

## Catholics for a Peaceful End to War and Terrorism

# All Life is Sacred

Holy Week 2003

**I**N the weeks since the US initiated the war in Iraq, we have witnessed once again the death and destruction suffered by a people made to endure the violence of war. As representatives of many faith-based organizations and religious congregations, we spoke out at the start of this war to remind people that our own church leaders had characterized this war as unjust and immoral.

We echo once again the words of Vatican spokesperson Joaquin Navarro-Valls on March 18: *Whoever decides that all the peaceful means made available under international law are exhausted assumes a grave responsibility before God, his conscience and history.*

We said then that, "All life is sacred, and we mourn the loss of any life - Iraqi or American, civilian or military."

In these past weeks we have witnessed scenes of tremendous violence and human suffering brought about by this war on our TV screens, on the Internet, and in our newspapers. We have seen the bodies of victims, often innocent civilians, sometimes entire families, killed by bombs, shot at military checkpoints, or in the crossfire of battle. Homes have been destroyed, cities left without electricity, water, and telephones. Hospitals have been damaged by bombs and ransacked by looters. Medical personnel lament that they are overwhelmed with wounded and no longer have the medicines, equipment or bed space to deal with the injured. We have seen the photos and heard the stories from the National Museum of Antiquities as looters robbed and destroyed the cultural heritage of Iraq and, indeed, the cultural roots of our common history.

And we have seen the faces of grieving family members of US troops killed in this war, a war of choice, not of necessity.

Sadly, we have also heard our national leaders -- those who, against the will of the international community, decided to perpetrate this war - announce that they are not responsible or accountable for this destruction. We have heard them proclaim that there will be no accounting for Iraqi casualties, combatant and non-combatant, nor an acceptance of responsibility for the collapse of social order and the chaos that is now being experienced in many parts of Iraq. In the middle of this

Christian Holy Week, the image of Pilate comes to mind, he who washed his hands of responsibility after condemning Jesus to death.

As people of a gospel faith, we cannot keep silent before so much death and destruction, before the suffering of the Iraqi people. Nor can we be silent as our government leaders fail to share with the world the real human costs of this war.

The gospel tells us that we must embrace truth, love our enemies, feed the hungry, care for the wounded ones on the side of the road, take responsibility for our actions and their motivations. The United States must accept its "grave responsibility before God, [its] conscience, and history" by taking responsibility for the chain of events sparked by its decision to go to war.

We therefore call upon our government leaders to:

- stop the war in Iraq immediately and reject consideration of any new theater of military action;
- repudiate the immoral and dangerous policy of pre-emptive war;
- account for the casualties, both civilian and military, caused by this war, including allowing free access to human rights, humanitarian and other non-governmental organizations seeking to carry out this accounting;
- take responsibility for the social chaos caused by the war as well as our direct and indirect complicity in the destruction to Iraq's infrastructure, and do everything possible to restore electricity, water, sanitation and communications systems;
- ensure that hospitals and other health care delivery systems are immediately restored to full service;
- protect the population, the country's economic resources and cultural inheritance from injury and destruction by looting and vengeance;

- turn over humanitarian aid efforts in Iraq to the United Nations and/or other international agencies;
- begin immediately to clean up the lethal aftermath of our munitions, including depleted uranium, unexploded bomblets from cluster bombs, and other toxic or dangerous materials that pose a future threat to the Iraqi people.

We also call upon the United Nations to immediately lift the 12-year-old economic sanctions and to help empower Iraqis as soon as possible to determine the future of their own nation.

Tremendous damage has been caused by this war - to the Iraqi people, to the Arab world, to the reputation of the US in the international community, to the United Nations and other international alliances and organizations, to the hopes of addressing the root causes of the terrorism that afflicts our world and threatens our

own people here in the US. We call upon the community of faith and the citizens of this country to reassess the role of the United States in the world. Are we a force for good, for justice and peace, or are we perpetrating and deepening the cycle of violence we claim to be fighting?

In this Holy Week, we are reminded that our faith begins at the foot of the cross. There we see before us the Suffering One, the victim of the violence that continues to plague our world.

But we also see something else. From this cross comes the hope for life. This hope rests on the faith and effort of those willing to go to the foot of the cross, to see the victims and what put them there, and to do all we can to bring them down from the cross.

This is our Holy Week faith, our resurrection hope.

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**Endorsers of the All Life is Sacred statement include:**

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