at the opera. Simon Harak is already on his feet, asking Ms. Albright if she would impose the same punishment on every other country that fails to comply with U.S. demands.

Ardeth, Carole and Art rise, in turn, to speak. After we are all escorted out, Ms. Albright

*Kathleen Kelly works with Voices in the Wilderness headquartered in Chicago.*

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## About This Issue

Usually I write this column right after I've read the author's manuscript. When I put Kathy Kelly's manuscript down, the words that stuck with me were those of the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Reportedly, when asked about the number of Iraqis who died in the Gulf War, the General replied, "Frankly, that number doesn't interest me."

Because it does interest us—and, we trust, most Americans—we asked an American who was in Iraq at the start of the war, and subsequently has made four trips back, to tell us what it's like over there. Particularly we wanted to know about the 4,500 Iraqi children who die each month of hunger and disease because of the embargo. That's right, 4,500 *each month* or *one every ten minutes*.

To put this in perspective, more Iraqi children have died as a result of our sanctions than the combined toll of two atomic bombs on Japan and the recent scourge of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. Kathy, it should be noted, is a pacifist. She's against all wars. But her article is about these children. And the legitimate question for all peoples of good will, pacifist or not, American or not, is whether the preventable deaths of over 600,000 children under 5 years of age is an appropriate sanction to levy on any country, anywhere, any time?

Readers who may wish to pursue this question with Kathy or to support a campaign to end the economic sanctions may contact her at Voices in the Wilderness, 1460 W. Carman Avenue, Chicago IL 60640; telephone 773-784-8065, fax: 773-784-8837; e-mail: <kkelly@lgc.apc.org>.

One of the best researched and most profoundly moving videos I have seen on the bombing and embargo of Iraq is "Children of the Cradle," produced in 1996 by the International Relief Association. Thanks to the generosity of one of our supporters, this 30-minute documentary is available to Link readers for the price of postage and handling. For details on ordering, please see page 16.

AMEU's complete Book & Video Catalog is found on pages 13-16.

**John F. Mahoney,**  
Executive Director

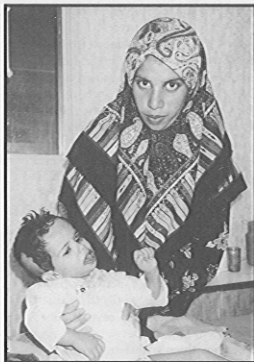


Kathleen Kelly

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—Photo by D. Justice



—Photo by R. McDowell

### Mothers at Their Children's Bedsides

(Left) At Saddam Pediatrics Hospital, Baghdad; (right) At Basrah Pediatrics Hospital.

*(Continued from page 1)*

addresses the committee: "I am as concerned about the children of Iraq as any person in this room. . . . Saddam Hussein is the one who has the fate of his country in his hands, and he is the one who is responsible for starving children, not the United States of America."

On January 10, 1997 we sent out a statement of our response, saying in part:

"Iraqi children are totally innocent of oil power politics. All those who prevent the lifting of sanctions, including Madeline Albright, are not. One line disclaimers of responsibility may appear suavely diplomatic, but the children are dead and we have seen them dying. According to the U.N. itself, they died as a direct result of the embargo on commerce with Iraq. Many United Nations members fa-

vored significantly easing these sanctions. The U.S. government and Madeline Albright as its spokesperson prevented that from happening. This economic embargo continues warfare against Iraq, a silent war in which only the weakest, most vulnerable and innocent non-combatant civilians—women, children and families—continue to suffer."

One year earlier, in a modest act of nonviolence, we wrote to U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno declaring our intent to deliberately violate the U.N./U.S. sanctions against the people of Iraq. We said we realized the possible penalties we faced, but that we hoped in her capacity as guardian of justice and in her concern for children, she would join us in demanding that the U.S. government lift the embargo against Iraq.

Four delegations traveled to Iraq in 1996 and more are prepared to go in 1997. Each group openly defies the sanctions by taking medical relief supplies directly to Iraqi children and families. Our trips create a drama which we hope will gain attention for the plight of Iraqi people, especially the children. Upon return, we "hit the ground running," with presentations in classrooms and community groups. We contact our legislators, send out mailings and try very hard to push the issue into the mainstream media.

In the meantime, 150 Iraqi children die every day. Sincere people debate whether the embargo is Saddam Hussein's to end or whether failed policy demands its termination by the institution that imposed it. And the death toll of the innocent only escalates. □

**I**t is January 16, 1997. With wind chill temperatures at minus 50, Chicagoans are braced for frigid weather. I arrive breathless but on time for a religious studies class at De Paul University, where my Kenyan friend, Dr. Teresia Hinga, teaches a class on conscience and moral choice-making. I feel awkward, pulling off boots, scarves, and several sweaters as the class members, bemused, listen to her introduction.

