

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando,
Chairman, USCCB Committee on International Policy
Cc: Bishop William S. Skylstad, Bishop of Spokane and President, USCCB
Cc: Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles
Cc: Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton of Detroit
Cc: Archbishop Alexander J. Brunett of Seattle
Cc: Dr. Stephen Colecchi, Director, USCCB Office of International Justice and Peace

Justice and Peace Committee
Our Lady of the Lake Parish
8900 35th Ave NE
Seattle, WA 98115
February 11, 2006

Dear Bishop Wenski,

In light of our October 4th 2005 letter sent to the Bishops of the United States asking for some response to the tragic plight in Iraq, it is with great interest and gratitude that we read your January 12th 2006 statement, entitled "Toward a Responsible Transition in Iraq". It is our hope that this and other statements by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will be broadly disseminated among the clergy and laity and that it will inspire reflection, prayer, dialogue and action in response to the moral challenge we all face with the continued U.S. intervention in Iraq. The call for a "responsible transition" is indeed urgent and, as you clearly state in this statement, the foundation for a just transition is a forthright discussion that begins with an honest assessment of the situation in Iraq and our associated moral responsibilities. We write to you today to continue our engagement in the forthright discussion that you invite and to thank you for your leadership and wisdom in the moral reflections that you continue to offer.

In response to your January 12th statement, our committee respectfully requests further exploration, clarification and deliberation by the USCCB on two primary U.S. obligations that are essential to the establishment of a just and responsible transition in Iraq. These are 1) the renouncement of hegemony by the U.S. in terms of its long-term relationship with Iraq, and 2) the U.S. obligation to provide just reparations to the people of Iraq. You allude to both of these responsibilities in your document. We feel, however, that they deserve to be brought to the forefront of the recommended benchmarks for a responsible transition because without them there can be no true justice or peace in Iraq.

You state that it is important for the U.S. to send clear signals that the goals of U.S. policy are to help Iraqis assume full control of their governance and not to occupy the nation for an indeterminate period. In agreeing with your position, we also urge that it is essential for our government to unequivocally renounce all interest in economic and political control of Iraq and especially to renounce completely all plans for U.S. military

bases in the country. Further to these renouncements, we ought to demand that our government meet its urgent moral obligation of providing reparations to the people of Iraq for the hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths and injuries, and the extensive damage and destruction brought about by two U.S.-led wars and twelve years of brutal economic sanctions. Included in these reparations, provision must be made for the clean-up of highly dangerous U.S. military weapons debris such as Depleted Uranium that has the potential to plague the health of the Iraqi people and their environment for many generations to come. Our U.S. military veterans and their families also need our continuous care and support and we must speak out that they too may receive just reparations for the deaths, injuries and suffering they continue to bear as a result of this military intervention. Once again we are inspired by and would like to draw your attention to the work of our local Interfaith Network of Concern for the People of Iraq (www.concernforiraq.org) to which we are connected through three of our committee members. Their latest document is a resolution currently before the Seattle City Council for a three-point withdrawal strategy of the U.S. from Iraq, a tactic that reflects both a deep frustration with not being heard by our national leaders and a hope that local grassroots activism can make a difference. In it they deal specifically, and in further detail, with the primary U.S. obligations that we have outlined here.

On reflection, our ongoing discussions and deliberations on the obligations and responsibilities of our country to the people of Iraq speak to the broader issue of the ethics of U.S. “superpower”. As U.S. citizens and Catholic Justice and Peace activists, it is an issue we struggle with on many dimensions but always we hope with a Gospel perspective and an eye on Catholic Social Teaching. We hope too to continue to have our ears bent and consciences prodded by dynamic and prophetic statements from our Catholic leaders on this topic.

With much appreciation for your recent statement and with respect, hope and prayer for your continued leadership,

Sincerely yours,

Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Parish Justice and Peace Committee

(Signatures on attached sheet)