

Living Conditions in Iraq: A Criminal Tragedy

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History will acknowledge that the criminal policy of the U.S-Britain and the illegal invasion of Iraq led to the current tragedy of the Iraqi people. In addition, history will have to acknowledge that the Iraqi people, alone, have resisted the genocidal sanctions and the U.S-British Occupation of their country.

A detailed study by the U.N. and Iraqi officials found that life in Iraq has decayed significantly since U.S-led foreign forces invaded and occupied the country, following a general trend seen in most sectors since the imposition of the genocidal sanctions in 1990. Iraqi civilians, mostly children, have suffered the consequences of this criminal tragedy.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) conducted the survey (study), titled [“Iraq Living Conditions Survey 2004,”](#) (ILCS) in cooperation with Iraq’s Ministry of Planning under Occupation. It should be noted that the study is not independent. The survey was conducted by Iraqi officials, who are serving the Occupation, with officials from the U.N.

Iraq had one of the best national health-care systems in the Middle East. For example, Saudi Arabia with all her petrodollar earnings had just a fraction of that of Iraq’s.

Iraq boasted a modern social infrastructure with a first-class range of health-care facilities, and the Iraqi people enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the Middle East. In 1991, there were 1,800 health-care centres in Iraq. More than a decade later, that number is almost half, and almost a third of them require major rehabilitation. Iraq had used its oil revenues, which accounted for 60% of its gross domestic product (GDP), to build a modern health-care system with large Western-style hospitals and modern technology. Iraqi medical and nursing schools attracted students from throughout the Middle East, and many Iraqi doctors were trained in Europe or the U.S.A. Primary health-care services reached about 97% of the urban population and 78% of the rural population in 1990. But the Gulf war of 1991 and more than 13 years of U.S-Britain sponsored genocidal sanctions have left the country’s economy and infrastructure in ruins.

UNICEF reported on March 28, 2003 that, “The Education system in Iraq, prior to 1991, was one of the best in the region, with over 100% Gross Enrolment Rate for primary schooling and high levels of literacy, both of men and women. The Higher Education, especially the scientific and technological institutions, was of an international standard, staffed by high quality personnel”. In the 1980s, a successful government program to eradicate illiteracy among Iraqi men and women was implemented.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO),

“Iraq had a modern sanitary infrastructure with an extensive network of water-purification and sewage-treatment systems. Water networks distributed clean, safe water to 95% of the urban population and to 75% of those in rural areas. In 1990, Iraq was ranked 50th out of 130 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index, which measures national achievements in health, education, and per capita GDP”.

It has fallen to 127, one of the most dramatic declines in human welfare in recent history, as a result of the U.S-Britain-sponsored sanctions and wars, which needlessly killed civilians *en mass*.

The [UN ILCS study](#) , which took less than five months to complete and covered all of Iraq’s provinces, reveals that some 24,000 Iraqis, 12 per cent of them children under the age of 18 years old, died as a result of the U.S-British invasion and the first year of Occupation. The three volumes report, which was based on interviews conducted with some 22,000 Iraqi households in 2004. The report estimates that the total number of Iraqi deaths is between 18,000 and 29,000. However, this estimate is misleading and does not take into account households where all members were lost, crimes that occurred very often in the indiscriminate bombings of population centres.

The most credible study so far was published in November 2004 in the *Lancet*, the highly reputable British medical journal. It shows that U.S. occupation forces in Iraq have killed more than 100,000 civilians between March 2003 and October 2004, the great majority of them are women and children. The estimate is considered “conservative” because it excludes the high death toll in areas such as Fallujah, where the U.S. committed crimes against humanity by obliterating the entire city of 300,000 people. Further, the *Lancet* study also shows that 14 per cent of U.S. soldiers and 28 per cent of U.S. marines had killed a civilian: U.S-authorized war crimes ignored in the ILCS Report.

Consistent with other studies, the ILCS study reveals that Iraqi civilians, mostly children, have suffered from lack of health care and adequate nutrition. The Data shows that 23 per cent of children under the age of 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition, and 12 percent suffer from general malnutrition, 8 per cent suffer acute malnutrition.

In a study published in November, the Norwegian-based Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science found that acute malnutrition among Iraqi children between the ages of six months and 5 years has increased from 4% before the invasion to 7.7% since the US invasion of Iraq. In other words, despite the 13-years sanctions, Iraqi children were living much better (by 3.7%) under the regime of Saddam Hussein than under the Occupation. Officials from the Institute revealed that the Iraqi malnutrition rate is similar to the level in some hard-hit African countries. A generation ago, obesity was the main nutrition-related public health concern, today at 7.7 per cent, Iraq’s child malnutrition rate is roughly equal to that of Burundi, an African nation ravaged by more than a decade of war. The study was substantiated by new study prepared for the U.N. Human Rights Commission by the reputed Swiss professor of Sociology and expert on the right to food, Dr. Jean Ziegler.

