

THE IMPACT OF UN SANCTIONS ON THE CHILDREN IN IRAQ

Dominicans for Justice and Peace

A DECADE OF DOMINICAN PRESENCE AT THE UNITED NATIONS IN GENEVA 1996 - 2006

THE UNITED NATIONS AT A CHALLENGING PERIOD

The Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), Dominicans for Justice and Peace, was one of the NGOs at the 1996 United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva that raised the issue of UN sanctions and their destructive effect on children in Iraq. The Dominican's public interventions prompted member states to debate the issue in public at the UN Commission.

In 1996, an organization of world leaders led by **former U.S. Attorney General, Ramsey Clark**, declared sanctions as war. Ramsey Clark described the sanctions as the most brutal form of war because they punish an entire population, targeting children, and the future, most of all. Sanctions are a weapon of mass destruction. Since sanctions were imposed on Iraq, half a million children under the age of five had died of malnutrition and preventable diseases. Sanctions impose artificial famine. A third of Iraq's surviving children were left with stunted growth and nutritional deficiencies that will deform their shortened lives. [**The impact of sanctions on Iraq; the children are dying. Reports by UN Food and Agriculture Organization; Ramsey Clark; Published in 1996 by World View Forum, Inc. New York (with permission).**

The impact of UN Sanctions on Iraq in the nineties was disastrous for the Iraqi population, especially for the children who were targeted and it was also seen as one of the lowest periods of the United Nations. To this day the use of sanctions by the United Nations remains an issue in the world to such a point that the UN, USA and other countries need to come to grips with them for the purpose of ending them. The UN needs to look again at sanctions and seriously promote ending the use of sanctions as a weapon of war...worldwide.

New York Times INTERNATIONAL, Sunday, March 10, 2013

“In the aftermath of North Korea’s third nuclear test in February, last week China joined the United States to push for tougher United Nations Sanctions against the North. Although it remained to be seen whether China would actually enforce the sanctions, its decision to support them also raised the possibility that it might take even bolder steps against its recalcitrant ally.

China backed the new sanctions in the hope that they would be sufficient to encourage North Korea to return to the negotiating table to discuss denuclearization but not so hard that they would cause the North’s collapse. This does not augur well when one refers to the sanctions that the UN had adopted against Iraq in the nineties.”

On Monday, March 11, 2013, Amnesty International released an 89 page comprehensive report

indicating that Iraq remains “enmeshed in a grim cycle of human rights abuses”, from the March invasion 2003 to 2010. (**Toronto Star, Monday, March 11, 2013 page A12.**)

UN Sanctions against Iraq devastated the country

The UN Sanctions against Iraq in the nineties were devastating from the beginning and they caused lasting effects on thousands of children without providing them with the much-needed help they required as a follow-up to their situation. It is also recognized that the sanctions are the most brutal forms of war since they punish entire populations, targeting children, destroying the future of the people and most of all depriving them of a sense of a future life as families. It is said also that one third of Iraq's surviving children now live now in growth and with nutritional deficiencies that will deform their “shortened” lives.

An International Appeal to the United States government and the Security Council of the United Nations (1996) : Ramsay Clark

At the time, Ramsay Clark described the situation as economic sanctions and blockades applied as the weapon of choice by the United States and by the Security Council using weapons of mass destruction directed at a whole people.

These blockades have been used only against poor countries, and while the entire population is punished by their economic impact, the greatest harm is overwhelmingly on the poorest and the weakest---infants, children, the chronically ill and the elderly.

There is no greater violation of fundamental human rights than the sanctions policy. The case of Iraq has demonstrated that if the U.S. and their allies had not finally put a stop to the deliberate creation of a new zone of death and destitution, with thousands of deaths monthly, dehydration, organ failure, and pain without relief, permanent physical or mental disability, and generalized shortening of life, it would have meant the complete disappearance of a people.

All humanitarian law from its inception has endeavored to limit violence to combatants, to prevent the use of cruel and unfocused weapons, to protect citizens from the scourge of war, and to outlaw the principle of collective punishment. The sanctions policy is clearly a “Crime Against Humanity” as defined under the terms of the Nuremberg Principles. It also clearly violates the Charter of the United Nations, the Geneva Convention and other fundamental documents of contemporary international law.

The above International Appeal was drafted by **Ramsay Clark** and introduced by the International Commission of Inquiry on Economic Sanctions. It was submitted to the UN Security Council session that had taken up the continuation of sanctions.

‘A new form of violence’
Ramsey Clark (1996)
Former U.S. Attorney General

Five years ago today on January 20, 1996, Iraq was being subjected to a new form of violence that hadn't been experienced on this planet.

It could not see the enemy, perhaps for vapor trails. It could not reach the enemy, but it was being subjected to devastating bombardment from abroad. One hundred and ten thousand aerial sorties in forty-two days by the United States alone. That's one every thirty seconds. In an admission against interest, the Pentagon said U.S. aircraft alone dropped the equivalent of 7.5 Hiroshimas---88,500 tons of explosives

It was said that about 7 percent were directed---with great accuracy and accurate enough to hit pretty close. You would not want to be around if they were coming after you. They were intended specifically to destroy the life-support system of a whole country.

