

Listening for Hope



A season of prayer for Iraq

The situation in Iraq appears to be at a tipping point. Your prayers and actions should be included in the precarious balance.

The Harvest of War

Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed on it." And it was so... And God saw that it was good. —Genesis 1:11,12

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen, your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." —Genesis 4:8-11

In the story of the first human family, the soil becomes a curse, desecrated in the spilling of blood. What God created to nurture human life had to absorb its violence. As a result, the soil no longer yielded life for Cain who was forced to become a wanderer over the earth.

In Iraq, the place where this human drama likely began, the soil is still desecrated by violence. War has been Iraq's constant companion for more than two decades. War has been a despotic gardener, planting death in the soil, eager to spill the blood of the innocent.

Near the Baghdad Airport is a 150-acre farm owned by Hussain Mansour and his large extended family of 250 people. During the most recent war, thousands of cluster bomblets rained down on his farm, killing 12 cows and 10,000 chickens. In the aftermath of the war, four family members were wounded when they came upon cluster bomblets that had not exploded on impact. A woman in the family who was harvesting grass was "cut in half" by an exploding cluster bomblet the size of a flashlight battery.

During a February 2004 visit to the farm, we learned that nearly 400 unexploded bomblets were found on the farm by ordnance experts. Only through painstaking work by 10 bomb disposal workers over a three-month period were these bomblets safely destroyed. In all of Iraq, the U.S. and British forces dropped nearly 2 million cluster bomblets during the recent war.

Unfortunately, the recent war is not the only reason death lurks in the Iraqi soil. The Mines Advisory Group has demarcated over 3,000 mine fields in northern Iraq alone. These mine fields were laid during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. During the Persian Gulf War, the U.S. and British forces dropped 34 million cluster bomblets in Iraq and Kuwait. And ordnance experts estimate that the Iraqi Army left behind at least 600,000 tons of ordnance in ammunition supply depots, many of which are not securely guarded or enclosed.

Death will lurk in the Iraqi soil long after this war ends. Blood will continue to cry from the ground. Surely God's voice asks us, "Where is your brother? Where is your sister?"

Cain responded to God's question by asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Sadly, Cain's question is familiar. When blood is on the ground, we often look for ways to deny our connection to it. We too could ask Cain's question, for the blood on Iraqi soil is not from our hands alone. But surely God's response to Cain also comes to us. "What have you done? Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" (Gen. 4:10). How will we answer this question?

Resources:

<http://www.mcc.org/clusterbomb>

<http://www.mcc.org/areaserv/middleeast/iraq/index.html>



Prayer

God of life,
Restore our hearts, our minds, and our lives to your ways,
So that the earth will yield fruit, not death
So that our hands will make bread, not bombs
So that distant neighbors will become friends, not enemies.

God of peace,
Bless us with vision to see the way of peace
So that in humility we will forsake the ways of war
So that with courage we will overcome evil with good
So that with joy we will find our security in you.
Amen



May 2004. Titus Peachey, director of peace education, MCC U.S. Design: Cynthia Friesen, Peace and Justice Support Network Volunteer. Peace advocate office, 330-683-6844; SusanML@MennoniteUSA.org. For additional resources on Iraq, see www.MennoniteUSA.org (Peace resources).