

Listening for Hope



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

A season of prayer for Iraq

Prayer for leaders and right leadership

"We look for peace, but find no good; for a time of healing, but there is terror instead" (Jeremiah 14:19c).

Iraqis today can no doubt identify with this lament of the people of Judah, recorded by the prophet Jeremiah thousands of years ago. After living under a dictator for several decades, Iraqis have now suffered under an occupying U.S. power for the past 15 months. Their hopes for peace and security have been dashed many times.

While the U.S. military was quickly able to topple Saddam Hussein's government, it was not prepared to bring stability and security to Iraq.

"In the first days of the war, we were in shock but we supposed it was going to be for the better, given the promises that America had made for freedom, for a better life, for a better regime," Fatin Kashmoula told former MCC worker Edward Miller in October 2003. "Now we are lost. There is a feeling of numbness," grieves the 46-year-old Iraqi woman.

When I visited Iraq as part of a small MCC delegation in late September 2003, everyone we spoke with was anxious about the lack of security. This pervasive sense of insecurity has undermined efforts to rebuild Iraq's economy and infrastructure.

Things have only grown worse in the intervening months since my visit. Iraqi civilians are frequently victims of U.S. military actions, or targets of suicide bombers. The best estimates – based on careful analysis of credible news reports – say that, to date, between 9,436 and 11,317 Iraqi civilians have been killed in the fighting (www.iraqbodycount.net).


Insurgents now also frequently attack Iraq's oil pipelines and electricity plants – reducing the energy outflow needed to sustain life in the hottest months of Iraqi summer. And, according to the *L.A. Times*, as many as 100 of Iraq's top doctors have been kidnapped in the past several months, threatening Iraq's health care delivery system.

Today an overwhelming majority of Iraqis view the U.S. presence in their country as an unwanted occupation. The widespread mistreatment of Iraqi detainees by U.S. forces has only reinforced this view point.

The United States has promised to transfer at least some measure of sovereignty to an Iraqi provisional government on June 30. But since this temporary government has not been elected by the Iraqi people, many analysts predict that the insurgency could continue or even grow worse.

"Eventually it will get better," Fatin Kashmoula hopes. But then she adds, "or maybe we will just get used to it."

Prayer



Near the end of his reign as king, David reflected: "One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land" (II Sam. 23:3b-4).

In this volatile and uncertain time, pray that the new Iraqi provisional government will rule justly and be like the light of morning after a long and dark night for the Iraqi people.

God of peace, stir our hearts and the hearts of leaders in Iraq and around the world to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you. May leaders act to replace terror with peace; to overcome evil with good; and to bring healing to the deep wounds of war. Amen.

"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you" (II Thessalonians 3:16).



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