

Young adults build
Habitat homes
— Page 5



Teens find friend,
mother in Mary
— Pages 6-7



Lazarus is raised:
Kids' Chronicle
— Page 12



Catholic Courier

DIocese of Rochester, New York ■ VOL. 109 NO. 3 ■ THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1997 ■ 75¢ ■ 12 PAGES

EMBARGO

Catholics, critics claim sanctions only hurt innocent civilians

Is the death of an innocent, sick child an acceptable price to pay for the pursuit of a foreign policy?

That's the question critics of U.S. and U.N. economic sanctions policy are asking these days.

According to the U.S. Department of State, the United States has leveled some form of economic sanction — ranging from embargoes to the freezing of assets — against at least 75 countries. However, in recent years, two nations targeted by such sanctions have drawn the most attention from peace and human rights activists.

Activists blame sanctions against Iraq and Cuba for causing the suffering and death of thousands of innocent civilians while doing little or nothing to affect the dictators the sanctions target.

These critics include a Catholic bishop who's defied the U.S.-supported United Nations embargo against Iraq, as well as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, which has called since the early 1990s for a relaxation of the long-standing U.S. embargo on Cuba.

But supporters of sanctions against Iraq and Cuba blame those nations' dictators — Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro, respectively — for bringing economic misery upon their nations. Supporters strongly insist that sanctions are needed to remind these rulers that they need to play by far different rules than those they currently follow if they want to join the international game.

Who pays the price?

Tom Malthaner, a parishioner at Corpus Christi Church in Rochester, traveled to Iraq in September to defy the U.N. embargo. Malthaner

visited Iraq along with Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit and six other peace activists who delivered \$15,000 worth of medicines.

After meeting Iraqi children "with legs like broomsticks" on the verge of death from malnutrition, Malthaner minced no words spelling out what he thought of economic sanctions:

"I think economic sanctions are worse than war, because from what I've seen, it is always the children, the poor and defenseless who receive the blunt end of the sanctions."

Malthaner's group was sponsored by Voices In The Wilderness, a Chicago-based organization headed by a Catholic, Kathy Kelly. The organization is seeking to end the Iraqi embargo, in place since August 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

Ironically, it's the agencies of the United Nations that have painted the worst picture of the embargo's reported effects. UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization have issued various reports indicating that up to 4,500 Iraqi children die monthly from malnutrition, disease and starvation in their country, which has yet to recover from the devastation of the Persian Gulf War.

The Voices delegation's actions violated the U.S.-supported embargo, and, according to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, that means that delegates could face up to 12 years in prison and \$1 million fines each if the government decides to prosecute them.

The delegation visited four Iraqi hospitals, according to Malthaner.

"The conditions were deplorable," he wrote in a statement issued to the *Catholic Courier*. "Very few drugs, no antiseptics, antibiotics or the simplest fluids. The hospitals do not have their own

bed linens; patients have to provide their own, (and) many make them from gunny sacks. I saw babies lying on soiled and sometimes blood-soaked linens."

The Cuban embargo

Cuba under Fidel Castro has been embargoed since the early 1960s by the United States — though not by the rest of the international community. Unlike Iraq, Cuba is not an international pariah, but it has lost its biggest sponsor, the former Soviet Union, and has suffered considerable economic damage since the U.S.S.R.'s collapse.

Supporters of the U.S. embargo claim it helps to undermine a totalitarian dictatorship that has helped to fuel war throughout Africa and Central America, and that is on its last legs. Critics, however, claim the embargo is a mean-spirited attempt by the United States to attack a small nation that provides universal primary health care and other social services for its citizenry despite being vastly poorer than its nemesis.

In March of this year, the American Association for World Health — whose honorary chairman is former President Jimmy Carter — released a report detailing the effect of the U.S. embargo on Cuba. The report sharply criticized the embargo, blaming it for depriving Cubans of access to certain medicines and other goods available only from U.S. companies and their foreign subsidiaries.

"The declining availability of foodstuffs, medicines and such basic medical supplies as replacement parts for 30-year-old X-ray machines is taking a tragic human toll," the report said. "The embargo has closed so many windows that in

Continued on page 10