



A Spectrum of Light in the
Middle East

April - May, 2004

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About The Prism Group

The Prism Group continues to focus on several key issues and is pleased to see that its efforts are causing "spectrums of awareness" in many places. This month's newsletter widens our scope throughout the Middle East. We look forward to your feedback.

Massacres

The Middle East has been replete with stories of massacres, actual and claimed, over the past decades. To name but a few: the deaths of nearly 600 Christians in Damour in 1976 at the hands of Palestinian combatants; the slaughter of Sunni Muslims in Homs, Syria, in 1982; the false claims that Israel killed 500 Palestinians in Jenin in 2002; and the horrific excesses of Saddam Hussein's regime.

The following is a summary of events did not receive wide media attention or even comment in the UN. You are encouraged to write to your local papers and demand proper coverage of world events. Write to your elected representatives, church leaders and to human rights organizations. Ask them to take a firm stand.

Fallujah is a Sunni town, 35 miles west of Baghdad. According to US Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt: "This was a city that profited immeasurably ... under the former regime. They have a view that somehow the harder they fight, the better chance they have of achieving some sort of restorationist movement".

The situation in Fallujah took a turn for the worse on March 30 when four US private contractors were ambushed and murdered. Indymedia.com reported that there were hundreds of civilian deaths and the Coalition partners were horrified.

The facts are somewhat different. As reported by BBC Radio on April 29, the regions of Fallujah and Najaf, have been identified as planning centers for many of the atrocities carried out against Iraqi citizens, Coalition troops and others. In order for Iraq not to be victimized by another despotic Hussein-style regime, the country must be drawn towards the axis of democracy.

Sadoun al-Dulame, a Baghdad-based political scientist, has noted that: "You can never forget that in this area retaliation is the fundamental element of the tribal

system, its focal point. This is a revenge culture where insults to people's honor will always be repaid with violence."

Syrian Football massacre. Al Jazeera reported that on March 14, 14 Kurds were killed when violence broke out in the northern Syrian town of Qameshli during a football match. The next day, at demonstrations held to protest the murders, five more Kurds were killed by riot police.

A website called Rojname.com explained that during the football match some fans began waving a Kurdish flag. (About 160,000 Kurds have been denied Syrian nationality, meaning they cannot vote, own property, go to state schools or get government jobs.)

Syrian state broadcasting reported that the government had appointed a committee to investigate reasons behind the rioting. It said the riots damaged "the stability and security of the homeland and the citizens" and were the fault of "some intriguers" who had adopted "exported ideas".

However, this does not explain the home video shown on a few television channels days later. The video showed Syrian security forces opening fire randomly on unarmed citizens frantically fleeing the area.

(This newsletter was written as reports came in about explosions in Damascus).

A New Palestinian Massacre. The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group (PHRMG) has been highly critical of Israel's activities in recent years. In April 2004, PHRMG turned its attention to internal Palestinian violence. (see <http://www.phrmg.org/intrafada.htm>). It noted that although hundreds of Palestinians have been killed or injured since 1993 by local Palestinian militia, the statistics include the dead and injured in attacks blamed on Israel. However, the [American Humanist Association reported](#) that this type of statistical skewing has been common since the first Intifada.

Sudan. And the list goes on. Estimates show that thousands of native black Africans, mostly settled farmers, have been killed in an apparent ethnic-cleansing policy that has been recently instituted in Western Sudan. Hundreds of thousands of black Africans have been uprooted from their villages and forced to abandon their traditional farmland to lighter-skinned Muslim Arab Sudanese citizens. Nevertheless, Sudan has just been elected to the UN Human Rights Commission.

Aid for the Poor

The new UNRWA director in Lebanon, Richard Cook, recently announced that there are no plans to reduce services to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon – despite media reports to the contrary. Lebanon's Daily Star on line quotes Cook as saying: "We have no measures and no policy on the reduction of services. Far from it, in Lebanon of this year we have increased our services.... This year it is the highest funding that we have ever got.... But it's not keeping pace with the costs..."

At the same time, Cook is earnestly trying to ensure that donors' money is being used appropriately. In a brave break with previous UNRWA traditions, Cook is demanding the political slogans be removed from UNRWA run schools. It has also been reported that he has dismissed UNRWA officials for stealing food rations.

These policy initiatives are to be welcomed, especially compared to the disastrous arrangements in the Gaza region. Here, there are documents and pictures showing how UNRWA resources have been consistently misappropriated over years by local Palestinian mafia. UNRWA facilities have been used by gunmen and schools have become recruiting grounds for combatants.

The Prism Group, which has written on UNRWA in the past (e.g. see <http://www.theprismgroup.org/UNWRAPA.htm>), supports Cook's efforts.

Food-for-thought

On March 17 the New York Times printed an article by the venerable William Safire reporting how Claudia Rosett, another Times journalist had exposed a cover-up in the office of the U.N. secretary general -- a multibillion dollar financial fraud that has become known as the Iraqi oil-for-food program. According to Rosett, U.N.'s secretive oversight of more than \$100 billion in Iraqi oil exports and supposed humanitarian imports was "an invitation to kickbacks, political back-scratching and smuggling done under cover of relief operations."

Kofi Annan's right-hand man, Benon Sevan, headed the oil-for-food program. When confronted, Sevan cited a hundred audits in five years, but he refused to give any details.

Now, the whole scam has been brought to light by free Iraqis in Baghdad. Detailed accounts have been reported by The Times, The Wall Street Journal, and London's Daily Telegraph.

Assistant Secretary General Sevan, now on an extended vacation until his retirement next month, denied through a spokesman "that I had received oil or oil monies from the former Iraqi regime". However, The Journal produced a document in Arabic suggesting Sevan received 1.8 million barrels of oil.

It seems that nearly 75% of the program suppliers raised their prices to pay a 10% kickback. These included European manufacturers, Arab trade brokers, Russian factories and Chinese state-owned companies. Estimates of the corruption cost: \$2.3 billion.

Annan's office was stonewalling the press until an irate Iraqi Governing Council hired the accountants KPMG and a law firm to investigate what its advisers called "one of the world's most disgraceful scams."

Financial Mismanagement

In early March 2004 the Brussels-based European Institute for Research on the Middle East reported that Britain and other European states gave the Palestinians more than 20 million Euros to provide legal and technical advice for final status negotiations with Israel. Britain, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway paid the funds to the PLO Negotiations Aid Department's (NAD) Negotiations Support Unit (NSU), which in the absence of peace negotiations, was accused of pursuing a propaganda campaign which proposed policies frequently contradicting the five countries' stated foreign policy objectives.

The Institute asked several of the states for details of the targeted aid they provided to the PLO for the final status negotiations. According to its research director, Dr. Nick Lambert: "Various ministries sought to block our investigation, and some refused to cooperate altogether, yet still claimed a policy of transparency- until we uncovered classified reports which suggested the opposite."

Lambert says financial aid to the PA created a situation in which European countries continue to fund activities which often run directly counter to other areas of their governments' foreign aid strategies. Lambert also notes, following the NSU funding exposure, its legal advisor, Diana Buttu, in an April interview with the BBC, continued to make false statements, presenting Hamas as neither a terrorist organization nor committed to a charter which seeks to destroy Israel. She appeared to ignore the fact that Hamas' bombing campaign had caused her own international benefactors to declare Hamas a terrorist organization several months earlier.

The Prism Group Website:

Please visit our site and help direct others to the existing fact sheets. If you have ideas for fact sheets that you believe we should investigate and compile, please write to us at: info@theprismgroup.org.

Our web site is www.theprismgroup.org.

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