

# Middle East

As the Arab-Israeli conflict continues in deadlock, its punctuation by the US and UK bombing of Iraq shows the involvement of the West. Are we witnessing the final collapse of the peace process? Is the region heading for a new war? And is the political confrontation between Arabs and Israelis about to give way to a conflict of religions?



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As the sands of 'Desert Storm' settled, the UN Security Council's economic sanctions and the embargo preventing Iraq from selling its oil were put in motion. Whatever the aims of the policy, and whether or not they have been achieved, a decade later sanctions are still in place with the US and Britain alone at the UN insisting they be enforced.

Alarm has been growing about the effects of the sanctions on the ordinary people of Iraq. According to UNICEF over half a million children have died due to embargo-related causes since 1991 and some commentators put the figure at double this. Sanctions on Iraq have caused suffering on a colossal scale, and the UN's oil-for-aid programme appears to have brought insubstantial relief from that.

Critics of the sanctions policy have come from many corners. The former US Attorney General Ramsey-Clark has described it as 'the most draconian blockade in modern history', a blockade which according to Denis Halliday, former Assistant Secretary General of the UN, is killing an Iraqi child every six minutes.

Even Scott Ritter, the former weapons inspector in Iraq with UNSCOM, has denounced the embargo as being immoral. Three years ago a World Council of Churches delegation reported that sanctions had accomplished 'little else but suffering for the ordinary people', and 'substantially impaired' Christian witness in the country.

Before Christmas, Bishops in the Church of England voted overwhelmingly to express their concern for the Iraqi people with a recommendation to the British Government that questions whether any further political advantage can be gained from the existing sanctions policy without worsening the humanitarian crisis: **'sanctions have failed to achieve their purpose...'** they note.

The Middle East situation is comprehensively analysed in the French/English site of Le Monde. The site shows the process of the establishment and expansion of Israel in an easy-to-understand visual way using a series of maps which cover: 1914, 1939, the partition of Palestine, the 1948/9 war, the Israeli advance into Sinai, the 1967 war, the 1973 war, Oslo II, the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, the division of Jerusalem and Golan and South Lebanon.

<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/focus/mideast/ News>

## Embargo on Iraq

WACC and WACC-North America Regional Association together with the Children of Iraq organisation are planning a two-day workshop on "The News Embargo on Iraq" Why has the world stood by unmoved by the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Iraq as over half a million children have died because of a decade of Sanctions?

Why has the Western Press been so reluctant to discuss this issue, creating, in effect, a kind of

second embargo, a "news embargo" on the people of Iraq? And what can be done by secular and religious journalists to break that embargo? The workshop will be held in New York on April 5 and 6, 2001.

Keynote Speakers will include: Denis J. Halliday and Hans von Sponeck. Both men recently resigned their positions as United Nations Humanitarian Coordinators for Iraq to protest what the sanctions are doing to the people of Iraq.

Also first hand reports from humanitarian workers who have been in Iraq including Mennonite Central Committee, Fellowship of Reconciliation and Journalists who have reported on Iraq. Other distinguished guests are also expected. Details from: The Interchurch Centre, 475 Riverside Drive (at 120th St), New York City. e-mail: [mel@childrenofiraq.org](mailto:mel@childrenofiraq.org) or call 212 / 865-611