



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2003/NGO/56
28 February 2003

ENGLISH, FRENCH AND
SPANISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-ninth session
Item 12 and 13 of the provisional agenda

INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN
AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement* submitted by MADRE Inc. a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2003]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

MADRE, Inc. is an international women's human rights organization that works in partnership with community-based women's organizations in conflict areas worldwide to address issues of sustainable development, community improvement and women's health; violence and war; discrimination and racism; self-determination and collective rights; women's leadership development; and human rights education.

"... there will be a large segment of the population requiring treatment for traumatic injuries ... as many as 500,000 could require treatment to a greater or lesser degree as a result of direct or indirect injuries," (Para 23, UN report on the humanitarian disaster expected from a war against Iraq, December 10, 2002).

The above-quoted report, issued by United Nations planners in anticipation of a US-led military strike against Iraq clearly outlines some of the disastrous humanitarian consequences of a bombing campaign. While most of the world's attention is focused on the diplomatic and political dimensions of the current crisis, MADRE, an international women's human rights organization, asks the members of the Commission on Human Rights to consider the impact of war on ordinary women and families in Iraq. In particular, we ask that, in accordance with Items Twelve and Thirteen of the Provisional Agenda for this, the fifty-ninth Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Commission consider the impact of war on the human rights of women (Item 12) and on the rights of the child (Item 13).

Violations of Social and Economic Rights: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services," (Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

The Bush Administration has plans to bomb Baghdad, a city of five million people. This would cause a humanitarian catastrophe equivalent to a heavy air bombardment of Santiago, Chile; Los Angeles, California; or Sydney, Australia. A report issued on November 12, 2002 by the global health organization Medact estimates that at least 50,000 civilians are likely to be killed by a US-led attack.¹ Many more civilians are likely to die from longer-term effects of a bombing, including environmental damage and the destruction of food supplies, agriculture and critical infrastructure, such as pharmaceutical plants and hospitals.

¹ "Collateral Damage: The Health and Economic Costs of War on Iraq," <http://www.medact.org>, November 2002.

Iraq has already been subjected to 12 years of United Nations sanctions, rendering the population even more vulnerable than it was at the onset of the 1991 Gulf War. According to UNICEF and the World Health Organization, sanctions have resulted in the deaths of more than one million people to date.² Nearly 60 percent of the dead are children under the age of seven, most of whom died from starvation and preventable disease.

The number one killer of Iraqi children is dehydration from diarrhea caused by water-borne illnesses, on the rise since the US bombed the electricity grids that powered Iraq's water treatment plants. Sanctions have prevented Iraq from importing replacement parts or chemicals needed to treat water.³

Renewed bombing constitutes an added threat to Iraq's water supply. United Nations planners estimate that 39 percent of the population will need to be provided with potable water in the event of airstrikes on electricity grids [para 28] (December 10, 2002 UN Report). Returning from Baghdad in January 2003, former United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Denis Halliday, reported that, "people who can afford it are hoarding bottled water. The government is drilling water wells. I can find no preventive arrangements for healthcare of young children after the expected collapse of electricity, water and sewage treatment as happened in 1991. No shots for cholera, typhoid and other various waterborne diseases that will likely break out if the US bombs electrical and water facilities as it did in 1991."⁴ Indeed, cholera, typhoid and epidemic levels of malaria – diseases not seen in Iraq for decades – have reemerged since the 1991 bombings. Today, Iraq's entire public health sector is nearing collapse from a lack of basic medicines and supplies.

In their December 10, 2002 report, United Nations planners estimated that, "the nutritional status of some 3.03 million persons countrywide will be dire ... This consists of 2.03 million severely and moderately malnourished children under five and one million pregnant and lactating women" [para 27]. As a consequence of sanctions, over 60 percent of the Iraqi population is dependent on the receipt of a monthly food basket from the government. Aid officials warn that the distribution of food rations is almost certain to be disrupted by a bombing campaign.