Teresia warmly welcomes me as a woman who went to Iraq during the Gulf War and helped establish a peace camp on the border between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. She tells them that I have returned to Iraq several times since then, at great personal risk, and she urges them to listen to what I have to say.

By now, I've spotted Dr. Almaney in the back of the classroom. I thank Teresia and then say how glad I am that someone who is actually from Iraq can be with us as well. Dr. Almaney teaches Business Management at De Paul. His kindly nod reassures me.

I tell the students a bit of personal background, hoping they can identify with me on some levels. A few heads nod, with wry smiles, when I describe the neighborhood where I grew up—a blue collar, not-quite-middle-class area on Chicago's southwest side. I was blessed in those years with the most profound sense of security. It seemed that mom, dad, the nuns, the parish priest and the corner patrol lady were bound together in a benign conspiracy to assure that the Kelly kids were well cared for. It was a warm, wonderful, uncomplicated world.

Then an incident occurred which revealed that my apparently safe neighborhood was, in truth, a crucible of racial and political conflict. My father and a neighbor were engrossed in television coverage of Martin

Luther King, who was walking arm in arm with open housing advocates in Chicago's Gage Park. Someone threw a brick at King, striking him in the head. Blood trickled down the side of his face. Our neighbor, normally a calm, reserved man, leapt off the couch and said, "The son of a bitch got what he deserved!" I was stunned and suddenly afraid, one of my first encounters with real fear.

The students seem attentive now. I quickly mention another key moment in my teen years when an English teacher showed us "Night and Fog," a haunting documentary film about the Nazi holocaust. I confess to the students that it would be another decade before I

catch the joke and smile mildly.

I tell them that finally, in my last year of graduate theology studies, I felt uneasy about my remoteness from the cares and concerns of the poor. I lived and studied in an academic ghetto where I seldom saw anyone who struggled with oppression.

What a relief it was, then, to begin volunteering at a soup kitchen in one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. The community of friends in Uptown gave life and substance to my childhood ideals about service, sharing and simplicity. I still live there, looking after my dad who, at age 80, needs full time care, and trying to follow in the footsteps of Gandhi, Day, King and so many other peacemakers.

Doing this has led me to prison and to several war zones. I mention that I spent a year in prison for planting corn on a nuclear missile silo site, and would like, some day, to tell them more about that. But today marks the sixth year since the Gulf War began, and I feel impelled to talk with them about moral choices in relation to that war.

I was in Iraq during the first 16 days of the Gulf War, one of 73 volunteers from 18 countries who formed the Gulf Peace Team. We intended to sit in the middle of a likely battlefield and call for an end to hostilities. I feel a glimmer of pride recalling that we succeeded in setting up an encampment in the desert almost exactly on the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia and near a U.S. military camp.

Author Daniel Berrigan, a Jesuit and human rights activist, once said that one of the reasons we don't have peace is because pacifists aren't willing to pay the price of peace. Soldiers are expected to sacrifice their lives in the name of war, but peacemakers often decline to take similar risks. The Gulf Peace Team was a diverse group, but I think almost every per-

## The Bombing War

would involve myself in public activism and resistance movements. Yet somehow, at a deep emotional level, I realized even then that I wanted to confront injustice rather than pretend to be an innocent, powerless bystander. I began, in those days, to read more about people I admired intensely for having taken risks for love and justice, people like Mahatma Gandhi, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King.

A glance at the clock prompts me to fast forward. I mention that I majored in theology, taught high school religion for two years and then earned a master's degree in theology—which thoroughly equips me to be a waitress. A few

son there was motivated by just the willingness that Berrigan spoke of, a readiness to pay the price of peace in order to witness against the war.

It's easy to describe the camp to students. We did the kinds of things you do when you go camping. We dug latrines, boiled our drinking water, and carefully conserved water. We had to ration our food, eventually reducing our meals to one per day. The camp was an abandoned bedouin way-station once used by pilgrims on their way to and from Mecca. We slept in huge tents with corrugated tin roofs. The nights were bitter cold, but daytime brought an intense sun. Communicating with each other took great patience because we came from so many different countries and walks of life. It took weeks for us to sort ourselves into affinity groups that allowed for at least some democratic process in decision making.

The night the war broke out, our team members took turns clustering around a tiny short-wave radio, anxious to know whether there would be a last-minute resolution to prevent the war. Military experts had predicted that the bombing would begin on a moonless night. That night, there was no moon. At about 2 a.m., word spread through the camp that the bombing had started.

"Weren't you scared?" blurts a woman sitting in front of me. I shake my head. "No, honestly, what I felt was the deepest dismay I've ever known. I remember that every dog in the region began barking when the U.S. and

allied war planes appeared overhead. Those dogs barked themselves hoarse. I felt that was the most appropriate response to the war. Bombers flew overhead every night, sometimes at five-minute intervals. And each one carried a devastating payload of bombs. I imagined there would be nothing left of Iraq."