The United States lost fewer aircraft in 110,000 aerial sorties than it had lost in war games for NATO where no live ammunition was used. When you fly that many flights, a few crash, that's all. With all the NATO war games, our casualty rate, without live ammunition, was higher than the assaults on Iraq.

There was not a reservoir, a pumping station, or filtration plant that wasn't deliberately destroyed by U.S. bombing to deprive the people of water. By the time I arrived in Bagdad on Groundhog Day of 1991, February 2, dump trucks were backing into the Tigris, lowering tail gates, letting the water come in and driving out. They did it to take the water to the people, rather than water to the Tigris.

That week, the head of the Red Crescent, then Dr. Almuri, said that in one week there were 6,000 deaths from dysentery and vomiting. They didn't even have simple rehydration tablets costing a penny apiece. The babies simply died. Whoever got the bad water could not last long. The only liquid you have for rehydration is more of the dirty water that made you sick in the first place.

We knocked out the power. It doesn't sound like a big deal. You can get along without lights for a little while. But it meant, among things, that 90 percent of the poultry was lost in a matter of days, because they had a very sophisticated system of raising chickens---like I've seen driving around the countryside in Texas.

They lost over a third of all their livestock---goats, sheep, whatever they had. Why were we destroying fertilizer plants, fertilizer storage, insecticide storage, insecticide plants. We systematically destroyed every aspect of the food system we reasonably could,--not a grain silo left standing in the country, not a food distribution centre, a food processing center, not even the famous date processors. It looked like the Depression in the thirties in the cattle country of the USA Southwest. Just skeletons of steers lying around. They wanted to destroy the food supplies.

We drove 2,200 miles and even at that time I didn't see a single hospital that wasn't damaged. I didn't see a single hospital in Bagdad that didn't have the windows out. We saw some in the towns and villages that were flattened.

The sanctions are a killer beyond compare. They have killed five or ten people for every person who died from the assault on Iraq. They have injured far more. They are over 30 percent of the

population under 10, stunted in their physical and mental development from malnutrition in the early years of their lives, the number of underweight births is five times what it was before. If you were born under two kilos (4.5 pounds}, you're going to have a hard time, you won't live a happy life.

"Sanctions violate international law"

Protocol 1: Additional to the Geneva Conventions - 197section 1,
Chapter 111, Article 54

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 our civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive." [*Speech given at a forum organized by International Action Center on the fifth anniversary of war against Iraq, January 20, 1996, New York.*]

Dominicans for Justice and Peace raise the sanctions issue at the UN

In the year 2000, our NGO, Dominicans for Justice and Peace, had denounced sanctions against Iraq at the session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. We were the first to raise the issue of sanctions and we persisted until some action was taken. We also made statements at the United Nations in conjunction with NGOs from the USA and other countries.

First and foremost, the Dominican statements expressed grave concern about the children under the UN imposed sanctions and the embargo against Iraq. According to a UN report on the current humanitarian situation in Iraq at the time, the prevalence of malnutrition in Iraqi children under 5 had almost doubled since 1990. Similarly, the World Food Program estimated that, since 1991, access to potable drinking water in Iraq had dropped to 50% with even lower levels available in the rural areas of the country. It was estimated that as many as 5,000 children died every month as a direct result of deprivations caused by the sanctions.

Dominicans for Justice and Peace also recommended that the UN Commission on Human Rights strongly urge the international community to lift the sanctions and embargo on Iraq and advocate for immediate measures to stop and to reverse the downward pattern of life experienced by Iraqi children.

Humanitarian aspect

The NGOs raised these issues from humanitarian, ethical and human rights perspectives. Their reason for speaking out stemmed from their grave concern about the devastation brought on by sanctions and armed conflicts on the lives of thousands of children and women as well as the gross and ongoing violations of their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Our NGO, Dominicans for Justice and Peace, was also concerned that the UN had imposed sanctions and embargos on Iraq without taking into account the effect that it would have on

the health and well being of Iraqi children.

According to the WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (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 prevalence of malnutrition of Iraqi children under five years of age almost doubled from 1991 to 1997. One in four children was malnourished, a rise of 73% percent since 1991. Almost the entire child population in Iraq had been affected by a shift in their nutritional status toward malnutrition. Also, it was believed then that when the sanctions were lifted, it would take a long time before the infrastructure is repaired and the economy recovers.

Letter by the former U.S. Attorney General of the USA

During that period, the former U.S. Attorney General of the USA, Ramsey Clark, had written a letter to the Members of the UN Security Council before the Bi-monthly vote on Sanctions, January 1, 1996.

In his letter, Ramsey Clark stated that there is one crime against humanity in this last decade of the millennium that exceeds all others in magnitude, cruelty and, portent. It is the U.N.-forced sanctions against 20 million people of Iraq. The whole population has suffered. More than 1 million have died, mostly among the elderly, the chronically ill, including "567,000" children that have died as a consequence of the economic sanctions".

