

NATIONAL PSR STATEMENT ON IRAQ

June 2004

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) shares the 1985 Nobel Prize for Peace with International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. PSR is a national organization of over 30,000 physicians, health professionals and citizen supporters concerned with global security and health. We are deeply troubled by events in Iraq — by the loss of human life and the continuing severe medical injuries to soldiers and civilians alike, by escalating violence, growing insecurity and destabilization, by the failure to adequately rebuild medical and public health infrastructure, and by the flagrant disregard at the highest levels of the U.S. government for the Geneva Conventions calling for the humane treatment of prisoners, including their mental health and medical treatment. We are concerned that the Bush administration having profoundly failed to anticipate the difficulties of rebuilding Iraq in the wake of invasion, now seems to have no viable plan to extricate the United States from its occupation.

The deterioration of the situation in Iraq is directly attributable to numerous failures in US policy dating to the determination of the current Administration to invade Iraq without adequate *casus belli*, without proper international backing and authority, and on the basis of false claims of Al Qaeda links to Saddam Hussein and the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Since that time, US policy has failed to create or permit the emergence of broadly representative Iraqi leadership, has alienated Iraqi opinion by operating as an occupying, not a liberating power, and has stimulated, rather than deterred, terrorist attacks and armed resistance in Iraq and elsewhere. The invasion has also diverted resources from securing Afghanistan, allowing senior Al Qaeda and Taliban figures to continue their campaign of terror against the West.

Physicians for Social Responsibility opposed the unilateral invasion of Iraq, warning as early as October 2002, that opting for war unsanctioned by the international community and absent a threat to the United States would lead only to chaos; that in choosing such a course President Bush would diminish rather than enhance American security. In particular, we feared the invasion and destabilization of a Muslim country by the United States would fuel the fires of global terror. The appalling scenes of abuse of prisoners from Abu Ghraib jail, the intense hand-to-hand fighting in Fallujah and the killing of innocent Iraqi civilians, the mutilation and beheading of Americans, the assassination of Iraqi political figures, have all confirmed and even exceeded our worst fears.

The medical and public health situation in Iraq has deteriorated sharply in the year since the invasion. Public access to drinking water and electricity has declined. Hospitals have been overwhelmed by casualties of war, even as their supplies of drugs have been reduced, and the appalling security situation makes it hard for medical staff to do their jobs. The use of depleted uranium ammunition has created new radiological and toxic chemical threats to health, for Iraqis and for military personnel.

Physicians for Social Responsibility believes that only a dramatic shift in US policy can prevent further deterioration of the security situation, widespread loss of life, and ultimate failure in Iraq. Only a new policy can improve the health, well-being and security of Iraqis, and decrease threats to US security. "Staying the course," the favorite mantra of the Administration, means pursuing blindly a failed policy, without considering options that can improve the dire tactical and strategic situation in which we now find ourselves.

It is unlikely that anything the US military now does in Iraq can restore calm and establish peace. US soldiers have needlessly become targets for insurgents and foreign terrorists of Al Qaeda. Continued US military actions, like the offensive in the Holy City of Najaf, merely give credence to those who claim that the United States is engaged in an anti-Islamic crusade. A phased increase of Iraqi and international responsibility for providing security matched with an international political process to assure a transition to legitimate Iraqi rule is now the only viable course. Such a course may not be guaranteed to bring peace, but it cannot bring more conflict than current US policy. We further believe that the installation of a U.S.-designed interim government on June 30 will not be perceived as legitimate nor will it stem a growing insurgency.

In order to achieve real security in Iraq and to provide the conditions to reduce violence and its mounting medical and public health toll, PSR specifically calls for the President and the Congress to institute immediately a political process that would lead to:

- Convening an international conference involving the UN, the EU, the Arab League and others with an interest in regional stability that will create a plan for the return of legitimate Iraqi self-government.
- Supervision of a process by the UN and Arab League through which Iraqis themselves would devise the form of that legitimate government, as well as the route to achieve that end.
- A transition phase during which an Iraqi interim government under the aegis of a UN High Representative for Iraq would administer the country, oversee reconstruction, and prepare for the election of the permanent government;
- Assurance of security in Iraq during the transition phase by an international force under the authority of the UN Security Council. A UN Iraq Stabilization Force could be made up of NATO and Gulf Cooperation Council states troops with a Commanding Officer who would be a senior officer from the Gulf Cooperation Council. The US would provide the preponderance of soldiers, whose numbers would decline in stages as internationalization proceeds and an Iraqi military is reconstituted.
- Recognition by the international community of the human and public health costs of the destruction of Iraq, partly by the Saddam regime and partly by the US-led war, through the creation of a fund from international donations (substantially US donations) and from Iraqi revenues. Such a fund should be administered by Iraqis to put the pre-war food rationing system back into place until the country is stabilized.

- Massive assistance to restore fully functioning medical and public health provisions for a population battered by war.
- Full recognition and observance of international law during the transitional phase.

Accountability in the United States from President Bush on down for the actions of US soldiers, both in the killing of innocent civilians and in the abuse of prisoners. At a minimum, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Joint Chiefs Chairman General Myers should be replaced or should resign.

As an organization dedicated to the prevention of war and the use of weapons of mass destruction and to the prevention of medical harm and suffering to our fellow humans, PSR therefore calls upon the US government, as we did in our October 2002 New York Times ad before the invasion of Iraq, to end its failed policy, to work with the international community, and to live by “the force of law, not the law of force.”