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BLUEPRINT

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Remembering the Children: Reflections and Connections on Haiti, Iraq, Palestine, and USA by Kathy Kelly

For the past several weeks, I've anxiously read updates from close friends who traveled regularly to Haiti to report on human rights and seek the release of Rev. Jean-Juste, a Haitian priest jailed for campaigning on behalf of people in his beleaguered parish. What a relief to know that Bill Quigley, Bishop Tom Gumbleton, Johanna Berrigan, Linda Panetta, Kathy Boyle and others had succeeded in bringing Rev. Jean-Juste safely out of prison for ongoing advocacy.

I first met each of the above named friends during successive trips to Iraq. But during these weeks, I've been reminded of experiences in Haiti, while it was under embargo, in the summer before U.S. troops arrived, while President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was in exile.

In the summer of 1994, I was part of a four-person Christian Peacemaker Team dedicated to filing reports on human rights conditions in Jeremie, located in the southern finger of Haiti. When I arrived, I spent one day in Port-au-Prince, waiting to travel by ferry to the tiny coastal town of St. Helene. That day, eager to be Helpful Hannah, I joined some young girls to haul Hinckley Schmidt size water containers, destined for a neighborhood center in Port au Prince's appalling Cite Soleil, across a ravine. My arms were trembling almost immediately. When we reached the cement ledge where the plastic water containers were lined up for vehicle transport, I dropped mine down with an exhausted hurrah and then watched in horror as it split. The girls flew into action trying to save some of the precious water. "Si ou cache verite, ou enterre dlo" – the Haitian proverb says that to hide the truth is like trying to bury water. The truth was gushing out. Throughout that summer I watched women carry water, on their heads, walking miles uphill. One day my friend Madame Ti Pa nearly fainted from the ordeal.

Did I come from a country that had more in common with the Haitian persecutor or the persecuted?

Madame Ti Pa struggled to support three children: Natasha, 8, Petiarson, 2, and Patricia, 1. Natasha was an orphan whose parents were killed when the overcrowded Neptune ship capsized off Haiti's coastline in 1993. Madame Ti Pa found Natasha wandering tearfully in the street and took her into her home. Natasha was eligible for financial help to attend school, but Madame Ti Pa couldn't afford to buy her a uniform, socks and shoes. Nor did she have money to feed the children properly. The children appeared malnourished and were often feverish. Even so, they sang, laughed and cuddled together, obviously responsive to Madame Ti Pa's animated spontaneity.

St. Helene's hilly roads were rocky and jagged, rough on wheels, shoes and barefeet. Beyond St. Helene, one path led to a smooth, paved road with attractive interlocking stones called "adoken." Lined by gorgeous plants, trees and flowers, the road passed through the richest section of Jeremie.

Our Christian Peacemaker Team members hurried along this route two mornings each week to make radio contact with Port-au-Prince. The sisters at the House of the Good Shepherd let us use their equipment. Afterward, it was always pleasant to chat with the kindly sisters and to hear of progress at the cooperative farm they sponsored. Sixty-five families were supported by women who cultivated crops in fields next to the sisters' home.

One day, Madame Ti Pa asked me to go with her to talk to the sisters about joining the project. A woman in Port-au-Prince had written her a letter of recommendation. Madame Ti Pa's eyes shone with hope when she showed me the typed letter. Then, she asked for a bar of soap. She hadn't been able to wash clothes for weeks, soap having become a luxury.

Letter in hand, dressed in a clean skirt

and top, Madame Ti Pa met me to walk up to the Good Shepherd House. When we reached the smooth road, Madame Ti Pa told me the story behind it. The "adoken" bricks were ordered by President Jean Bertrand Aristide to build a road through St. Helen, but the shipment was delayed and didn't arrive until after the coup d'etat. The bricks were then confiscated and used instead to cover the already paved road through the richest section of town. The people of St. Helen felt disappointed and cheated.

More disappointment was in store for Madame Ti Pa when we arrived at the Good Shepherd house. Sr. Angeline firmly told her that it was impossible for them to accept any more women into the project. Madame Ti Pa was one of many who had begged to join.

