

Bush Claims 'Sovereign Right' to Destroy the Peace

By Roger Normand / The Center for Economic and Social Rights

(March 18, 2003) — Last night, President Bush reminded the world that "one reason the UN was founded after the Second World War was to confront aggressive dictators actively and early before they can attack the innocent and destroy the peace."

Yet "attack the innocent and destroy the peace" is precisely what he now intends to do.

A US-led invasion of Iraq will be unequivocally illegal under the UN Charter and international law generally. A new report from the Center for Economic and Social Rights, *Tearing Up the Rules: The Illegality of Invading Iraq*, rejects efforts by the US, U.K, and Australia to circumvent the UN Security Council and claim legal justification for a war against Iraq.

The report cites a range of authoritative legal sources to refute their arguments, and warns that an illegal war in Iraq will threaten the pillars of collective security established after World War II to protect civilians from a recurrence of that unprecedented carnage.

"This is an attack on the very institutions of international law and the United Nations," said CESR board president Philip Alston, who directs the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice Program at New York University. "It opens the door for every country to take the law into its own hands and launch preemptive military strikes without any universally binding restraints."

CESR is taking part in an unprecedented worldwide effort by legal organizations, practitioners, and scholars to uphold the rule of law by putting governments on notice that they will face public condemnation and legal prosecution for any war crimes they commit in Iraq. Michael Ratner, President of the Center for Constitutional Rights, a human rights litigation center said today, "We are working with CESR and likeminded groups in the UK, Australia, and elsewhere to ensure that our leaders know in advance that they will be held individually accountable for any and all war crimes they commit."

The report points out that the impact of an unlawful war against Iraq will be suffered primarily by innocent civilians. "A pre-emptive military strike against Iraq is a cruel culmination of 13 years of punishment of people for something they have not done," said Hans von Sponeck, CESR's Europe representative and former UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq.

The suffering that is likely to result from a new war against Iraq has been thoroughly documented by a team of six public health, nutrition, and

infrastructure experts from CESR who visited Iraq from January 17-30, 2003. A new article from the research team members, published in the British medical journal the Lancet, concludes that military intervention in Iraq will severely affect an already vulnerable population, and a humanitarian disaster is likely to ensue.

As the US prepares to unleash an illegal and catastrophic attack against the people of Iraq, we urge people everywhere to stand up for human rights and the rule of law and raise their voices in loud opposition to this war.

Tearing Up the Rules: The Illegality of Invading Iraq:

<http://www.cesr.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&catid=538&cpid=402&pressview=1>

The Humanitarian Cost of a War in Iraq:

http://pdf.thelancet.com/pdftdownload?uid=llan.361.9360.health_and_human_rights.24861.1&x=x.pdf

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