

Washington police arrest anti-Iraq sanctions protesters

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Police carried out the mass arrest of 104 people in Washington, D.C. on Monday in front of the White House as they protested against United Nations sanctions against Iraq. Three of the demonstrators were held for pouring mock blood over the sidewalk. Demonstrations were held in several cities in the US, as well as London and Baghdad, to mark the tenth anniversary of the imposition of punitive sanctions by the UN, which have resulted in the death of as many 1.7 million Iraqis since the end of the Gulf War. Grace C. Simms, one of the protesters in Washington, stated that “I feel as if I'm living in Germany before the Holocaust and I need to stand up and say this is wrong.”

Some 300 people attended the Washington protest, which was held over three days. Protesters held signs such as “US has killed 1.7 million Iraqis for oil,” “Stop sanctions now” and “Iraqi children Holocaust II.” The arrests occurred in what the police claim is a restricted area in front of the White House, where protesters are barred from standing still or sitting. The marchers had a permit but this was unilaterally revoked by police when the protesters stopped. Those arrested face up to one year in prison. The protesters were made up of various anti-sanctions groups including religious groups and pacifist organizations. A rally over the weekend was addressed by Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader and Ohio Democratic Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

Simultaneously four demonstrators commenced a three-day hunger strike outside the UN compound in Baghdad. Kathy Kelly of Voices in the Wilderness, an anti-sanctions group, stated “What we are doing is nothing compared to the suffering of Iraqis. We hope that our government will wake up to the fact that thousands of innocent people are dying because of their

political ambitions.”

A UNICEF survey of infant and maternal mortality published at the end of 1999 revealed the impact of the sanctions on Iraqi children. The initial impact of the Gulf War was a staggering three-fold increase in the mortality of children under five. The report reveals a further doubling in the death rate since 1991, which can be attributed to the imposition of economic sanctions. The study also found that death at child birth is the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age. Thirty one per cent of women at child bearing age die in giving birth. Most of the deaths can be attributed to the lack of basic medical facilities and drugs and malnutrition.

The sanctions have meant that hospitals are deprived of basic medical supplies and some operations are performed without anesthetic. Simple machinery such as refrigerators are impossible to maintain due to a lack of parts.

In 1996 the UN partially lifted its embargo in its so-called Oil for Food program. This has allowed Iraq to sell a limited amount of oil supposedly to buy food and medicine. In reality most of the funds gained are used to pay war reparations and UN administrative costs. The result is that the lives of ordinary people have not been ameliorated at all.



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