Iraqis are fearful that the US will bomb food facilities as it did in Iraq in 1991 and in Afghanistan in 2001. UNICEF's Iraq Program Coordinator has stated that, "Iraq is already in crisis. The capacity for withstanding shortages is very light. Malnourished children and pregnant women have suffered the most [under United Nations-imposed economic sanctions] and those are the ones who will suffer the most during war, that's clear."⁵

² Reporting on the 1991 US bombing of Iraq, the *Washington Post* wrote, "The worst civilian suffering, senior officers say, has resulted not from bombs that went astray but from precision-guided weapons that hit exactly where they were aimed – at electrical plants, oil refineries and transportation networks," "Allied Air War Struck Broadly in Iraq; Officials Acknowledge Strategy Went Beyond Purely Military Targets," *Washington Post*, June 23, 1991.

³ A 1991 US Defense Intelligence Agency document observed that massive civilian suffering was a known outcome of US policy. Predicting the combined impact of bombing and sanctions, the report states, "Incidences of disease, including possible epidemics, will become probable...". "Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities," January 22, 1991.

⁴ Institute for Public Accuracy, January 7, 2003.

⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 8, 2003.

The public health catastrophe of depleted uranium

It is estimated that between 300 and 800 tons of depleted uranium (a waste product resulting from the process of uranium enrichment for bombs) were dropped on Iraq in 1991, most of it in the southern region of Basra. Nobel Peace Prize nominee Dr. Helen Caldicott recently reported that, “pediatricians in the Iraqi city of Basra report an increase of six to 12 times in the incidence of childhood leukemia and cancer. Yet because of the sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United States and the United Nations, they have no access to antibiotics, chemotherapeutic drugs or effective radiation machines to treat their patients. The incidence of congenital malformations has doubled in the exposed populations in Iraq where these weapons were used. Among them are babies being born with only one eye and with an encephaly – the absence of a brain.”⁶

War on Civilians, War on Women and Children

As a leading international women’s organization working to defend and promote the human rights of women in conflict zones around the world, MADRE has long been aware of the distinct and often disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls. In accordance with their universally assigned role as caretakers, women are primarily responsible for those made most vulnerable by war – children, the sick and elderly – and for maintaining families and households. When bombs destroy homes, hospitals, schools and food markets, people’s basic needs do not disappear. In fact, they intensify and it is left to women to meet the tremendous needs generated by the sharp rise in trauma, disability, disease and homelessness that are the known outcomes of war.

US-led bombing and sanctions have already caused great hardship for Iraqi women, who must intensify their work hauling water, processing food and providing health care, day care and many other services formerly provided by the state. Moreover, gender discrimination means that when resources such as jobs, medical treatment and food are made scarce, the needs of girls and women are sacrificed first.

Meaningful action on the part of the Commission is imperative in order to protect the human rights of Iraqi civilians threatened by a military attack against their country. MADRE calls on the Commission to:

- Uphold the international laws listed in Appendix A that protect the rights of Iraqi civilians and hold accountable all countries, including the United States, to complying with international human rights instruments.
- Demand that UN Member States provide adequate financial resources to protect the lives and human rights of Iraqi civilians.
- Review and revise the United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq, considering the humanitarian impact of these sanctions, as outlined above and by the World Health Organization.

⁶ *Baltimore Sun*, October 6, 2002.

Appendix A

International instruments violated by United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq and by the use of military force against a civilian population:

Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Convention (1977)

1. Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited.
2. It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless objects indispensable to the agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Article 14, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

Constitution of the World Health Organization (1946)

The enjoyment of the highest standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic, or social condition.

International Conference on Nutrition, World Declaration on Nutrition, FAO/WHO (1992)

We recognize that access to nutritionally adequate and safe food is a right of each individual. We affirm...that food must not be used as a tool for political pressure.

Appendix B

A sample of the hundreds of items that Iraq is forbidden to import under the sanctions regime:

Ambulances
Batteries
Children's wear
Computers and computer supplies
Electric cords
Eyeglasses
Films
Hearing Aids
Microscopes
Plastics
Bottles
Soap
Toilet paper
Ventilators
Water pumps
Toothbrushes
Thermometers
Sponges
