

# Iraqi child deaths have doubled under UN-imposed sanctions

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Children under five in southern and central Iraq are dying at more than twice the rate of 10 years ago, according to a report released Wednesday by UNICEF. The children's agency has declared the situation facing Iraqi children a "humanitarian emergency." Economic sanctions have been imposed against Iraq for the past nine years.

The health surveys which formed the basis of the report were conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with the Iraqi government in the southern and central parts of Iraq and local authorities in the north. Large household sample sizes (24,000 in the south and central areas, 16,000 in the north) lend credence to the accuracy of the survey results.

The report shows that under-five mortality in southern and central Iraq—where 85 percent of the country's population reside—doubled from 56 deaths per 1,000 live births (1984-89) to 131 deaths per 1,000 live births (1994-99). Infant mortality—deaths in the first year of life—increased from 47 per 1,000 live births to 108 per 1,000 live births in this same time period.

While Iraq made significant strides in reducing infant mortality rates in the 1980s, the current under-five mortality rate of 131 per 1,000 births in south and central Iraq is comparable to rates in Haiti (132) and Pakistan (136), two of the world's poorest countries. The report notes that if the reduction in child mortality begun in the 1980s had continued, half a million fewer under-five Iraqi children would have died between 1991 and 1998.

In the northern region of the country, the under-five mortality rate rose from 80 per 1,000 live births in 1984-89 to 90 per 1,000 live births in 1989-94. Between 1994 and 1999 the rate fell to 72 deaths per 1,000 live births. US officials have made much of the disparity between these improved statistics in the north,

where United Nations officials run food and medical programs, and the deteriorating conditions in those areas under Iraqi control. However, these figures in no way negate the impact of the sanctions and continued bombing on the south and central regions.

A report in the August 13 *New York Times* attempts to pin the blame for this child health emergency on the distribution methods and greed of Saddam Hussein, claiming the Iraqi president is "blocking aid available through the oil-for-food program, and that there is nothing outsiders could do." They quote US State Department spokesman James Rubin, who said, "We can't solve a problem that is the result of tyrannical behavior."

However, the UNICEF report disputes this: "Even if not all suffering in Iraq can be imputed to external factors, especially sanctions, the Iraqi people would not be undergoing such deprivations in the absence of the prolonged measures imposed by the Security Council and the effects of the war."

Felicity Arbuthnot, a free-lance journalist who made her seventeenth visit to Iraq last spring, debunked the theory that Iraqi sabotage of the distribution of food and medicine was to blame for the child health crisis. In April she told the *WSWS*, "There has been a lot of criticism recently about the food in Iraq not being distributed. There are no telephones outside Baghdad now, so there is no possibility of communication with the rest of the country. They no longer even have refrigerated trucks, so they have to get stuff quickly to the point of distribution.... They don't know what they need and they don't know whether the electricity is on or off. During the Gulf War every single normality was destroyed and it's gone downhill from there."

American and British bombers have continued to attack Iraq. In the last eight months more than 1,100

missiles have been fired against 359 targets, more than triple the amount of air strikes launched last December, and two-thirds as many missions flown by NATO in the 78 days of the war against Yugoslavia.



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