

Statement to the U.S. troops

In place of a column written by me, there is a "Call to Conscience From Veterans to Active Duty Troops and Reservists" (<http://www.calltoconscience.net>), which says better than I could why we must rethink this whole illegal war effort.

"We are veterans of the U.S. armed forces. We stand with the majority of humanity, including millions in our own country, in opposition to the United States' all out war on Iraq. We span many wars and eras, have many political views and we all agree that this war is wrong. Many of us believed serving in the military was our duty, and our job was to defend this country. Our experiences in the military caused us to question much of what we were taught. Now we see our real duty is to encourage you as members of the U.S. armed forces to find out what you are being sent to fight and die for and what the consequences of your actions will be for humanity. We call upon you, the active duty and reservists, to follow your conscience and do the right thing.

"In the last Gulf War, as troops, we were ordered to murder from a safe distance. We destroyed much of Iraq from the air, killing hundreds of thousands, including civilians. We remember the road to Basra — the Highway of Death — where we were ordered to kill fleeing Iraqis. We bulldozed trenches, burying people alive. The use of depleted uranium weapons left the battlefields radioactive. Massive use of pesticides, experimental drugs, burning chemical weapons depots and oil fires combined to create a toxic cocktail affecting both the Iraqi people and Gulf War veterans today. One in four Gulf War veterans is disabled.

"During the Vietnam War we were ordered to destroy Vietnam from the air and on the ground. At My Lai we massacred over 500 women, children and old men. This was not an aberration, it's how we fought the war. We used Agent Orange on the enemy and then experienced first hand its effects. We know what Post Traumatic Stress Disorder looks, feels and tastes like because the ghosts of over two million men, women and children still haunt our dreams. More of us took our own lives after returning home than died in battle.

"If you choose to participate in the invasion of Iraq you will be part of an occupying army. Do you know what it is like to look into the eyes of a people that

hate you to your core? You should think about what your 'mission' really is. You are being sent to invade and occupy a people who, like you and me, are only trying to live their lives and raise their kids. They pose no threat to the United States even though they have a brutal dictator as their leader. Who is the United States to tell the Iraqi people how to run their country when many in the United States don't even believe their own President was legally elected?

"Saddam is being vilified for gassing his own people and trying to develop weapons of mass destruction. However, when Saddam committed his worst crimes the United States was supporting him. This support included providing the means to produce chemical and biological weapons. Contrast this with the horrendous results of the U.S. led economic sanctions. More than a million Iraqis, mainly children and infants, have died because of these sanctions. After having destroyed the entire infrastructure of

their country including hospitals, electricity generators, and water treatment plants, the United States then, with the sanctions, stopped the import of goods, medicines, parts, and chemicals necessary to restore even the most basic necessities of life.

"There is no honor in murder. This war is murder by another name. When, in an unjust war, an errant bomb dropped kills a mother and her child it is not 'collateral damage,' it is murder. When, in an unjust war, a child dies of dysentery because a bomb damaged a sewage treatment plant, it is not 'destroying enemy infrastructure,' it is murder. When, in an unjust war, a father dies of a heart attack because a bomb disrupted the phone lines so he could not call an ambulance, it is not 'neutralizing command and control facilities,' it is murder. When, in an unjust war, a thousand poor farmer conscripts die in a trench defending a town they have lived in their whole lives, it is not victory, it is murder..."

The statement will be concluded in the next column.



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is a complete

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— Irucka Ajani Embry can be reached at iembry@utk.edu and is interested in hearing how you think we can stop this and all other wars. Thank you.