

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [10.05 pm]: I move -

That the House do now adjourn.

War in Iraq, Support - Adjournment Debate

HON DEE MARGETTS (Agricultural) [10.05 pm]: I rise briefly tonight to make a correction. Yesterday in debate on the urgency motion in relation to a possible US-led war on Iraq, I mentioned that I had been contacted by the chief executive officer of a shire in my region, who indicated that seven shires in the vicinity of Wyalkatchem had passed a motion expressing their concern about any move by the Australian Government to commit Australian troops to war in the absence of a parliamentary debate. The correction I would like to make is that this motion is still in the process of being developed, and has not yet been passed. I thought it best to put that on the record - that the motion is being developed and has not yet been passed.

War in Iraq, Effect on Iraqi People - Adjournment Debate

HON JIM SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [10.06 pm]: On the same issue of Iraq, I came across some very interesting stories on the web site of the English newspaper, the *Guardian*. The first of these explains why a human rights campaigner, Jo Wilding, intended to travel to Iraq. I will quote from that article, because it is important to understand that we have heard many people in favour of starting a war that will kill thousands of people in Iraq claiming that the war is really to benefit the people of Iraq. It is important that the issues I am about to raise are heard. The article states -

I am leaving for Iraq today to act as a human rights observer. I shall be gathering evidence on breaches of the Geneva conventions and other humanitarian law for legal challenges being brought by CND and Peacerights against the British government.

CND is the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The article continues -

I would draw Tony Blair's attention to the fact that 60 per cent of the Iraqi population, about 16 million people, are completely dependent on government food rations, which will not be distributed in the event of war.

Malnutritional disease rates are high, particularly among children, who are dying of diarrhoeal illnesses in a country where, before sanctions, the main child health problem was obesity.

The situation regarding water is perhaps even more frightening. Despite improvements in purification, corrosion of pipes means that many people are still without clean water. Emergency backup generators will not be adequate to maintain even a rudimentary water supply. Although people are being encouraged to dig wells, this will be ineffective when there is no power with which to boil the water.

I might also add that the Americans intend to use bombs which dismantle anything that is run on electrical power, so very little is likely to work. The article continues -

The likely effects on the civilian population are well documented in the planning paper Likely Humanitarian Scenarios (written by UN agencies which will be involved in the crisis), in Our Common Responsibility, by the international study team, and in the MedAct report, Collateral Damage.

When such effects on the population are foreknown and inevitable, they cease to be collateral and become intentional, and are thus grave breaches of the Geneva conventions.

I would also draw Mr Blair's attention to the principle, under the fourth Geneva convention, that the presence of a military objective within a largely civilian population does not deprive the population of its civilian character, whereby it is protected from attack.

I am aware that powerful countries such as Britain and the US feel able to flout humanitarian law with impunity, for the lack of institutions able to enforce them.

Much humanitarian law arose from the wars of the 20th century in the hope that, if we must have wars, we could learn to conduct ourselves better. To ignore it is a betrayal of all that people went through in those wars.

To attack Iraq without evidence of a genuine threat to any other country will be wrong. However, given that the government's ostensible excuse for war is Iraq's alleged breach of international resolutions, it would be all the more hypocritical if troops attacked civilians in breach of international law.

That outlines some very serious questions for all western countries that are contemplating becoming involved in that war.

The next article I will read is by Johnathan Steele and Luke Harding for the *Guardian* entitled "West's failure to donate humanitarian aid threatens catastrophe for millions". This article illustrates the hypocrisy of western countries, which have said that the war is for the good of the people of Iraq. It indicates that the United Nations has given only a quarter of the requested funds to assist in the aftermath of the war in Iraq, and reads -

With a war against Iraq perhaps days away, the world's richest governments have given the United Nations barely a quarter of the funds its agencies have asked for to deal with the expected humanitarian catastrophe.

"We made an updated appeal for \$120m in February and have so far received \$30m.

The amount of \$30 million is approximately the cost of an aeroplane that would be dropping bombs on the people of Iraq. To continue -

The result of this shortfall in funds is starkly illustrated by the empty field near the Kurdish town of Soran. There are no tents. There is no sanitation. In fact, there is nothing at all - merely a vast, muddy plain beneath a freezing snow-covered mountain. But it is here, close to the border with Iran, that authorities in opposition-controlled northern Iraq are planning to house tens of thousands of refugees.

Kurdish officials admit they are unprepared to deal with the looming refugee crisis because the international community has offered insufficient help.

The UN has predicted that up to 2 million Iraqis could be left homeless by the war.

Can we imagine the situation if two million people in this country were left homeless?

Many are expected to flee to neighbouring countries such as Iran, Syria, Jordan and Turkey. Close to a million refugees are likely to be displaced within Iraq itself, aid workers believe, and half of these will seek sanctuary in the Kurdish self-rule enclave of northern Iraq.

It states further -

The two Kurdish regional administrations in northern Iraq have drawn up emergency plans to accommodate refugees in 25 camps but say they have virtually no tents or medicines.

"We have been lobbying the European Union and the Americans for two months. We have asked for shelters, tents and medicines. They have promised us help but we don't know whether we are going to get it in time. We are talking about a major crisis here," said Sakvan Farhan, the head of Kurdistan's emergency coordination department.

The same shortages await the 600,000 people who are expected to try to flee Iraq. UN plans to amass stocks of food and medicines for the millions of Iraqis likely to need help are a long way behind schedule.

One of the UN's biggest worries is the future of the oil-for-food programme. Around 16 million people, more than 60% of the Iraqi population, depend on it. At the moment the Iraqi government imports food commercially through a UN-supervised programme. It is distributed by Iraqis via 45,000 outlets in every big city in a scheme which is accepted even by the US and the UK as fair and efficient.

Once the first shot is fired, distribution is likely to stop because drivers will fear going into a war zone.

We know that any trucks seen moving will be blown up. To continue -

The Iraqi government last month gave people two months' ration but aid agencies say the poorest Iraqis have sold some of it. Even if they do not flee their homes under bombing raids, they will be at risk of hunger. UN officials will be withdrawn from Iraq in advance of the bombing, and there is no guarantee when their programmes will resume.

The World Food Programme appealed for \$23m to finance "an initial contingency plan" which would stockpile enough food just outside Iraq to give meagre rations for 900,000 people for 10 weeks. "So far only enough is in place for 500,000 for 10 weeks. We have received only \$7.5m," said Trevor Rowe, the WFP spokesman. "We may have to feed more than 10 times the number we appealed for, that is, 10 million people."

The UNHCR is equally short of funds. It has received \$16.3m out of the \$60m it asked for, which means it has stocks of tents, plastic sheeting and jerry cans ready for 180,000 people instead of the 600,000 refugees it estimates. This is a best case analysis. The worst case analysis is that around 900,000 people will try to leave Iraq and another million will be displaced inside it.

I do not have time to read the entire article, but it is very clear that although a huge effort is being directed towards preparations to bomb Iraq, little effort is being made to prepare for the humanitarian crisis it will cause afterwards. That is a disgrace. We must stop this madness.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.14 pm
