

Statement by Ambassador Paul Heinbecker to the United Nations Security Council

March 27, 2003

Mr. President,

We meet at a sombre moment.

The Government of Canada had hoped that a compromise was possible and that the Iraqi regime could have been disarmed without recourse to war.

But war it now is.

And, therefore, our foremost concern must be for the victims of war.

No one, civilian or soldier, combatant or non-combatant, is immune from the devastation and havoc that war wreaks.

We express our condolences to all those who have experienced loss during this conflict.

In this Council, our common humanity compels us to put people first, to focus our energies on protecting them and helping them to meet and surpass the challenges they face in the days ahead.

Our first duty is to meet the urgent human needs of the Iraqi people, too long victimised by their own brutal government.

The Security Council has on several occasions committed itself to protecting civilians in armed conflict, including in particular women and children at risk.

Every effort must be made to avoid civilian casualties.

The Council has, also, emphasized the obligation of parties to a conflict to ensure the safety, security and freedom of movement of UN and humanitarian personnel.

The Council has underscored the need for safe and unimpeded access to civilian populations at risk.

Furthermore, the Council has urged all parties to conflicts, including neighbouring countries, to comply strictly with their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

We appeal to all concerned to fulfil those undertakings.

We, particularly, appeal to neighbouring countries to do everything in their power to facilitate immediate, full, safe and unhindered access by humanitarian aid agencies to those in need.

We commend the courage and commitment of humanitarian aid personnel, including ICRC and UN employees, who are braving the very significant dangers of war to continue their operations in support of the ordinary people of Iraq.

We, also, call upon neighbouring countries to respect international law and to shelter those refugees who have no alternative but to flee across international borders

We have only begun to see the potential humanitarian implications of the current crisis, including movements of internally displaced persons,

And we know that the longer and more destructive the war is, the greater the needs will be.

We urge the Council, therefore, to adapt the Oil for Food programme without delay.

The Program can contribute significantly to meeting the Iraqi people's pressing needs.

Despite the efforts of many inside the Security Council and out, including Canada, the United Nations was not able to unite to disarm Saddam Hussein. However, we now have another opportunity to find the unity of purpose that eluded us before.

The people of Iraq will soon face the challenge of rebuilding their country in the wake both of inevitably destructive war and of the deprivation and suffering they have endured for years.

We believe that this Council must provide the mandate for this reconstruction effort.

We believe, further, that the UN system as a whole should be centrally engaged and should offer both leadership and its proven expertise in ensuring that this effort to help the Iraqi people rebuild their country is one in which all members of the international community can participate.

A word about the laws of war.

We appeal to all parties to respect their obligations under the Geneva Conventions in regard to the conduct of conflict.

Prisoners of war must not be used for propaganda purposes.

Civilians must not be used as human shields.

Schools and hospitals must remain off limits to war.

When I spoke before you on February 19 on behalf of the Canadian Government, I urged you to keep the welfare of the Iraqi people at the heart of your deliberations.

I make this appeal again, today.

There is no more noble and humane purpose this Council can now serve than helping the people of Iraq.

Canada commits to joining with others in meeting the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people and in working with them to rebuild their country.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that the Government of Canada has decided to commit \$100 million (Cdn) for humanitarian assistance to the people of Iraq.

Thank you.