

## Holy Cross International Justice Office Statement on War Against Iraq

*The way to peace does not lie through war, but through the transformation of structures of injustice and of the politics of exclusion.*

*from The Morality and Legality of War Against Iraq: A Christian Declaration*

As Christians and members of the family of Holy Cross, we are impelled by our belief in a compassionate God and by the gravity of the moment to read the signs of these times and respond in ways explicitly informed by the gospel. The world is again poised - unnecessarily - on the brink of war. As people of faith, we cannot be silent; we must speak against preemptive war on Iraq.

Our first concern is the pain of the Iraqi people - victims of decades of authoritarian regimes, bloody conflicts, U.S. bombings, and severe economic sanctions. In the past eleven years, more than a million Iraqis have died, at least half of them children. Any military action against the government of Iraq would greatly exacerbate the suffering of its people and almost certainly result in the wounding/death of large numbers of innocent civilians.

Our second concern is the adverse consequences of preemptive military action. In the Catholic tradition, any justifiable use of military force “must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2309). War against Iraq would almost certainly have grave consequences not only for Iraq, but also for the region as a whole and the entire global community.

- Preemptive military action against Iraq has great potential to further destabilize the Middle East region: aligning Arab states against the U.S. and cooperating nations, aggravating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, undermining multilateral efforts to eliminate terrorism, and even enflaming terrorist sentiments and provoking terrorist attacks against other countries.
- The preemptive use of force to deal with perceived threats would set a dangerous global precedent, especially for nations who feel threatened by the military capacities of their neighbors.
- War against Iraq would divert attention and enormous resources away from critical problems facing the global community: the HIV/AIDS pandemic, resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the increasing gap between rich and poor, the debt burden of many developing countries and escalating degradation of the environment. Economists estimate that military action against Iraq would cost \$100-\$200 billion (U.S.) - money which could be used to build a *truly* secure global society.

Our third concern is the illegitimacy of preemptive war. According to international agreements articulated in the United Nations Charter, no nation may go to war except in self-defense - when an armed attack has *already* occurred. And then only until the U.N. Security Council has taken measures to secure peace. Short of actual attack, all U.N. Members are bound to settle international disputes by peaceful means (Article 2:3). Christian tradition too requires that defense by military force be used only a last resort, after all other means of resolution have proven impractical or ineffective (*Catechism*; 2309).

**In light of these concerns, we can only judge the proposed preemptive invasion of Iraq as both immoral and illegal.** We call upon the United States and all countries of the world, including Iraq, to work through the United Nations to actively pursue alternatives to war. We urge the United Nations to persist in efforts to resume and maintain rigorous and exhaustive weapons inspections and other peaceful, legitimate means of containing and deterring Iraqi aggression. We ask the Iraqi government to demonstrate good will by cooperating fully with the international community.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. noted, “wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows.” Catholic Social Teaching has always held that peace is the fruit of justice. The present crisis challenges the international community to defuse violence by addressing the underlying causes of terror in *all* its forms. We must create “new and creative political, diplomatic and economic initiatives aimed at relieving the scandalous situation of gross injustice, oppression, and marginalization which continue to oppress countless members of the human family” (John Paul II). The surest way to disarm dictators and terrorists is not invoking military might, but building a global culture of solidarity, rendering violence and the use of force obsolete.