



Statement by Save the Children UK on Sanctions against Iraq

New York, 10 May 2002

In light of the on-going consultations at the United Nations Security Council to adopt a resolution on a modified regime of sanctions against Iraq, Save the Children UK today expressed grave concerns regarding the humanitarian and human rights situation in Iraq, and the possible further deterioration of that situation as a direct result of the impending, ill-conceived, measures.

Save the Children UK is taking this opportunity to voice its concerns in advance of a vote on the forthcoming resolution. We strongly urge the international community to ensure that the humanitarian dimension of UN interactions with Iraq is addressed more effectively. Save the Children UK believes that sanctions, in their current form, constrain the human development of civilians in Iraq to an unacceptable degree, and have exacerbated widescale poverty throughout the country.

At a time when other, recent, sanctions regimes are characterised by initiatives to assess and ameliorate unintended humanitarian consequences (Liberia, Afghanistan), the Council has failed spectacularly to do so in the case of Iraq.

We are fully cognisant of the respective roles and obligations of the UN Security Council and the Government of Iraq in safeguarding the human security of the civilian population. Save the Children UK's concerns focus on the overt humanitarian needs of the civilian population, and of children in particular, and we believe that both parties have failed to address these needs adequately and to ensure the protection of children's rights.

Save the Children UK feels that the proposed 'streamlined' sanctions -- at the core of which is the Goods Review List and associated procedures -- will not, in the absence of complementary initiatives (such as locally-available financial resources), significantly improve the humanitarian situation in Iraq. Indeed, it has already been suggested that the proposed measures may constitute a more stringent regime and that the associated implementation procedures may actually inhibit efforts to improve the health and well-being of civilians in Iraq. Moreover, the potential humanitarian impacts of any changes to the sanctions regime have not been adequately assessed by the Security Council and the Sanctions Committee.

One of the primary factors responsible for the continuing humanitarian crisis in the country is the advanced state of decay of the essential civilian infrastructure, and the water & sanitation (WATSAN), healthcare, and electricity sectors in particular. A sustained improvement in the humanitarian situation will only be realised through urgent rehabilitation of these facilities. The proposed 'streamlined sanctions' will only marginally assist in the rehabilitation of the essential civilian infrastructure. Without such rehabilitation, it is most likely that the sustained high incidence of preventable illnesses among children, and the unacceptably high level of malnutrition (reported by UNICEF and other UN agencies) will persist, with a detrimental effect on child mortality in Iraq.

Save the Children UK has recently published a report outlining the findings of a Household Economy Survey conducted in North Iraq. The research findings point to unprecedented levels of dependency on the ration system provided under the "Oil-for-Food" Programme. While this study was confined to Northern Iraq, recent data from UNICEF points to a humanitarian situation in South/Central Iraq that

is considerably worse. In addition to the volatility of household-level food security, it is estimated that 'bulk' food stocks in Iraq (for some commodities) are sufficient for no more than six weeks. These facts point to the extreme vulnerability of the population to internal or external shocks.

Save the Children UK is confident that Security Council Members, can, with the collective political will, bring about a significant improvement in the health and well-being of Iraqi civilians. We strongly urge the international community to play a more proactive role in this regard, and to ensure that any newly-agreed measures are predicated on the protection of children's rights in Iraq. On this basis, Save the Children proposes that the international community:

1. Urgently re-assess the likely humanitarian impact of any proposed (impending) changes to the sanctions regime, based on a comprehensive and quantitative assessment of the humanitarian situation in Iraq;
2. Re-focus the proposed measures to include (and prioritise) provisions that will facilitate urgent rehabilitation of the essential civilian infrastructure;
3. Emphasise the need to enhance the humanitarian dimension of the work of the Security Council Iraq Sanctions Committee;
4. Re-focus the attention of the Security Council to move away from the 'temporary' nature of the "Oil-for-Food" Programme to a more sustainable humanitarian programme;
5. Take steps to reduce the dependency and vulnerability of the population in Iraq, including the implementation of provisions for local procurement of goods in Iraq, and the stimulation of agricultural and industrial production at a local level.

Finally, in the context of the possibility of military action against Iraq, Save the Children UK maintains that any such military action that disrupts the food pipeline and results in damage to essential civilian infrastructure will have a catastrophic effect on the health and well-being of an extremely vulnerable population. Any military action that further compromises the human security of the population, would, we believe, constitute a breach of International Humanitarian Law. Of particular relevance in this regard is the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention (1977) concerning the destruction or "rendering useless" of objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population.

We strongly urge the international community to factor these concerns into on-going negotiations on Iraq at the United Nations in New York.