Walking back along the "adoken" road, Madame Ti Pa trembled with weakness. She hadn't eaten since the previous morning. I thought again of the attitude I'd heard macoutes express: "The poor are too lazy and stupid to run the country. They just want to cheat and steal." On that road, even the very stones would cry out. (Habakkuk 2: 9-11)

What could we say to people who had driven Haitians to raw despair? Days later I met a man reputed to have committed the worst crimes. He was accused of theft, torture and murder, yet because he had a gun, he had power. He used this power against simple people who had nothing and craved little more than basic rights. Yet, I had to ask, did I come from a country that had more in common with him or with the people he persecuted?

A cold shiver ran through me when I recalled similar awareness of the power of water, the power of guns and the grinding power of poverty encountered in Basra, Iraq during the summer of 2000. Our small peace team, again four in number, wanted to settle into the poorest area of Iraq's southern port city to study Arabic and better understand conditions in a neighborhood blighted by the

effects of economic sanctions and a dictatorship's abusive rule. Three of the first words I wanted to learn, in Arabic, were, "Don't do that!" I wanted to shout the phrase at playful boys who, in the blasting heat, would cup their hands, dip into the sewage ditch running alongside the road, and pour water over their heads to cool off. By the end of the summer, my companions and I would sometimes clap our hands over our eyes and shout "OK, my turn," then pucker our lips as the boys poured water over our heads. The alternative was to pass out under the harsh sun as the temperature rose to 140 degrees.

Each morning, in the household where I stayed, Nadra, whose name means "exceptional," would rise at 4:00 a.m. to begin scrubbing every surface in the sparsely furnished home. Her next task would involve removing a stone, lowering an electric pump into the well below, and siphoning off some of the available tap water supply. Nadra was one of a very few people who could afford such a pump. Our team members didn't drink the pumped water, for fear of becoming deathly ill. We drank bottled water and spent more money on two days of bottled water for ourselves than Nadra's household spent for an entire month. So you can see the pecking order: Americans get purified bottled water, an Iraqi family in the good graces of the regime could at least manage to pump somewhat sanitized water, and the poor would be the most vulnerable to water-borne diseases.

Again, memory takes me to a scene of painful conflict over water. I'm remembering a time when our friend Caoihme Butterly walked into the wretched remains of the Jenin Camp on the West Bank, in April of 2002, carrying two heavy six packs of bottled water. Immediately, small boys ran up to her, eager to greet her. "Caoihme, Caoihme!" they shouted. Caoihme is a tall woman. She towered over them, holding the valuable water. I watched her eyes fill with tears when the boys, in frustration, began to fight with each

other as they reached up to grab her cargo, eager to bring a bottle home to their family.

I wonder how Natasha, the eight year old orphan whom I met in St. Helene, has fared. Is she an eighteen year old woman with luminous eyes and a gorgeous smile? Would she remember waiting outside her home, each morning, to run and greet me when I stepped out of mine? I hope she doesn't remember a morning when she was crouched on the ground and looked away when I called her name. I walked toward her, wondering if I had done something to hurt the child's feelings the previous day. Drawing closer, I could see tiny pebbles glistening on Natasha's lip. Natasha hadn't run to see me because Natasha was eating dirt.

"You can't bury water," said our Haitian friends. "And you can't bury truth." The British medical journal, *The Lancet*, estimates that upwards of 100,000 Iraqi civilians have died as a result of the war. Child malnutrition is escalating and chronic outbreaks of such diseases as hepatitis and cholera occur regularly.

After 18 months of US war and occupation, contaminated wells cause water borne diseases; rivers are so polluted that not even animals can safely drink from the rivers; the lack of electricity means food and medicine can't be preserved and water and sewage can't be treated. Because of chaos and corruption in the US occupation, Iraqis remain in desperate need of jobs, services and security.

A decade has passed since I first met children in Haiti. In January 2005, *Voices in the Wilderness* marked a decade since we first declared our intent to become "criminals" by traveling to Iraq. Several of our members are returning from recent trips to Haiti with stories worse than mine. I hope the children we've met and all those who hunger and thirst for justice will teach us to tell the truth, nonviolently, and to never be so foolish as to think you can get anywhere by burying water.

The British medical journal *The Lancet*, estimates that upwards of 100,000 Iraqis civilians have died as a result of the war

Many of the people in Haiti and Iraq have the truth but don't have the water. We have the water, but we don't have the truth.

