

**CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY
DELIVERED BY
KEVIN HENRY, ADVOCACY DIRECTOR, CARE**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

MAY 13, 2003

I. INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Kevin Henry, and I am Advocacy Director for CARE. In addition to my current policy work on Iraq and Afghanistan, I have participated in CARE's response to numerous complex emergencies over the past two decades, including "Operation Provide Comfort" in northern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today on the problems being encountered in the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the wake of the military conflict in Iraq.

I will focus my testimony on the efforts of CARE and other humanitarian organizations to deliver assistance in Iraq, the context in which we are operating, and our recommendations for priority action by the U.S. Government. I will also highlight critical lessons that need to be learned from our experience in Afghanistan post-9/11.

As now acknowledged in the draft resolution tabled last week at the United Nations Security Council, the U.S. Government is the *de facto* occupying power in Iraq. As such, we have assumed enormous responsibilities for the immediate security and welfare of the Iraqi people. We call on the Bush administration and Congress to ensure that the U.S. Government fully and effectively meets its obligations under international law.

II. CURRENT CONDITIONS AND THE URGENT NEED FOR SECURITY

The central reality in Iraq today is that a vacuum has developed in a country that was for decades completely dominated by institutions that now no longer exist—the Iraqi Government led by Saddam Hussein, the Baath party, and the Iraqi security and intelligence services. *A swift military victory must now be followed by an equally effective response in filling this vacuum; failing to do so could prove tragic for the Iraqi people and very damaging for the international standing of the U.S. Government.* What is required of the U.S. Government is obvious and straightforward—restore order, re-establish essential public services, and set in motion a process that will allow the Iraqi people to rebuild their country and establish a legitimate government. While

straightforward, the magnitude of the challenges faced in doing all that is required in Iraq is enormous and should not be under-estimated.

First and foremost, immediate action must be taken to restore law and order. While the Iraqi people have no desire to return to the police state that was Iraq under Saddam Hussein, they are urgently calling for a restoration of security. Many Iraqis are still afraid to venture outside their homes, especially at night, and most parents are still unwilling to send their children back to school, fearing for their safety.

And the lack of security is already having a very detrimental effect on the ability of CARE and other humanitarian organizations to do our jobs. CARE International is one of the few NGOs that has worked continuously in Iraq since the 1991 Gulf War. Our staff, primarily Iraqi nationals, remained in Iraq during the war and continued their work (interrupted for only a few days) in Baghdad, even during the bombing. *Despite our extensive experience in Iraq, current conditions are making it very difficult for CARE to do its work, which has been focused on the critical areas of helping hospitals and clinics deliver much-needed medical services and undertaking emergency repairs of water and sewage treatment facilities.*

During the war, a missile hit the CARE warehouse in Baghdad, and in the war's immediate aftermath, that same warehouse was looted of its emergency relief supplies. Just this past weekend, two CARE vehicles were carjacked at gunpoint, and the CARE office and warehouse were attacked at night, resulting in the gunshot injury of a security guard. As a result of this setback in the security situation inside Iraq, we are pulling several recently deployed members of our international staff out of Baghdad and back to Amman for their own safety. CARE staff in Baghdad have asked the military to establish security in the neighborhood where the CARE warehouse is located and to clear unexploded ordnance in the area. CARE's security officer in Baghdad reports that we are receiving no information from the military, and that we have not even been provided a number to call to report security incidents.

What does it say about the situation when criminals can move freely around Baghdad but humanitarian aid workers cannot? Unless law and order can be re-established promptly, there is the risk of a rapid downward spiral in the humanitarian situation in Iraq, and civilian relief agencies will be in no position to respond. *Establishing security throughout Iraq must be priority number one of the U.S. Government, and the assets required to accomplish this objective should be deployed immediately.*

III. OTHER URGENT PRIORITIES

Beyond the establishment of law and order, urgent action is required in other areas to stabilize the humanitarian situation and to convey to the people of Iraq the hope that things will soon start to get better, rather than worse. Based on CARE's assessment of the current situation in Iraq, we recommend that particular attention be accorded to the following three areas:

- **Restoring electricity and repairing water supply and waste treatment systems**-- While everyone involved recognizes the urgency of restoring these public utilities, the progress that has been made to date is very slow in the eyes of the Iraqi people. *Restoring these services is essential not only to preventing further deterioration in the health situation, but also to providing a tangible sign to the Iraqi people that some degree of normalcy is being re-established.*
- **Preventing a complete collapse of Iraq's already fragile health system**— CARE Iraq is working with hospital and clinic staff in Baghdad and elsewhere in central Iraq to help them cope with the war and its aftermath, including civilian casualties, the looting of their facilities, and an increasing incidence of water-borne diseases. *Immediate action, including improving security at hospitals to prevent further looting and delivering urgently- needed supplies and equipment, is required to prevent a complete collapse of health care.*
- **Instituting an emergency system for the payment of essential government employees**— Employees at hospitals, clinics, water treatment plants, and other vital social services facilities continue to work, for the most part, without any payment of salaries or expenses. While that is commendable, it is clearly neither reasonable nor sustainable. *While the complicated, longer-term issues of who should be retained and how much they should be paid are being worked out, an emergency system should be put in place to provide some compensation to doctors, nurses, and other civil servants, so that they can stay at their vital jobs and support their families.* It is important to remember that the largest employer by far in pre-war Iraq—the Government of Iraq—no longer exists. Resuming payments to civil servants is thus essential to getting the Iraqi economy moving again.

