

IRAQI DEBT— CAN'T PAY, SHOULDN'T PAY!

In the 1980s many countries gave Saddam huge loans which financed his wars, palaces and oppression of the Iraqi people. Today Saddam owes up to \$400 billion in debt and reparations. If the Iraqi people are made to pay this, each will owe \$15,000 - a hundred times the yearly income of most Iraqis. Iraq can earn \$15bn a year from oil, but this is just 4% of the money Saddam owes. It would take decades to repay even a fraction. If Iraq is forced to repay these debts, then critical resources will be diverted away from reconstruction. After decades of war and over 12 years of economic sanctions, rebuilding Iraq should be the priority to avoid further unnecessary death and suffering.

The campaign to cancel these debts is led by Jubilee Iraq, a non-partisan, global network of Iraqis and citizens of the creditor countries working for debt cancellation. Jubilee Iraq asks all those who were owed debts or reparations by Saddam not to demand payment from the Iraqi people. If they believe their claims are legitimate, and they are not willing to write them off, then they should submit a case for payment through the proper channels to a public arbitration tribunal.

The burden of proof is on the creditor countries to demonstrate to the Iraqi people that the loans they made to Saddam were not "odious". When a contract for a debt is made without the consent of the people, and when the loan is not spent in the interests of the people, and the creditor is aware of this, then the debt is termed "odious".

After the 1991 Gulf War, the UN Security Council determined that Iraq was liable for any economic loss and damage resulting from its invasion of Kuwait. People of other countries suffered terribly as a result of Saddam's wars in Iran and Kuwait, but the Iraqi people should not be responsible for reparations. They were also Saddam's victims in these wars. At present, there is an obligation on Iraq to pay \$26.4 billion, which is 250% of Iraq's

entire annual income. This claim is predicted to rise to \$85 billion plus interest.

In its report: "A Fresh Start For Iraq, The case for debt relief", Oxfam argues that "the country's debt is unpayable, but also that there are wider moral and legal grounds for reducing Iraq's debt burden." The report "sets out a case for treating Iraq's debt as odious and illegitimate - and it explains why ordinary Iraqis should not pay for a debt accumulated by a tyrannical regime, borrowing from irresponsible creditors." The Iraqi Women's League demands that "The Iraqi people must not pay for the wars and the other crimes of Saddam Hussein, especially since he was enabled to wage wars by extremely profitable arms sales mainly from the US. The debts and their arrears he incurred are therefore not the debts of the Iraqi people and must not be paid by them."

Iraq is, of course, one of many countries crippled by foreign debt. The Jubilee Movement, successor to the Jubilee 2000 campaign, campaigns for worldwide economic justice. In the 52 countries of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, a total population of 1037 million people shoulder a debt burden of £286 billion. It is a curious fact that this is less than the total net worth of the world's 21 richest individuals.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Learn about the issue and browse the Jubilee Iraq website on www.jubileeiraq.org.

Visit the Jubilee Movement web site www.jubilee2000uk.org

Write to your MP and Tony Blair. Demand that they support the Jubilee Iraq campaign for debt cancellation.

Complete and send off the postcard enclosed with this newsletter.

Write to your local paper to draw attention to this issue. If a paper receives a large postbag about an issue, then at least some of the letters will be printed.