Recently, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told U.S. soldiers in Kuwait, "You go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time." One brave scout with the Tennessee National Guard unit had stepped forward saying that soldiers had to scrounge through land fills in Kuwait for pieces of rusty scrap metal and bullet-proof glass, what they called hillbilly armor, to bolt their trucks.

These children have something to say to each of us in their deaths... they did not die in vain." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I wonder if the questioner knows that women I lived with at Pekin Federal Prison Camp's UNICOR prison industry factory were manufacturing armored plates for insertion into US Humvees. And when they weren't assembling the armored plates which seem never to arrive swiftly enough or in sufficient supply, they were manufacturing small cages to pick up the children of deportees arrested on our southern border.

* * * *

Shortly before sunrise, a few mornings ago, a small band of us gathered at a busy Chicago intersection and unfurled vinyl banners bearing enlarged pictures of Iraqi children. One banner called for an end to US warfare in Iraq. On my banner was Johan, smiling wanly, a 14 year old child who weighed 75 pounds shortly before she died of cancer in the oncology ward of a Baghdad hospital on September 21, 2003. As our banners flapped in the wind, I tried to compose a letter in my head to her teenage brother, Laith, who recently wrote to tell me how much he misses her.

Writing my mental letter, I thought of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's words of comfort to bereaved parents of four little girls who were murdered when the Birmingham Baptist church was bombed on September 18, 1963. A former member of the Ku Klux Klan

was convicted of the crime. Addie, Carol, Cynthia and Carole had been praying inside the church.

"These children-unoffending, innocent, and beautiful-were the victims of one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity." Dr. King said. But he offered comfort. "In a real sense," he continued, "they have something to say to each of us in their death. . .they did not die in vain. . .Indeed, this tragic event may cause the white South to come to terms with its conscience."

In recent weeks, columnists in major US papers have been alerting US people to possible wrongs, even crimes, committed by UN officials in the course of the "oil for food" program which coordinated and monitored sales of Iraqi oil, while economic sanctions ravaged Iraq. These economic sanctions constituted the most comprehensive state of siege ever imposed in modern history. It's not likely that Saddam Hussein ever missed a meal, but children, hundreds of thousands of children, suffered gruesomely. Their suffering and death can be likened to child sacrifice, certainly the most egregious instance of child abuse in modern times. They'd committed no crime, yet they were brutally - and lethally - punished for the government of the country into which they were haplessly born. You aren't likely to find this story in the current exposés of UN wrongdoing.

In fact, many UN officials tried valiantly to put an end to the economic sanctions. Hans von Sponeck and Denis Halliday resigned their posts and crisscrossed the globe educating people about the effects of the economic sanctions which Halliday termed "genocidal." UNICEF's Executive Director, Carole Bellamy, held a 1999 press conference to announce the release of a "Situation Analysis of Women and Children in Iraq" which carefully explained that the economic sanctions contributed to the "excess deaths" of over 500,000 Iraqi children, under age five. Not one US television network aired coverage

of the press conference. Only two of 50 leading US papers reported the actual shocking number of one half million “excess deaths” of children. The Wall Street Journal asserted that it was all Saddam’s fault. The New York Times echoed this in an 800 word story quoting Jamie Rubin of the State Department questioning the study’s methodology.

The sanctions punished children while Saddam’s regime profited through smuggling. Many Westerners who traveled to Iraq tried to communicate this to people in their home locales. The smuggling and the rake-offs were no secret, especially in the final years of the sanctions when there were many reports of lucrative kickbacks and inflated prices. Many witnessed the sanctions actually strengthening Hussein’s control, as the regime became the only source of food and stability for an increasingly desperate and disempowered population.

The children were punished. When the pictures of those little ones, writhing in pain, wrinkled with wasting, desperate and bewildered, ...held by equally despairing and tortured parents...when those pictures were held up, sometimes as we fasted, sometimes while we were being led off in plastic handcuffs, sometimes at press conferences in front of the UN in Baghdad, sometimes in the middle of Basra cesspools and cemeteries...when those pictures were held up, many people looked the other way.

When I try to understand why columnists in far away places wouldn’t take on the story of these worthy victims, I try to remember that there are many worthy victims and one person can’t undertake care and concern for every devastating, brutal injustice. Pick your battles. But I can’t for the life of me understand how a steady stream of columns have appeared on op-ed pages, in the NYT and other papers, alerting us to possible crimes committed by UN officials in the course of the “oil for food” program while there has been no mention of the crime of child sacrifice in Iraq.