On January 27, 1991, as the ground war loomed, the Iraqi government decided to evacuate us. They sent in a team of civilians to persuade us to pack quickly and accompany them to Baghdad. We were divided about whether to stay or to go. A hard argument ensued followed by a brief but moving demonstration by those who chose to stay but were forcibly removed.

By late afternoon, we were aboard buses traveling a road that was under constant bombardment. The buses swerved around huge bomb craters and we saw the

charred, smoking remains of not only oil tankers, but also an ambulance, a passenger bus and several civilian cars. Later I learned the Station Chief for CBS News had been attacked from the air while driving a tiny Toyota.

In Baghdad, we stayed for four days at the plush Al-Rashid hotel, which could offer no running water and was pitch dark because all electrical power had been knocked out. When a bomb exploded in a nearby parking lot, the Iraqi authorities, once again concerned about our safety, hurried the whole Gulf Peace Team onto buses and moved us to Amman, Jordan.

In Amman, a large press conference had been arranged for us. I was to speak for U.S. Gulf Peace Team participants, but I felt at a loss for words. "How can I begin?" I asked George Rumens, a British journalist and a member of our team. "Tell them," he said, "that when the war fever and hysteria subside, we believe the lasting and more appropriate responses to this war will be felt throughout the world, deepest remorse and regret for the suffering we've caused."

During the remainder of the war, we joined medical relief convoys that traveled the road from Amman to Baghdad. In accompanying the convoys, we hoped that the U.S. and British forces would refrain from targeting them out of reluctance to bomb citizens of their own countries.

After the war, Iraq agreed to let us enter the country with study

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### Let the Record Show . . .

- The international community has still failed to confront "the ethical question of whether suffering inflicted on vulnerable groups in the target country is a legitimate means of exerting pressure on political leaders whose behavior is unlikely to be affected by the plight of their subjects."—Former U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali, 1995.

- More than one million Iraqis have died—567,000 of them children—as a direct consequence of economic sanctions. . . . As many as 12% of the children surveyed in Baghdad are wasted, 28% stunted and 29% underweight.—United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), December, 1995.

- 4,500 children under age 5 are dying each month from hunger and disease.—United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), October 29, 1996.

- Since the onset of sanctions, there has been a six-fold increase in the mortality rate for children under five and the majority of the country's population has been on a semi-starvation diet.—World Health Organization (WHO), March, 1996.

- "In general, there has been an astonishing lack of public debate over the U.N.'s participation in this massive violation of human rights, and particularly child rights."—Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR, formerly known as the Harvard Study Team), which visited Iraq in April-May, 1996, with a team of 24 doctors, public health experts, economists, lawyers and health surveyors from eight countries.

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teams to document the combined effects of the war and economic sanctions. I stayed in the region for the next six months helping to organize medical relief and study teams.

U.S. aircraft alone had dropped 88,500 tons of explosives on Iraq, the equivalent of 7.5 Hiroshima nuclear blasts. Eighty percent of the so-called smart bombs missed their intended targets, falling sometimes on civilian dwellings, schools, churches, mosques or empty fields. But the 20 percent that blasted on target wiped out Iraq's electrical generating plants and sewage treatment networks. Iraq's infrastructure was systematically destroyed—bridges, roads and highways, canals, communication centers.

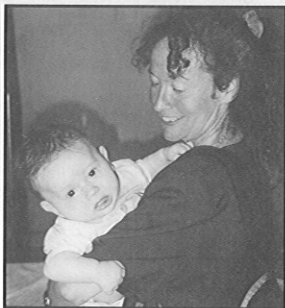
On February 12, 1991, the Allied assault on Iraq was at full throttle. As Christians throughout the world observed Ash Wednesday, Muslims marked the special 'Id al-Fitr feast. Families in a prosperous Baghdad neighborhood had decided to celebrate the 'Id despite the relentless bombing. They were to make use of the Ameriyah bomb shelter, the best Baghdad had to offer except for the shelter near the Al-Rashid Hotel.

As evening fell, the whole neighborhood gathered for a common meal, not unlike middle America's potluck suppers. After eating, the men left to make room in the shelter for as many women and children as possible, including refugees from other areas. Mothers, grandmothers, infants, children and teens hoped to sleep in safety during the blistering explosions.

That night, two U.S. "smart bombs" found the ventilation shafts of the Ameriyah shelter. The exit doors were sealed and the tempera-

ture inside rose to 900 degrees Fahrenheit. Of the estimated 500 to 1300 people in the shelter, all but 17 perished.

In March, 1991, a Red Crescent vehicle delivered four of us study team members to the Ameriyah neighborhood. Single family homes surrounded the cavernous remains of the shelter. Stretched across the brick facade of each house was a



Author Kathleen Kelly with Iraqi infant at the Basrah Pediatrics Hospital in August, 1996.—  
Photo by R. McDowell.

black banner bearing the names in graceful, white Arabic letters of the family members from the home who had died in the massacre.