IV. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM AFGHANISTAN

Although Afghanistan and Iraq are very different in many respects, there are aspects of our recent experience in Afghanistan that *should* be informing our collective response to the current crisis in Iraq. In this respect, CARE urges the members of this committee to focus on the following four points:

- **Following “regime change,” priority must be given to establishing nationwide law and order as a basis for economic reconstruction and political transformation.** Regime change, by definition, creates a security vacuum. Like all other vacuums, this one will eventually be filled. If it is not filled by international peacekeepers and new national security forces, it will be filled by less savory forces, including criminals, warlords,

terrorists, and drug traffickers. One and a half years after the end of the war in Afghanistan to unseat the Taliban and defeat Al Qaeda, a large portion of the country remains insecure and outside the authority of the Karzai government. Despite repeated calls, the U.S. Government and the larger international community have failed to expand international peacekeepers beyond Kabul. *Current U.S. Government strategy, which includes the deployment of small Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and the training of a new Afghan National Army (woefully behind schedule), is unlikely to deliver on the level of security required, thus threatening the overall transition of Afghanistan to a stable, democratic future. Similar policy mistakes should not be made in Iraq.*

- **Post-conflict reconstruction is a long and costly undertaking, requiring sustained commitment from the U.S. Government and the rest of the international community.** To this day, the international community has yet to mobilize anywhere near the \$15-20 billion required by the Afghan Government to rebuild that country over the next five years. For its part, the U.S. Government has been slow to match its Marshall Plan rhetoric with cold, hard cash. Fortunately, there does now seem to be progress in the resources area as regards relief and reconstruction in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Congress acted to appropriate funds for Afghan reconstruction this year, despite the Bush administration's failure to include a specific request in its FY03 budget, and the administration and Congress have augmented those resources through the Iraq supplemental. The Iraq supplemental also includes more than \$2.5 billion for Iraq relief and reconstruction, which should be seen as a reasonable down payment against a much larger, multi-year effort. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, we will have to guard against our short attention spans, ensuring that adequate funds are appropriated, long after public and media attention and interest might otherwise wane.
- **Establishing an international framework for managing post-conflict situations like Afghanistan and Iraq is in the best interest of those countries, as well as of the American taxpayers.** The people of Iraq, and the eventual new government of Iraq, will need all the help they can get—financial aid, technical assistance, trade and investment, and debt relief—in rebuilding their country economically and politically. Creating a framework that enjoys the widest possible international support is thus vital. In order to achieve broad international buy-in, the U.S. Government will eventually have to be prepared to share control beyond the limited coalition of countries that participated in the military campaign. In Afghanistan, the United Nations has provided an umbrella of international legitimacy that has enabled dozens of countries to contribute to both international peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts. A comparable role for the United Nations would be appropriate in the Iraq context.

- **Transitioning as quickly as possible to full civilian leadership and control of relief and reconstruction in Iraq will encourage the widest possible participation of U.S. and international humanitarian organizations in those efforts.** The military's expertise is in the security area, and that should be their focus in Iraq. By contrast, most experience in relief and reconstruction resides in the civilian branches of the U.S. Government, the United Nations, and humanitarian NGOs like those testifying here today. *While the military should provide humanitarian assistance where no civilian humanitarian organizations are in a position to do so, logic dictates that they turn over responsibility for relief and reconstruction as soon as possible to civilian agencies that have the comparative advantage in this area.* As we have learned the hard way in Afghanistan, it is also vital that the military respect the need for humanitarian organizations to be seen as impartial and independent, and that they do nothing to blur the distinction between military and humanitarian action. Organizations like CARE work in many very dangerous situations, and the safety of our staff largely depends on their reputation in local communities as unbiased providers of humanitarian assistance.

V. CONCLUSION

This week's news from Baghdad is unsettling. The Saddam Hussein regime clearly is no more, but in its place a security vacuum has developed. Clearly, the team of U.S. officials tasked with governing Iraq in the interim is also in a state of flux. A high degree of insecurity, coupled with confusion as to who is in effective charge as regards re-establishing vital services, make Iraq today a difficult and dangerous place for humanitarian organizations like CARE to work. We urge the President's new special envoy for Iraq, Paul Bremer, to accord highest priority to the establishment of law and order throughout Iraq, as security is the foundation on which economic and political reconstruction must be built. If that is done, we can work to ensure that the basic needs of Iraq's 24 million people are met, and a humanitarian crisis can be averted.

Thank you for giving CARE the opportunity to testify before you today.