The concern generating reams of verbiage at this point is that UN officials may have looked the other way as Saddam Hussein and a number of collaborators pocketed rake-offs in underhanded dealings using profits from Iraqi oil sales. I’m not equipped to comment on those charges. But is there no columnist who will remind us that 500,000 children under age five died as the US used the UN to wage economic warfare against children?

Let’s consider the UN workers who stood a chance of getting food and medicine into Iraq – were they to look Iraqi families straight in the eyes and say, “sorry, we’ll have to prevent these contracts from going through because you, in your pitiful weakness, can’t prevent the dictator that rules you from getting rake-offs on the deal. We can’t compromise our principles...”

They looked the other way. I looked the other way myself. We in our delegations looked the other way even as we knew that normally we’d be hopping mad and demonstrating in front of any government bastion that inflicted so much fear on its people...but that would have been the wrap-up for our entry into neighborhoods, families, hospitals, schools, ... it was a trade-off.

King said, “And so I stand here to say this afternoon to all assembled here that in spite of the darkness of this hour, we must not despair. We must not become bitter . . . Somehow we must believe that the most misguided among them can learn to respect the dignity and the worth of all human personality.” But this said, what words of comfort can I offer to Johan’s brother Laith? I can tell him where we stood this morning, and whose picture I held. People looked.

* * * *

I return again in memory to a real life scene that happened not far from the birthplace of Jesus. In April of 2002, Jeff Guntzel and I

Is there no columnist who will remind us that 500,000 children under the age of five died as the US used the UN to wage economic warfare against children?

were part of a small team that had entered the Jenin Camp, in Palestine, during the Israeli Defense Force's "Operation Defensive Shield". We were appalled at the conditions afflicting civilians whose homes had been destroyed. One hundred three-story apartment buildings had been reduced to rubble. We had helped pull a grandmother out of a partially destroyed home and, while IDF snipers were still shooting, we'd managed to get a stretcher from a nearby hospital and then carried her to the emergency room, shouting at the soldiers to put their guns down and let us pass.

Who then is responsible?

Later we approached the ruins of a home with two young college-aged Palestinian women. One of the women spotted some fabric and realized it was her jacket. She began clawing through the debris, loosening the fabric from the mound of wreckage, and became increasingly hysterical. Pulling out the jacket in one piece, she went through the pockets, convulsed with nervous laughter over the absurdity. Her sister spotted the edge of a book. Together they dug frantically, as though racing against time, until they unearthed the older sister's nursing textbook and then managed to free another book, a history of Islamic faith. Looking at Jeff and me, the younger woman screamed, "Under here, four televisions, two computers!" They were people, just like us.

The next day, picking our way over more ruined homes, while very brave Palestinian men and boys, wearing flimsy surgical masks, retrieved corpses from the rubble, we were approached by three furious mothers who saw us scribbling notes in our spiral pads. "Put this in your notebook," shouted one enraged woman. "It is your country that we hold responsible!" She jabbed my notebook. "Write this! Your country!" Taken aback, I blurted out, "I don't pay my taxes." I was desperate not to be responsible.

Who then is responsible? Of course I'm responsible. I live well in the country that, during the 37-year armed Israeli occupation of Palestine, has given over \$100 billion dollars

to Israel, mostly for its military. US lawmakers have directed the productivity of US people into a \$524 billion budget for US military and security in 2005. When I return to the US after spending a few weeks or months in a war-torn, shattered area of the world, how long does it take for me to adjust to electricity, clean water, phones, computers, plenty of food and easy transport? About eight seconds.

There's no way to run or hide from the truth of the US people's responsibility for reckless warfare, military and economic, in numerous parts of the world. Nor can we hide from the truth about who pays to prepare for future wars. In this year's defense budget, \$177 billion is earmarked for weapon systems that won't be available until two generations from now. President Bush and his advisors ask that we saddle ourselves, our children and our grandchildren with the bills for this wild spending so that his profiteering friends can become wealthy peddling weapons and war.