Staring at the scene, I had begun to cry when I felt a tiny arm encircling my waist. A beautiful Iraqi child smiled up at me. "Welkom," she said.

Then I saw two women dressed in black cross the street. I thought surely they were coming to withdraw the children who now surrounded us. As they drew closer, I spoke the few Arabic words I knew: "*Ana Amrikyah, ana asifa*"—I'm

American and I'm sorry.

But they said, "*La, la, la*"—No, no, no. And they explained, "We know that you are not your government and that your people would never do this to us." Both the women had lost family members to the American bombs.

Never again in my lifetime do I expect to experience such forgiveness.

In retrospect, I wonder if they weren't better off without electricity. Wasn't it better for them never to hear on TV or radio what was being said, just then, in the United States? I wasn't there, but I was told about it later. I heard that college students hoisted beers to cheer the war on, shouting "Rock Iraq! Slam Saddam!" Soldiers sang out "Say hello to Allah!" when they rocketed Iraqi targets.

And then there were the unforgettable words of General Colin Powell. When asked about the number of Iraqis who died in the war, he replied: "Frankly, that number doesn't interest me."

The students shake their heads and feel troubled.

I hold up a poster bearing photos from my visit to the Ameriyah neighborhood and point to the little girl who welcomed me. I wonder, is she a teenager now? Did she survive the ongoing economic war? Is she lucky enough to get clean water and adequate food despite the merciless embargo that has created a veritable state of siege in Iraq?

My poster shows other Iraqi children, giggling and smiling. The headline says "Faces of War: The 'Enemy' in Baghdad." I stop to take a deep breath. I don't want to cry just now. The students might feel manipulated, although frustrated tears befit these memories.

I don't want these students to

cling to impressions that the Gulf War was a series of surgical strikes that, as modern wars go, was not too destructive. I want them to understand that when you destroy a nation's infrastructure and then cripple it further with punishing sanctions, the victims are always the society's most vulnerable people—the poor, the elderly, the sick, and most of all the children.

I tell them about Taha, a Palestinian driver who had braved dangerous desert treks along the Amman-Baghdad road to make repeated deliveries of Red Crescent humanitarian relief shipments to Iraq.

After the war, in mid-March, 1991, Taha drove our small study team back to Jordan. Along the road, we passed an isolated village. Suddenly a group of youngsters ran down an embankment toward our speeding vehicle. They stretched out their arms, touched their lips, then made the motion of forming chipatis, the bread of the poor. They were desperately hungry.

"We cannot stop," Taha said, blinking back tears. "Anyway we have nothing to give." The road had turned into a gauntlet, flanked with wave upon wave of child beggars. Taha shook with frustration, then finally heaved with sobs as we drove on through the desert.

I am pleading with the students now. I want to immunize them from the contagion of residual war hysteria, from the temptation to consolidate all of Iraq into one demonized figure, Iraq's President Saddam Hussein. There are so many stories I can tell about individual Iraqis who are courageous, hospitable, intelligent and kind. I decide to tell them about Tariq.

When Iraqi authorities in Baghdad opted to evacuate our team from the border encampment, the unenviable task of coordinating our removal fell to Tariq, a civilian with the Min-

istry of Culture. He had visited our camp several times before. He seemed genuinely fond of us, and was eager to understand why we had placed ourselves in such peril.

On January 27, 1991, he came to evacuate us for our own safety. Since this went against our original intention to interpose ourselves between the armies, we protested. Some submitted voluntarily to the Iraqis' insistence that we leave. Several veteran British activists and others sat down and held before them signs reading, "We Choose To Stay" in Arabic and English.

Tariq was baffled. I doubt that he had ever read much of Gandhi or Martin Luther King. Maybe he'd never heard of nonviolence. He asked me, "What am I to do?"

"Tariq," I answered, "Nobody here wants to harm you or disrespect you. They're just unable to board the buses voluntarily—it's a matter of conscience." He nodded, then walked away. Moments later I saw him walk up to Jeremy Hartigan, a gentle British barrister. He was seated cross-legged on the ground, holding his sign and softly singing, "We Shall Overcome."

Tariq bent over, kissed Jeremy on the forehead and pointed northward, saying "Baghdad!" Then he and several aides gently placed their hands under Hartigan—it reminded me of levitation games we played as children—and carried him aboard the bus. With solemn faces, they continued one by one with the others, carefully placing them on the buses.

Some 40 days of aerial bombardment intended, some say, to return Iraq to the Stone Age, was to be undone in lethal effects by the economic sanctions, which have been especially devastating to Iraq's children.

I show the class a poster made

from photos our delegation took in August, 1996—haunting pictures of emaciated children, infants who look like old men, hairless and skeletal. I remember cradling the fragile body of one of the children and wondering if I were interrupting the final hours together for the mother and her child.

