

CASI

campaign against sanctions on Iraq

PRESS RELEASE

Humanitarian NGO condemns further politicisation of 'oil for food'

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For immediate release

A Cambridge-based NGO warned today that the politicisation of Iraq's 'oil for food' programme is exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. The Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq (CASI) accused the US government of playing politics with the UN's humanitarian efforts, after the UN Security Council only renewed its 'oil for food' programme for the usual six-month period at the second attempt yesterday.

The previous attempt last Monday, which resulted in a nine day extension under Security Council Resolution 1443, had stalled over US demands for additions to the Goods Review List, the list of potential 'dual-use' items Iraq can be banned from importing. Wednesday's resolution, passed a few hours before the programme would have expired, saw the Security Council decide to consider "necessary adjustments" to the Goods Review List within 30 days.

The dispute comes at a critical time for the 'oil for food' programme, which is currently facing a revenue shortfall as a result of the year-long political dispute over retroactive oil pricing. The most recent update of the UN's Office of the Iraq Programme (OIP) states that \$3.1 billion worth of approved humanitarian supply contracts are currently without available funds.

The OIP has for years warned of the humanitarian consequences of politicising the programme. In September 2000, the Executive Director of the OIP, Benon Sevan, told the Security Council that: "The growing tendency to politicize the programme has indeed been affecting adversely the implementation of the humanitarian programme."

CASI's co-ordinator, Jonathan Stevenson, said:

"It is unacceptable that the US held the existence of the 'oil for food' programme hostage to political negotiations for nine days. The Goods Review List was developed for over a year before its adoption in May, and the Security Council had six months to review it in operation before last week's discussions. That the US presented its concerns at such a late stage further displays the low priority the administration attaches to Iraqi civilian needs.

"'Oil for food' is an emergency humanitarian lifeline for millions of Iraqis, not a tool for exerting pressure on the Iraqi government. This is just the kind of politicisation that 'smart sanctions' were supposed to have addressed. Instead, at a time when the programme is already facing a severe funding crisis which also stems from political factors, Iraq's civilian population has been placed at enormous risk."

NOTES FOR JOURNALISTS:

1. The Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq is a registered society at the University of Cambridge. It was founded in 1997 by students concerned about the humanitarian crisis created in Iraq by the economic sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. CASI's exclusive concern is

humanitarian: it campaigns only for the lifting of the non-military sanctions. CASI neither supports nor seeks to topple the Iraqi regime; it does not take a position on the ongoing US/UK bombing of Iraq or on human rights abuses committed by the Iraqi government.

CASI opposes the continued non-military sanctions on Iraq because it believes that they have produced a humanitarian disaster of extraordinary proportions in Iraq. While the Government of Iraq has not taken all the steps that it might have to alleviate this disaster the sanctions are also clearly to blame: economic sanctions work by inflicting hardship. CASI's website is at www.casi.org.uk, and it can be contacted via info@casi.org.uk.

2. The UN's press release about Wednesday's resolution is available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=5567&Cr=iraq&Cr1=oil>. Recent Security Council Resolutions can be found at <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2002/sc2002.htm>.

3. For the full text of Benon Sevan's 21 September 2000 remarks to the Security Council, see <http://www.un.org/Depts/oip/background/latest/bvs000921.html>.

4. For the full text of the OIP's 22-29 November weekly update, see <http://www.un.org/Depts/oip/background/latest/wu021203.html>.

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