

Agencies ask for aid to Iraqi people

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As the U.S.-Iraqi war began, church leaders and organizations worldwide pleaded for humanitarian aid for Iraqi civilians and for peace.

Aid agencies raised concerns and mobilized against the possibility of an influx of Iraqi refugees into neighboring countries.

In Britain, leading aid agencies urged the government to ensure the protection of Iraqi civilians and to provide Iraq with much-needed humanitarian assistance.

Directors of the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, Oxfam, Save the Children and Action Aid also warned the British and U.S. governments that they had a legal obligation to avoid the loss of civilian life.

The United Nations predicted that as many as 3 million Iraqis could flee their homes, but remain within Iraq, while another 600,000 could flee the country. A statement on the Web site of CAFOD, the official aid and development arm of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, expressed con-

cern that the international community was unprepared to care for potential refugees.

"International donors — and particularly those countries attacking Iraq — must ensure that states bordering Iraq have the resources to receive refugees," the statement said.

CAFOD said the United Nations had an obligation to facilitate distribution of humanitarian aid in Iraq during the war.

"Even before war started, as many as 16 million Iraqis relied on U.N. food aid. As a matter of urgency, a new U.N. Security Council resolution is needed to establish alternative food distribution systems should the current system collapse during the conflict. This will be particularly urgent in the event of prolonged fighting," the statement said.

Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services provided an initial allocation of \$1 million to help local church agencies in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey respond to humanitarian needs.



Reuters/CNS

A worker checks sacks of wheat flour at a warehouse in Amman, Jordan, March 12. The World Food Program was positioning food supplies before any potential attack on Iraq. Officials from the U.N. agency said more than two months of food aid for up to 900,000 displaced people and refugees will be necessary in countries bordering Iraq.

Some of the funding already has been used to rehabilitate medical centers and purchase medical supplies and food aid, said Joe Carney, CRS communications associate for the Middle East.

U.S. President George W. Bush announced March 20 that \$22 million would be made available to assist the needs of potential refugees. The funds will be distributed by the U.S. Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance Fund.

In Toronto, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace provided \$100,000 for emergency medical aid and shelter for Iraqi civilians.

The money is being channeled into Iraq through Caritas Internationalis, said Mary Corkery, regional coordinator in Toronto.

The funds will be used to stockpile medicine, train 42 doctors and 220 volunteers to cope with the expected large number of casualties, and prepare shelters to house those displaced by bombing.

"The impact (on Iraqi civilians) will be far worse than you can imagine in a country already devastated by sanctions," said Corkery.

She said the agency was preparing an emergency appeal to assist Iraqi civilians.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops expressed its "profound sadness" concerning the war and acknowledged Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien's decision not to commit troops to the war.

The conference said it was praying that the war ended quickly and that the innocent "be spared from its most devastating effects."

In Switzerland, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, Vatican representative to U.N. agencies in Geneva, said it was time for the world to "move beyond the logic of war and all forms of the arrogance of power."

The archbishop, speaking during a March 20 World Council of Churches prayer service in Geneva, said those who want peace should continue to speak out against the war.

"It is time for us to renew our conviction also that the arrogance of power can paradoxically be humbled by the conviction of the weak and the apparently powerless," he said.



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Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580)
Vol. 114 No. 24, March 27, 2003

Published weekly except the first Thursday in January and the last Thursday in December. Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1136 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624, 585/529-9530. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, NY.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, PO Box 24379, Rochester, NY 14624.

CORRECTION

A photo caption in the March 20 *Catholic Courier* incorrectly identified students who were making rosaries for troops March 12 at St. Mary's School in Waterloo. The students were seventh- through twelfth-graders who attend the religious-education program at St. Mary Church in Waterloo.

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