A student poses a thoughtful question: "What can you tell us about what Iraqi people think?" Teresa's eyes light up as she nods toward our guest, Dr. Almaney. The young man continues, "I mean, they must want things to change. Why aren't they taking steps?"

Dr. Almaney asks students to understand that while Iraqis are very unhappy over their present conditions, it is not so easy for them to make a change. First of all, freedom of speech is not so readily enjoyed in Iraq as it might be in other countries. When families are worried about where their next meal will come from, they are not so likely to involve themselves in organizing political movements. What's more, because of sanctions, almost every family in Iraq directly depends on government rationing to get whatever meager food supplies they have.

Dr. Almaney said many Iraqis have good reason to fear that if Saddam Hussein's regime lost power, the country could sink into a bloody civil war, one which could be exacerbated by hostile neighbors. The students listen intently as he presents his points earnestly in a dignified, professional manner.

There is only a little time left for questions. At first, the room is quiet. A student raises his hand. "When the Gulf War started, wasn't everyone pretty convinced that Iraq was a real dangerous country that had to be stopped?"

This, of course, is the central

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## Faces of Iraq

Clockwise from left: (1) An orphan girl in Baghdad poses with a giant stuffed toy. (2) Surviving twin, the sibling dead because there was blood for only one transfusion, struggles for life. (3) The only food in a day for some Iraqis is distributed from soup kitchens operated by mosques, where the hungry wait for long hours to receive a soup ration of rice, water, herbs and, occasionally, lamb. (4) A shrine to children who were killed when coalition forces struck the Amerijah civilian bomb shelter in Baghdad.—Photos by Dianne Judice.



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question for many people who struggle with mind and conscience over when, if ever, war is justified. From my pacifist perspective, the answer seems clear—war is an absolute evil. But that response is clearly inadequate, and even unnecessary if I can convey the reality of what my colleagues and I have seen in Iraq.

I can speak at first hand of the horror of the war itself and the human devastation wrought by “smart bombs” that could not distinguish between soldier and civilian, warmonger or pacifist, adult or child. But I wish Brad Simpson, a graduate student in history at Northwestern, were at my side to tell of the Gulf War that has never ended, the U.N./U.S. sanctions against Iraq, perhaps the most comprehensive collective punishment of a single nation in history.

In Brad’s own words: “Nothing

could prepare me for the overwhelming suffering I witnessed. When one scratches beneath the surface, Iraq is literally dying under the weight of the embargo. Malnutrition is epidemic, reaching 50 to 60 per cent of the population outside Baghdad.

“Hospitals have set up malnutrition wards to handle the flood of victims, but wholly lack the medicine and supplies to treat patients. In Iraq’s leading children’s hospital, doctors report having only 10 per cent of the chemotherapy drugs needed to treat childhood cancer victims, whose numbers have increased five-fold since 1991.

“More than half the country lacks potable water, and much of what the poor routinely drink is infected with cholera, typhoid and E. coli bacteria, leaving malnourished children vulnerable to dis-

ease. In Basrah, a sewage pumping station broken for four years has left the Hai Hussein neighborhood a lake of raw sewage, a cesspool of disease and potential epidemic, through which barefoot children walked.”

The period is nearly over. I wonder if I’ve been convincing. It is not necessary to condemn all war, as I do, to critically examine the “bombing” and “silent” wars against Iraq. The evidence is in, much of it, like the number of children’s deaths, statistically certified by the United Nations itself, and much of it emerging in a growing body of eyewitness testimony like my own.

My audience files out, some offering help if it’s needed, most murmuring a word of appreciation. These students—indeed everyone—can make a reasoned judgment by looking at the record: *Have the ends justified the means? Should sanctions continue?* □



It's August 10, 1996, a sweltering day in southern Iraq during one of the hottest summers on record. I sink onto my bed at the Basrah Towers Hotel, grateful for the fan overhead and the promise of slightly less intense heat as evening falls. I don't feel particularly tired, but my companions insisted I take a break because I fainted after visiting the Basrah Pediatrics and Gynecology Hospital.

Dr. Tarik Hasim Habeh, the young director of residents, had taken us through several children's wards. Infant after infant lay wasting and skeletal in squalid conditions. We saw children suffering severe malnutrition, respiratory diseases, leukemia, and kidney disease. In one room, 14 incubators were stacked against the wall, useless for lack of repair parts. The blood bank consisted of one miniature refrigerator and an ancient centrifuge.

Dr. Habeh explains that the hospital is chronically short-staffed. Doctors can't earn enough to feed their families, sometimes no more than \$3 per month, so some work instead as taxi drivers, street vendors or waiters. Many nurses also find it impossible to continue the work for which they were trained.

Absent hospital staff to minister to their children, mothers are at their bedsides around the clock, arranging as best they can for the care of other children left at home. Dr. Habeh spoke about how demoralizing it is, salaries notwithstanding, to practice medicine without the proper tools and lacking medication.

