



DOMINICAN SISTERS OF SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

CORPORATE STANCE: OPPOSITION TO ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAQ

We, the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois, stand in solidarity with the people of Iraq. We urge our government to end the bombings and the sanctions that harm innocent people. We further urge our government to replace these actions with creative diplomatic solutions. *July 2000*

CORPORATE STANCE: OPPOSITION TO THE WAR AGAINST IRAQ

We, the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois, as sisters to Dominican women and men in Iraq and as members of the human family, regret that our government has decided to renew a war against the people of Iraq. We oppose this decision. We pledge to redouble our personal efforts toward peace and invite all people of good will to join us. To all those who will suffer the consequences of this violence at home and abroad: Iraqi civilians, American and Iraqi combatants, children, immigrants and refugees, the homeless and hungry, the jobless and working poor, we offer the only thing we have to give - our prayer for God's protection. *March 2003*

EXPERIENCE

After the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait at the end of the Persian Gulf War in 1990, the United Nations Security Council imposed economic sanctions on Iraq in April of 1991. The sanctions created scarcity of food and medicine as well as economic instability.

Timothy Radcliffe, OP, then Master of the Dominican Order, visited Iraqi Dominicans during the late 1990's. He challenged U.S. Dominicans to remember that they have family in Iraq. Delegations of U.S. Dominicans were formed to visit the Dominicans in Iraq, letting them know they were not forgotten, and to bring whatever medicines could be carried.

After September 11, 2001 and more than 12 years of sanctions, the US and the United Kingdom made war on Iraq in March 2003.

U.S. Dominicans maintained contact with Iraqi Dominicans in spite of the war, though delegations ceased. Over time, the instability in Iraq saw the rise of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). The sisters and friars had to leave their convents in the large city of Mosul. On August 6, 2014, ISIS overtook Qaraqosh and other towns forcing the Dominicans to flee along with their neighbors and families. Displaced to Erbil, Kurdistan, the friars and sisters ministered to the people in the midst of the chaos and fear.

While the ISIS army has been defeated and some families have returned to the towns on the Nineveh Plain, the ideology of ISIS continues to be present and invokes/evokes fear. Current U.S. tensions with Iran and Iran's presence in Iraq add to the instability.

ANALYSIS

In 2000 a United Nations official, reporting to the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights declared that the sanctions against Iraq were illegal under existing international humanitarian law and human rights law. Various UN agencies and legal scholars note that the Security

Council had directly violated a number of important rights, including the rights of children to protection and the right to life itself.

The 2003 war was started on the premise of Iraq having weapons of mass destruction. After the invasion, no weapons of mass destruction were found. Soon after, the U.S. government called for and obtained the lifting of sanctions, a step that gave the US occupation authority full control over Iraq's oil sales and oil industry.

American authorities transferred formal sovereignty of Iraq to its new leaders in 2004 and elections were held 16 months later. The country remains unstable.

In December of 2011, United States forces declared a formal end to their operations in Iraq even as violence continued to plague the country and American leaders acknowledged the severe challenges that face the struggling democracy. As noted above, the rise of ISIS created more death and destruction in the north of Iraq and beyond.

REFLECTION

Economic sanctions against Iraq were a moral, not a political concern. They violated the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child. It is imperative that they be understood as a concern in their own right and separate from the question of the Iraqi regime and the US response to the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The Christians of Iraq are considered to be one of the oldest continuous Christian communities in the world. In 2003, Christians numbered about 1,500,000, representing just over 6% of the population. Since then, it has been estimated that the number of Christians in Iraq have dropped to around 500,000. While a number were killed, many were forced to migrate to other countries for safety.

The fate of Christianity in places like the Nineveh Plain has a geopolitical significance as well. Religious minorities test a country's tolerance for pluralism; a healthy liberal democracy protects vulnerable groups and allows them to participate freely in society.

The devastation of war results in the destruction of relationships— Sunni, Shia, Yazidi, Christian. Building trust is a lofty and far off goal, but urgently needed. Gospel values call us to have regard for the dignity of all life, knowing that we are made in God's image.

ACTION

1. Study to become aware of the reality and connections of war to migration, fossil fuels, precious metals, poverty, hunger, greed, corruption, economic injustice.
2. Pray for those living with the effects of war and the subsequent uncertainties of daily life.
3. Explore the Nonviolence and Just Peace initiative: <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/>
4. Advocate for Iraqi refugees to be allowed into the U.S. Especially advocate for Iraqis who served as interpreters for U.S. forces in Iraq and for their families.