Over and over, President Bush told Senator Kerry, "You can run, but you can't hide." It's a harsh line, a hurtful taunt, but in these harsh and hurtful times, the progressive community faces a moral imperative that won't allow us to run or hide. We can't control the US government. Millions of US people tried mightily during the past election season to assert an antiwar agenda. But antiwar progressives can't dodge the fact that more than half of the US democrats voted for Kerry over Dean. More than half the democrats voted for a man who said he would be tougher than Bush on Iraq, but that he'd pursue the war making more efficiently. He'd have sent more troops than Bush is sending.

Then a large percentage of U.S. voters chose Bush over Kerry.

Politically, progressives were defeated by a majority of Democrat voters even before the majority of American voters ratified imperialism. We're having limited results

from time-honored ways of influencing our government – getting out and protesting, the signs, the candles, the education and legislative work that is still crucially important.

Bush promised that he would spend money for the amount of troops that he needs to recruit for ongoing wars. Most of us are not targeted by the recruiters. We're not listened to by our government, nor, in sufficient numbers, the American people. From most of us, what is required is not our bodies and not our consent – it's our money. This is what we have power over.

We can appropriate money away from militarism to health care, housing and other needs by our resistance, by our nonpayment of taxes for war. As civilian and military casualties mount, as US foreign policy creates terrorists faster than we can kill them, progressives opposed to war making simply can't deny a moral imperative: don't turn your productivity over to the war makers.

Our refusal here in the US can be undertaken at no great risk. We're not talking Germany 1939. More relevantly, we're not talking El Salvador 1980-present. By any measure that takes in the lives of our war-victims and the risks they face, it is no great risk.

Karl Meyer, a pacifist guide for numerous war tax refusers, a man who hasn't paid his taxes since 1960, takes a harder line than I do. Here are Karl's words: "If progressives fail to resist militarism or refuse participation in it through the one form of participation that is demanded, that is to pay taxes, they should give up their pretensions to being in opposition."

How readily we criticize Bush for being in denial about the reality of US war making against Iraq. Yet we're all vulnerable to layers of denial about our own complicity.

As we examine the devastation

afflicting Iraq, Afghanistan, the West Bank, Haiti, impoverished US neighborhoods ("the refugee camps of the class wars," said Dorothy Day), and other war zones, simple adages emerge that could help us stop burying the bodies and stop burying the truth. Yearn for peace. Try very hard not to pay for war. And, most of all, think of the children.

About the Author:

Kathy Kelly (kathy@vitw.org) is a co-coordinator of Voices in the Wilderness (www.vitw.org). Voices has sent delegations of people and medicines into Iraq for years to challenge the sanctions which killed nearly a half million Iraqi Children. She has refused to pay all forms of federal income tax since 1980. See www.nwtrcc.org for more information about war tax refusal.

Yearn for
peace.
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February, 2004

Dear Blueprint Subscriber:

OOPS, SORRY!

We experienced some technological difficulty with the database in our November 2004 mailing of the Blueprint newsletter. There were subscribers who received mailing labels with incorrect last names, company names with incorrect addresses, etc. Rest assured that the problem has been rectified and we thank you for your efforts and patience in assisting us with this problem.

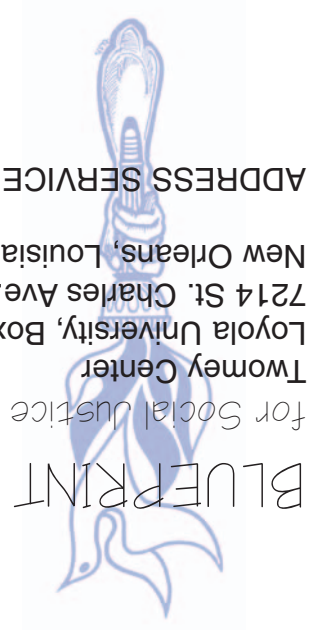
*Sincerely,
Bernice Gurley-Gray
Administrative Assistant*

*PS,
Due to the lost of production during the Christmas Holidays and with the recent relocation of the Twomey Print Shop, we are running way behind schedule with the BluePrint publication. We are very sorry for the inconvenience and are presently working on January, February, and the March issues. We will have those issues in the mail shortly.*

In this Issue

**Remembering the Children:
Reflections and Connections on Haiti, Iraq, Palestine, and USA**
by
Kathy Kelly

Kathy Kelly is a coordinator of the Voices in the Wilderness. Nominated for the Nobel peace prize several times, she writes in *Blueprint of the Children of Haiti, Iraq, and Palestine* and the role of the U.S. in their lives.



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