"The only difference between me and the patient is the white coat," he said with a sad shrug as he left the bedside of a child likely to die of a respiratory infection that antibiotics would cure.

The temperature in Basrah today is 140 degrees. Under these condi-

tions, one should drink at least a gallon of water a day. Because sanctions bar chlorine used for water purification, even most bottled water, for the few who can afford it, is contaminated. At the water ministry, officials showed us rusted pipe sections with large holes that allow contaminants to leak into Basrah's drinking water.

I reach for the bottled water that Father Kassab gave us. "Drink this," he said, "and mark your bottles. We call this sweet water, water from Baghdad. I can tell you that if you drink the other bottled water here it will make you very sick." I think of the desperately ill

## The Silent War

children I met earlier today, and put the bottle aside. And my thoughts return to Fr. Kassab.

I first encountered him at Sacred Heart parish in Baghdad. Iraqi friends in Chicago had given me his number and when I called him in March, 1996, on my first day in Baghdad, he invited me to visit that same day. He was sweeping the courtyard when I arrived. He and a few helpers were preparing for a weekly distribution of lentils, rice, sugar and tea which his parish gave to the nearby needy.

Later, in his office, he read descriptions of our campaign. "That's good," he stated, "keep doing just what you are doing. You challenge this embargo. But we are a proud

people and we don't want handouts—we just want to be able to work again and we can take care of ourselves."

In August, 1996, I returned to Baghdad with a second Voices in the Wilderness delegation. Fr. Kassab was no longer in Baghdad, having been appointed Archbishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Basrah and Nasiriyeh, located in southern Iraq. This was good news because we hoped to visit Basrah and needed a contact.

Two days later, we sat with Fr. Kassab in his modest office. I introduced my friends. Then I told him I felt relieved that he had encouraged us to simply work toward ending the embargo since we really had only a pittance of medical relief supplies to offer.

"No, I have completely changed my mind." Archbishop Kassab was characteristically emphatic. "Now, after three months here, I must say yes to handouts. We'll take anything we can get. That's how critical the reality is."

Basrah is Iraq's third largest city. Before the long years of the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War and the six-year siege of sanctions, it was a thriving oil port. Now, of 300 families interviewed by Archbishop Kassab, only 45 have at least one working family member. Unwillingly idle, frustrated and humiliated, Basrans trudge through streets fouled with sewage and bordered with piles of human waste. The piles, five to six feet tall, are left to dry, spaced every thirty feet. Adults negotiate residential sidewalks with care, stepping over human feces, and wastewater spills from the streets into nearby homes.

Meanwhile, amidst it all, smiling children, totally innocent victims of the silent war, rush forth to pose for our cameras. □

**I** sit in my living room surrounded by some of the finest people in the world. It is January 18, 1997, six years since the Gulf War began and one year since a handful of us initiated "Voices in the Wilderness," a campaign to end the U.S./U.N. sanctions against Iraq.

Four of our delegations have gone to Iraq carrying nearly \$60,000 worth of medical supplies. We are on notice from the U.S. Treasury Department that by failing to receive explicit authorization for our travel and humanitarian cargo, we risk 12 years in jail and \$1-million in fines. On moral grounds, we won't acknowledge a veto power over our taking medical supplies, medicine and solace to fellow human beings in dire need. On practical grounds, we cannot accept months of bureaucratic delay for a superfluous stamp of approval.

I again recall George Rumens's assurance that when the war hysteria subsided, the lasting response to the war would be deepest regret and remorse for the suffering we've caused. In many places his words have been borne out. We find ourselves heard in classrooms and community centers. Our views find expression in small town papers and radio stations. Consistently, a more sober response grows. "We didn't know. We didn't realize."

Now we want to harvest the results of our first year of campaign work and carefully strategize our next steps. We've spent most of the day together, informally evaluating, brainstorming and reminiscing. We go over our pictures.

Pictures are crucial for our outreach and education. Most of the photos come from the main hospital in Basrah and the Qadissiya Hospital on the outskirts of Baghdad. During an August, 1996, visit to the Qadissiya hospital, I was determined to identify some of the women and children we met, and to record details about their

plight. What a grim necessity. Rick McDowell, a carpenter from Akron, Ohio, and I teamed up to photograph mothers and children and then, with a translator, question the weary mothers. How old are you? And your child? From what does your child suffer, and for how long? Do you have other children? Who cares for them now?

And so the stories emerge. Ana Anba is 27 years old. She is glassy-eyed, exhausted, on the verge of tears. For 11 days she has been at the bedside of her 9-year-old son, Ali. He is listless, barely conscious. Ana has purchased thousands of dinars of medicine since he became ill months ago with a respiratory

infection. There's been no improvement. She wonders now if the medicine she bought on the black market was outdated. Or perhaps it was not what he really needed.

fers from septicemia, a blood infection. The doctors tell us that the pale, gasping infant is near death. Before coming to the hospital, his parents sold their television set and other pieces of furniture to buy expensive medicines. "Nothing works," sighs his mother. "Since 10 days he has been here." Yusuf's father makes a fist and points to his arm, telling us he's already donated all the blood he can for transfusions.

