

Equal Rights - Equal Responsibilities
Droits Égaux - Responsabilités Égales

IAW NEWS FLASH - February 2003, nr. 1



Equal Rights

Dear IAW members,

With this News Flash we are sending you thoughts and opinions from very concerned IAW members about a future war and the effects it will have for our world. Please raise your voice against war!

Raising Voices against War

Brussels, 21 January 2003

Women all over Europe say No to war against Iraq and call for a halt to militarisation

The European Women's Lobby, representing over 3000 women's NGOs in Europe (including the International Alliance of Women) is:

- Committed to achieve the full realization of women's human rights and sustainable development;
- Aware that modern warfare disproportionately affects civilian populations, especially women and children;
- Deeply concerned that violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations is extreme, systematic, and widespread;
- Asserting that a culture of militarisation disempowers and silences women's voices as they engage in daily actions in support of peace, justice and solidarity in their communities;
- Acknowledging that the current militarisation process holds back investment in human rights, social development and gender equality.

While condemning the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein, we believe that a war is not the solution. A war will be a disaster for the women, men and children of Iraq who are already suffering because of the embargo. The UN Charter must be respected as the basis for coexistence in peace. A war against Iraq could also have a devastating impact on people across the Middle East and neighbouring regions. Pressure from the US to wage war against Iraq not only prevents other solutions from emerging, but also undermines the existing UN mechanisms for upholding human rights and strengthening women's rights.

Women all over Europe call for

- Governments to use their powers to press for and pursue negotiations in favour of a peaceful resolution
- The rejection of unilateral support of USA policy by any country in the European region.
- EU Member States, countries in accession to the EU, and other European countries to bring their influence to bear and to press Iraq to accept political solutions and to accept fully the mandate of the UN inspectors

All European Union Member States, countries in accession to the EU, and other European countries wish to ensure the implementation of all commitments in UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women's role in conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

The UK Prepares For War

Here in the UK it is winter, the nights are long, the sky is grey and it rains constantly. My friends tell me they are suffering from winter blues, better known as SAD. At present we have plenty to feel sad about. Every time I open a paper or turn on the television news, I hear the same thing. President Bush and his associates announce that Saddam Hussein has had his last chance; he must be disarmed one way or another. War will be inevitable. This will be followed by much the same thing from Tony Blair or the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw. Unfortunately, the Minister of Defence Geoff Hoon is silent. It is half-term and he has gone skiing with his family. The snow is good in the French Alps. Yet we are told that a declaration of war may be only three weeks away.

Justifications

When this crisis first began to unfold we were told that the objective was to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction. Nothing more. The British public was sceptical, could it be oil we asked? But no, the UN inspectors went into Iraq and were looking for weapons of mass destruction, a 'smoking gun'. They found nothing but a few old warheads. The public remained sceptical. But, we were told, evidence is being amassed by our intelligence agencies and a convincing dossier will soon be published by the Ministry of Defence. This will explain the threat that Iraq poses to the free world and the link between Iraq and Osama Bin Laden. The dossier arrived and was highly praised by Colin Powell. Only a few days later we discovered that it was a compilation of unacknowledged plagiarized work (the cardinal academic sin). Some of it came from the thesis of a surprised PhD student in California, the rest from editions of *James International* (a military journal). The text had been altered in places to make it seem more threatening and some of the data was up to twelve years old. "Never mind", said the government, "what matters is it is that it all true". In the meantime our official intelligence agencies complained that pressure was being put upon them to adjust the facts and come up with the desired conclusions. An unprecedented move. The newspapers had a field day and the public laughed, but we know that it is not funny.

So the goal posts were moved again. We are not just disarming Iraq, we are aiming at a regime change. We will 'liberate' the people of Iraq from an evil dictator. A million people marched through London and gathered in Hyde Park carrying placards saying 'No War Against Iraq' or 'Not In My Name'. It was a peaceful and uneventful demonstration, I felt encouraged. Perhaps after all there was another way forward. This was misplaced optimism, since after a short pause, during which our Prime Minister seemed to draw breath, the goal-posts were moved again. Apparently, there was now a moral argument for war. We were told that Saddam had killed as many people in his own country as had joined the peace march, we would be failing in our duty if we did not liberate the people of Iraq, even though we may have to kill many more before it is over. Following this, both the Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster (Church of England and Roman Catholic), made an official joint statement refuting this new argument. Mr Blair's moral reasoning did not, in their opinions, justify war at the present time. The next day Mr Blair and his wife visited the Pope and we are now to have a 'last push for peace'. The country rocks with laughter. We do not believe a word of it.