Infant mortality and malnutrition findings show clearly that, “the suffering of children due to war and conflict in Iraq is not limited to those directly wounded or killed by military activities”,’ says the study. With children under the age of 15 make up 39 per cent of the country’s total population of 27 million, the ILCS study notes that, “Most Iraqi children today have lived their whole lives under sanctions and war”. In other words, most Iraqi children

today have lived their lives in constant fear of U.S-British sponsored terrorism. “We find record of not a single significant demonstration protesting the wholesale destruction of Iraqi children,” wrote Professor Ward Churchill of the University of Colorado.

A detailed study by the British-based charity organisation (Medact) that examines the impact of war on health, revealed cases of vaccine-preventable diseases were rising and relief and reconstruction work had been mismanaged. Gill Reeve, deputy director of Medact, said, “[t]he health of the Iraqi people has deteriorated since the 2003 invasion. The 2003 war not only created the conditions for further health decline, but also damaged the ability of Iraqi society to reverse it”.

And as a consequence of the war, “Hundreds of thousands of children born since the beginning of the present war [March 2003] have had none of their required vaccinations, and routine immunization services in major areas of the country are all but disrupted. Destruction of refrigeration systems needed to store vaccines have rendered the vaccine supply virtually useless”, writes Dr. César Chelala, an international public health consultant. “Even antibiotics of minimal cost are in short supply, increasing the population’s risk of dying from common infections. Hospitals are overcrowded, and many hospitals go dark at night for lack of lighting fixtures. The Iraqi minister of health claims that 100 percent of the hospitals in Iraq need rehabilitation”, added César Chelala. The “current major problems” includes “lack of health personnel, lack of medicines, non-functioning medical equipments and destroyed hospitals and health centres”, the study reveals. It is a U.S-made and a U.S-accelerated tragedy.

After health, Iraq’s education system has also deteriorated. Again, Iraqis youngsters are hard hit under Occupation. The literacy rate among Iraqis between the ages of 15 and 24 is just 74 per cent, which is according to the study is only “slightly higher than the literacy rate for the population at large”. The figure is lower than that for those 25-34, “indicating that the younger generation lags behind its predecessors on educational performance”, said the study. As a result of high unemployment (over 70 per cent), males have neglected their education and are in search of work to support their families. Contrary to the ILCS study, like males, women literacy has declined markedly.

In reference to the past, the study acknowledge that while the previous regime (of Saddam Hussein) built up many of the country’s service networks, like electricity grids, sewage systems and water, the systems are widely in disrepair, the study reveals. However, in scathing over the sanctions and war, the ILCS study fails to condemn and attribute the causes of Iraq’s current conditions to the deliberate and systematic U.S-British bombings campaign (since 1991) to destroy the entire of Iraq’s civilian infrastructure, including water purification plants, sewage treatment plants, electricity grids, and communications.

The deliberate destruction of Iraq’s water and sewage systems by U.S. bombings has been the major cause (for a decade) of an outbreak of diarrhoea and hepatitis, particularly lethal to pregnant women and young children. Diarrhoea killed two out of every 10 children before the 1991 Gulf War and four in 10 after the war. The study indicates that only 54 per cent of households nationwide have access to a “safe and stable” supply of drinking water. An estimated 722,000 Iraqis, the report also notes, rely on sources that are both unreliable and unsafe.

Conditions are worse in rural areas, with 80 per cent of families drinking unsafe water, the report says. According to researchers, “the situation is alarming” in the southern

governorates of Basra, Dhiqar, Qadisiyah, Wasit, and Babel, located near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. A large percentage of the population in this region relies on water from polluted rivers and local streams.

Although 98 per cent of Iraqi households are connected to the electrical grid, 78 per cent of them experience “severe instability” and low quality in the service, according to the survey. One in three Iraqi families now relies on electricity generators, most of which are shared between households. In all, daily living conditions under the Occupation have deteriorated markedly.

According to Barham Salih, Iraq’s minister of planning, “This survey shows a rather tragic situation of the quality of life in Iraq”. Staffan de Mistura, the U.N. secretary general’s deputy special representative in Iraq, said the study “not only provides a better understanding of socio-economic conditions in Iraq, but it will certainly benefit the development and reconstruction processes”. The study will help address the grave disparities between urban and rural [areas] and between governorates in a more targeted fashion”, Mistura added.

Despite its reluctance to blame this criminal tragedy on U.S-Britain genocidal policy toward Iraq and the violent Occupation, the ILCS study is a strong indicator of a failed colonial policy and an illegal war of aggression against the Iraqi people. The ‘world community’ should use the study as a benchmark to demand the full withdrawal of U.S-British forces from Iraq and prevent the acceleration of this criminal tragedy.

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