The Asads, a family of four, share their home with 21 other persons. They survive on a daily diet of a souplike mixture of tomatoes and oil that they eat with bread. The father, 34, is a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war, and spent one year in an Iranian prison. We asked if there was a message we should carry back to the U.S.

"Look at this child," he said, "and you can decide." Hoping it will make a difference, we take Yusuf's picture.

Along with notes and photos, we also pool the personal requests we received—notes slipped into our hands begging for particular medicines. Even government workers in cabinet level offices asked us for aspirins, eye drops, children's vitamins and other over-the-counter items easily acquired in this country.

Our agenda is long and the tasks ahead seem daunting. Primarily, we need to find ways to dramatize our confrontation with the U.S./U.N. sanctions. The best way forward seems to be that of continuing our present effort to bring medical relief supplies to people in Iraq, in open and public violation of the sanctions.

Bob Bossie, a Catholic priest from Chicago, who traveled to Iraq twice in 1996 and was part of the Gulf Peace Team, speaks somberly. "The oil-for-food deal passed under Resolution 986 gives the impression to many peo-

## Regret and Remorse

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We tell her that we hope her story will help awaken parents and families in the U.S. "When?" she asks with sharp insistence. The interpreter tries to gloss over her obvious anger. "She is frustrated and tired from six years of sanctions." Ana interrupts sharply. "In America, would women want this for their children?" Then she turns to Ali and whispers softly, "It is for the children that we ask an end to this suffering, not for us."

Yusuf Asad, 7 months old, suf-

ple, even some of our supporters, that it will eliminate human suffering in Iraq. Really it's just a slower form of death."

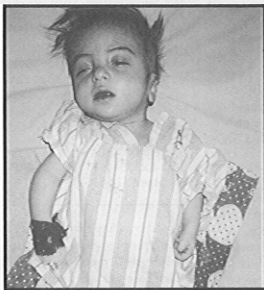
Chuck Quilty, a social worker from Rock Island, Illinois, quotes primary source material. "This article says Resolution 986 will make more food available, but it will be merely better quality and quantity of the same staples they now get. Iraqis still won't get meat, eggs, milk and other necessary ingredients of their diet. After funds are subtracted for reparations, U.N. surveillance and the Kurds, they will receive less than 25 cents per person per day. And these meager funds do nothing to address the restoration of infrastructure vital to public health—the water and sewage systems and the medical sector."

Would it help, we wonder, to involve Gulf War veterans in our delegations? In July, 1996, the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses held a public hearing in Chicago. I applied to speak to them on behalf of Iraqi children and was quite surprised to learn that I was allotted ten minutes, the same time given to veterans who had served in the Gulf.

Every veteran who spoke to the commission became so overcome with emotion that at some point he or she wept or halted their testimony to regain composure. They were painfully burdened physically, psychologically, or both, and some suspected their wartime service in the Gulf had led to family members' health problems. Clearly something happened to these men and women while they were in the Persian Gulf, and the government responsible for placing them there has been largely unresponsive.

One of the veterans testified to having been near a chemical weapons depot blown up by the U.S. military,

and to have undergone other traumas while serving in the Gulf War and following his return to the U.S. A physician responded that, "You seem to have a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time," words of little comfort to the distraught soldier. Later, during my testimony, I had the doctor's comment in mind: "Surely we can't conclude that 567,000 Iraqi children



Yusuf Asad's parents sold household furnishings to buy medicine to treat his blood infection. Treatment was proving ineffective when this photo was taken in August, 1996, and Yusuf's father was no longer able to give blood for transfusions.—Photo by R. McDowell.

were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time."

One cause of widespread anxiety is depleted uranium (DU), a subject which has stirred public debate and generated official military studies because of DU's toxic and radioactive effects on humans.

In metal form, DU is one of the densest materials known to man. As a byproduct of the process to produce enriched uranium for reactors around the world, DU accumulates in huge stockpiles with few recycling opportunities to diminish

the disposal problem. To the U.S. military, DU has the double appeal of "improving" weaponry while eating into the DU stockpile.

But DU-tipped munitions had never been used in warfare before U.S. and British forces employed them in Iraq. Particles and fragments of DU, more than 300 tons of such debris by the most conservative military estimates, remain scattered across Gulf war battlefields. The consequences of ingesting DU particulate from the air or contaminated water supplies can be compared to the serious health hazards associated with lead, which is—like uranium—a toxic heavy metal.

Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark sees a link between DU and complaints registered by "Gulf Syndrome" veterans. "Of the 697,000 U.S. troops who served in the Gulf, over 90,000 have reported medical problems," said Clark in a speech delivered September 12, 1996, at a conference in New York on Depleted Uranium. "Symptoms include respiratory, liver and kidney dysfunction, memory loss, headaches, fever, low blood pressure.

"There are birth defects among their newborn children," Clark continued. "DU is a leading suspect for a portion of these ailments. The effects on the population living in Iraq are even greater."

American veterans of the recent war, should they choose to return to Iraq in "peace time," would be disturbed to learn about the higher incidences of congenital disease and fetal deformities in children under 5 and in the children of Iraq's Gulf War veterans. If the cause is DU, an exposure not limited to the Iraqis themselves, Ana Anba's anguished whisper may be heard in the world beyond Iraq: "It is for the children that we ask an end to this suffering, not for us." □

## Bricks for Bread

The Iraqi Dinar (ID) has been rendered nearly worthless due to high inflation. During our visit to Iraq in August, 1996, we saw exchanges of 2,300 ID for \$1. Before August, 1990, \$1 was worth one-third of an ID.

In 1995, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, issued a report evaluating food and nutrition in Iraq, a situation which has deteriorated further in the months since. The report stated: "Many have been selling household and personal effects to buy food. People in collective villages in the north were seen selling bricks and other materials by pulling down their houses. Thus, the people have been squeezed into a precarious position by a combination of hyperinflation and collapse of household incomes. As a consequence, the number of beggars and street children have increased enormously."

Commenting on inflation, FAO reported that wheat flour in August, 1995, was 11,677 times higher (1.16 million per cent) than in July, 1990, and 33 times greater than in June, 1993. For several other common staples, increases of 4,000 to 5,000 times were experienced since July, 1990. "On the other hand, incomes have virtually collapsed for the majority (70 per cent) of the people." The recently approved oil sales will bring scant comfort. According to the World Health Program, current food rations provide 1,200 calories per day, which will increase to 2,030 calories—well below the recommended 2,800 calories per person.

Later, I spoke with doctors who earned \$3 per month. "It is not enough for one can of milk for my own child," said one pediatrician. "What does the U.S. gain from our misery?"

A government worker who acted as our guide and earned \$3.50 per month, explained that he and his wife and five children lived in a one room home. He begged us for vitamins for his youngest child whose growth is severely stunted.

Coping with hyperinflation has become an everyday routine for Iraqis, but newcomers to the scene are appalled. Soon after my arrival in Baghdad in March, 1996, I went to St. Raphael hospital to deliver a substantial sum of money

## The Teddy Bear Connection

I have long admired the work of others who have gone to Iraq to take relief to suffering civilians. Dianne Judice, a pediatric nurse from Los Angeles, has been in Iraq 16 times since the war to take medicine, milk, and her special brand of tender loving care.

But the unique trademark of her humanitarian visits are teddy bears, which the U.S. government initially refused to authorize. Typically resourceful, Ms. Judice turned to child psychologists for their expert opinions. Their affidavits, testifying to the comforting, medicinal effects of teddy bears on children, melted an icy bureaucracy. Ms. Judice vows she will not rest until every child in Iraq has a teddy bear to hug. To date, she has reached 10,000 children.

Readers wishing to assist the Teddy Bears for Iraq project can contact Ms. Judice at 11611 Darlington Ave., #5, Los Angeles, CA 90049, telephone 310-826-0399.



raised by Dominican Sisters in the U.S. for the hospital's clinic for poor people. Sister Marianne, the administrator, then helped me schedule a meeting with Monsignor Delli, Archbishop of the Chaldean Christian Church.

As I was leaving, she handed me a plastic shopping bag full of bundled Iraqi dinars. I was surprised. Was the money I'd just given her going immediately to the Archbishop? "Is this for Msgr. Delli?" I asked? "Mais, no!" Sister cocked her head and smiled. "You give this to the cab driver."

## Conferences on Jerusalem

Two conferences on Jerusalem will be held in Washington, D.C., in June.

**Thursday, June 5:** "The Future of Arab Christians and Christianity in Jerusalem," hosted by The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. Invited speakers include: Karen Armstrong, Hanan Ashrawi, Naim Ateek, David Jaeger and Jonathan Kuttub, with Mumtaz Ahmad and Rosemary Reuther as invited respondents. Open to scholars and the general public. Contact Pat Gordon at telephone 202-687-8211 or fax 212-687-8376.

**Thursday evening, June 5, and all day Friday, June 6:** "Jerusalem: The Things That Make For Peace: An Agenda for American Christians," to be held at the National Presbyterian Church. Sponsored by Friends of Sabeel—North America. Speakers include: Yvonne Haddad, Rashid Khalidi, Sara Roy, Elias Chacour, Jean Zaru and Mark Ellis. Contact Friends of Sabeel—North America at telephone 313-665-5773 (evenings).

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