Preparations

The statistics for deployment for war were set out in *The Times* on the 22 February. I cannot list them all, but currently deployed US forces amount to 174,000 troops. There are 450 US aircraft and 62 US ships carrying 1,000 Tomahawk cruise missiles. Of British troops, 20,000 have already been deployed and another 20,000 are yet to come. They are supported by the world's most formidable arsenal of weaponry. An American serviceman, already in the Gulf, speaks to us over the airways. We are ready he says, "oil is a global problem". Then we are shown a film clip of Iraqi troops marching through Baghdad carrying their weapons in the air, only when you look at their feet they are wearing civilian shoes, they do not even have army boots.

One of our best known war correspondents is a woman, her name is Kate Adie. She tells us how the press is catered for and the truth suppressed. It seems that certain approved correspondents are given secure positions to work from and the news is monitored so that only good news can filter out. They do not want to repeat Vietnam.

Consequences

The weapons, we are told are 'smart' and sophisticated and the war will be short. It will be a slaughter say others. But what of the consequences? These are far from clear. The internal politics, conflicts and divisions within Iraq are unbelievably complex. We open Pandora's box. Hatred and conflict will fester amongst Muslims and Christians across the world providing the terrorists with exactly what they want. New waves of terrorists will plot revenge, some will succeed. Financial uncertainty and economic disruption will follow. We are told to expect 100,000 refugees fleeing from Iraq to Britain, joining the thousands of others from around the world who risk their lives to get here. We already have an immigration problem which the government seem incapable of resolving and xenophobia is rife.

The greatest anxiety comes not from the war against Iraq, but from the long term consequences. North Korea may follow, then Pakistan, then Saudi Arabia, Libya, Sudan, Iran and on and on. Some of these countries belong to what President Bush has called the 'Axis of Evil'. Thus small countries race against time to get a nuclear weapon before it is too late. Whilst under the cover of global preoccupation with one war, other countries resolve their own conflicts. Many small countries requiring aid merely fall into line, they cannot afford to oppose the might of America. Like children they do not wish to be the only ones left standing, as it is always better to be on the winning side. In Europe confusion already reigns, NATO is divided, France and Germany say 'No' and are insulted as 'Old Europe'. Other countries, such as Russia or Turkey are bribed or put under political pressure. China, we are told, does not approve, but will not in the end use its veto at Security Council. We see the United Nations, heirs to the League of Nations, manipulated day by day, and if it does not provide the required final resolution it will be ignored. What ever it does it risks losing all credibility.

The future

Here in the UK permission has been given for part of America's 'star wars' nuclear shield to be developed in Yorkshire, making Britain a prime target. How we laughed when President Regan first proposed it! While another rumour informs us that the Americans are secretly developing a new arsenal of small strategic nuclear weapons. In the meantime we deplete our fossil fuels, an AIDS pandemic encircles the world, one fifth of its people are living in absolute poverty and the biosphere is under threat.

Children

The children of Iraq, already weakened by sanctions, are now traumatized by fear. 'We will burn very much' says one small child during an interview on BBC Radio 4. They may well do so. The US has great new toys to experiment with. One such toy is called the HPM, or a humane wonder weapon, a weapon of 'mass non-destruction'. It is described as a 100 lightning bolts focussed into a single pulse of radiation equivalent to two billion watts. It produces micro-waves which destroy all electronic equipment within its impact area. The effects are said to be agonising as the radiation penetrates beneath the skin of animals boiling the nerve cells. But it is considered to be a great advance on the version used in Afghanistan which merely blew the lungs out of a persons body.

We are told that Saddam Hussein neglects the children of Iraq on purpose and hides his weapons beneath hospitals and schools. But we recognise these fears, they play upon the most ancient of human myths, like Griselda accidentally murdered by her vengeful father and the gypsies who steal and eat our children.

Iraq

Iraq is one of the most ancient civilisation in the world. Amazing archeological sites up to 7000 year old are scattered across its deserts, unvisited by tourists. If they are destroyed, they are gone for ever.

Today I listened to a water engineer who has worked in Iraq for a charitable agency. He tells us that the people of Iraq are gentle and courteous. To his constant amazement they bear no grudge towards him. He observes that since the last Gulf war the country's infrastructure has been degraded, although much of Baghdad has been rebuilt. He considers it a beautiful city. Most of the domestic water comes from two great rivers which are currently polluted by 500 tons of sewage

every day. Purification systems are inadequate and cannot cope. War will be a catastrophe. In the twenty first century, he implores us, there has to be another way to resolve our difficulties.