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that UN sanctions on Iraq had been responsible for the deaths of more than 560,000 children in Iraq since 1990. Most children's deaths were from effects of malnutrition including kwashiorkor, wasting or emaciation which had reached 12 percent of all children, stunted growth which affects 28 percent, diarrhea dehydration from bad water or food which is ordinarily easily controlled and cured; common communicable preventable by vaccinations, and epidemics from deteriorating conditions. There are no deaths crueler than these. They are suffered slowly, helplessly, without simple remedial medication, without simple sedation to relieve pain, without mercy.

While the United Nations Security Council was the nominal power imposing the sanctions, the United States had forced this decision on the Council. Three of the five permanent members of the Security Council – China, France, and the Russian Federation – had sought to modify the sanctions but the U.S. had systematically eliminated opposition to the sanctions. It blamed Saddam Hussein and Iraq for the effects of the sanctions, mostly arguing that if Saddam "stopped spending billions on his military machine and palaces for the elite, he could afford to feed his people." But not many would offer or believe such propaganda. If Iraq is spending billions on the military, then the sanctions are obviously not working. Malnutrition didn't exist in Iraq before the sanctions. If Saddam Hussein is building palaces, he intends to stay. Meanwhile, an entire nation was suffering. Hundreds were dying daily and millions were threatened in Iraq, because of US-compelled impoverishment.

If the United Nations continued to participate in such genocidal sanctions backed by the threat of

military violence and the people of the world failed to prevent such conduct, the violence, terror and human misery of the new millennium would exceed anything we have known.

You must vote against these genocidal sanctions. Your nation should not share responsibility for the death of more than 10,000 Iraqis who will die before the Security Council review in March if sanctions are not lifted in January.

“This letter was sent by the former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark to all members of the Security Council before its scheduled vote on the UN sanctions against Iraq. Since August 1990, this vote had come up every two months. Clark’s letters had been widely circulated to the media and on the Internet. They had become a voice of conscience against sanctions, citing ethical and legal standards widely agreed to by all nations but consistently disregarded. “

“The lawlessness and the cruelty of death dealing sanctions must be recognized as genocide and as a crime against humanity and must be prohibited.”

The 2000 UN Sub-Commission in Geneva adopted the idea of the humanitarian aspects of sanctions

In August 2000, at the session in Geneva of the *UN Sub-Commission on the prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities*, the independent experts introduced a resolution dealing with the humanitarian aspects of sanctions. In expressing his support for the resolution, the independent expert, [Paulho Pinheiro](#) (Brazil) told the committee members that by doing so they would be in good company, joining Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Franciscans International, Cardinal Etchegaray and other groups in North America. The resolution was finally adopted by the UN Sub-Commission.

NGOs were instrumental in this process and had become in a sense "the conscience" of the UN Commission and the Sub-Commission on the issue of sanctions against the people of Iraq since they were the ones raising the “issue from the perspective of human rights which finally brought about the adoption of the resolution on sanctions”.

The Lifting of the sanctions against Irak

On May 22, 2003, the Security Council of the United Nations voted 14 to 0 to lift the sanctions against Iraq, approved a role for the UN in the reconstruction of the country and called for the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary General.

On May 27, 2003, the UN Secretary General, [Kofi Annan](#), announced the appointment of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sergio [Vieira de Mello](#) (Brazil) as his Special Representative for Iraq.

Meeting with Sergio Vieira de Mello

Dominicans for Justice and Peace had previously met with Sergio [Vieira de Mello](#) in Geneva to discuss the situation in Iraq. We raised with him the question of the survival of the minority in

Iraq and the reprisals that may occur as well as the need for the reconstruction of the country; we also spoke to him of Dominicans for Justice and Peace and their presence in Iraq and of their visits to Iraq in October 2002 where they saw first-hand the effects of twelve years of sanctions against the people of the country. As High Commissioner, Sergio was aware of the issues and he shared the Dominicans' concerns about the post-war period. He saw the task of rebuilding the country as being a massive one requiring the United Nations to play a key role and being involved in all facets with civil society.

SERGIO'S TRAGIC DEATH IN IRAQ

Regretfully, Sergio died tragically in Iraq on August 19 2003. NEWSWEEK magazine (September 1, 2003) reported that at 4:37 pm, a covered flatbed truck moved slowly down a road beside a brick and stucco building and came to a stop below Sergio's office. The deadly load inside a truck blew up; 1,000 pounds of Iraqi ordnance, including mortar rounds, artillery shells and hand grenades, packed around a 500-pound bomb. The explosion killed 24 people, including Sergio and everyone in the room with him, seriously injured 86 more - and left the shell-shocked survivors grieving and struggling to comprehend the enormity of the catastrophe.

Shortly after the tragedy, The UN SECRETARY-GENERAL KOFI ANNAN made the following declaration: "The blue flag has never been so viciously assaulted...It feels like a nightmare, from which we are still hoping to wake. If only it were..."

In his recent book "Interventions: A life in War and Peace" Penguin (New York, 2012), Kofi Annan spoke highly of Sergio and of his commitment to the UN and his acceptance to lead the UN return to Iraq.

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