The International Alliance of Women

The Alliance was born in 1904, spanning most of the twentieth century. During this time an estimated eighty million people have died in conflict and an inestimable number of others have grieved and suffered. Many, if not most of the latter are women. I look to the Alliance to give some guidance, and if nothing else to give me a platform from which to express my anguish and extend a hand of friendship across the world. I am deafened by the silence.

(See also: www.guardian.co.uk)

Helen J. Self, 23:2:03

WAR or PEACE

Democracy ?

Seven million people walked peacefully worldwide in 50 countries on the 14th of February, an endless stream of protest against war. A global demonstration that was never seen before. In particular in countries with a pro-USA policy like the United Kingdom and Australia, the protest was carried "en masse". This should make politicians think twice before implementing their warlike thoughts. Even so, the future looks bleak. With the United Nations still holding the scales of balance in equilibrium, it seems that some nations of the 190 affiliated member states are thinking of passing the UN jurisdiction. Is this democracy?

Women, who always wear the brunt of war with their children, have been networking for months. They signed e-mail lists, wrote protests, joined debates and marched too on the 14th of February. We don't want war and if war is absolutely necessary, we don't want war without a democratically accepted resolution by the United Nations.

Editors IAW newsletter

Raise your Voice against War !

I am just back from New York, where I attended the UN Commission for Social Development on behalf of the Austrian government. I have spoken to many friends and colleagues there. What come out as the most general feeling was that of powerlessness. Powerlessness against a machinery that seems acting more and more independently, representing "an open space of imperial sovereignty" ("Empire" from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri).

Yes, I do think that powerlessness is the prevalent feeling in these times. We have lost "ethical politics", when politicians believed in what they sold to people, were ready to resign, even to commit suicide, in case of failure. Today politicians are sort of "tumbler-dolls" (Stehler in German), they tend to survive, they do not cede, they are not at all influenced by movements of millions of people demonstrating on the streets.

Time has changed since those famous days of the "old" suffrage movement. Priscilla wrote about in her wonderful brief HerStory of the Alliance: "1915 Women from both neutral and warring nations had maintained contacts and a meeting was held in The Hague. A resolution from that meeting called for a permanent international conference to settle international disputes, which is said to have been one of the seeds that grew into the League of Nations. Out of the Hague meeting emerged the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom".

Somewhere I read that even during World War II women's organisations succeeded in keeping contact, thus facilitating renewed relations after 1945. Many changes have occurred since then. And in my contribution to the Colombo workshop (2002 IAW Congress) I tried to explain some of the reasons for the weaknesses of current feminism. But, we should at least try to raise our voices.

Rosy Weiss, IAW vice-president

Can Women's Voices Stop this Senseless Conflict?

Before this 21st century began, there was talk of it being the women's century. Can women all over the world grab the opportunity before it's too late and make our warmongering men see that conflict is only continuing what has been happening for thousands of years. Instead of conflict in the Middle East for the rest of the century, let's scream for peace. We know we already have millions of supporters - men, women and children - all over the world.

One answer to the current conflict is for two men to be big enough and brave enough and statesmanlike enough to lose face - George W. Bush must say 'no war' and Saddam Hussein must say 'I will step down as leader of Iraq'.

I wonder if either of them can imagine how they would be lauded worldwide for such action and be allowed to do it with dignity.

This would stop the current feeling of powerlessness, watching the deadly juggernaut moving towards what seems to be an inevitable outcome. The world could breathe again and such brave action might just encourage other intransigents to grab the limelight too by being strong enough to lose face in similar ways. No need to name them. We know who they are and they know who they are.

And who oversees all this and plans a free and peaceful future for these troubled areas? Groups of eminent women and men from around the world who are publicly known to stand for these ideals, and some not so wellknown people who can speak for the average person in the street. Nelson Mandela, Mary Robinson, Kofi Annan are names that immediately spring to mind.

And as a corollary to all this, let's also scream for support for the environment so that the senseless scramble for oil can gradually be diminished as governments become brave and far sighted enough to support and finance other energy sources. They might even become brave enough to tell the weapons merchants to turn their arms into ploughshares and start helping to feed the world; brave enough to tell the pharmaceutical companies to stop holding a gun at the Third World's right to health.

If this can be achieved, there'll be enough international support to tackle the other warmongers and the drug dealers. Also, to help the war ravaged parts of the world that tend to be forgotten, or are certainly out of the broad public eye, once the international media circus moves on to another area.

Priscilla Todd, editor IWNews (English text)

Note: to avoid misunderstanding, we always send the IAW Flash twice, 1) in the body of the e-mail, and 2) as an attachment, saved in Word 6.0/95. Both have exactly the same content.

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