



*Represented by*

centerforconstitutionalrights  
*on the front lines for social justice*

March 19, 2013

Dr. Emilio Álvarez Icaza  
Executive Secretary  
Inter-American Commission on Human rights  
Washington, D.C. 20006

Re: Request for Thematic Hearing During the 149<sup>th</sup> Period of Sessions  
on Health and Human Rights Impacts of the U.S.-led Decade of War in Iraq

Dear Dr. Álvarez Icaza:

In accordance with Article 64 of the Rules of Procedure of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, we respectfully submit this request for a thematic hearing on the human rights impacts of the war in Iraq on behalf of the undersigned non-governmental organizations consisting of U.S. veterans of the Iraq war and two Iraqi civil society organizations. On this, the tenth anniversary of that war, Iraq Veterans Against the War, the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq and the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq have joined together to seek accountability for the shared harms of this war for which there has been no acknowledgment or accountability from the United States.

We attach a preliminary report in support of this request which provides context and background as well as an overview of relevant studies on different aspects of the war and its impacts on both Iraqis and U.S. servicemembers. In particular, the report details some of the same harms to health and trauma suffered by both U.S. veterans and Iraqis and includes first-person testimonies documenting the long-lasting and inter-generational health and environmental effects resulting from the U.S.'s use of certain munitions during the war, the post-traumatic stress experienced by Iraqis and veterans alike, the effects of war crimes on Iraqis and also the "moral injury" increasingly documented among U.S. servicemembers, as well as the gender-based violence experienced on all sides of the war, i.e. among civilians as well as within the U.S. military.

A hearing before the Commission on these matters is urgently needed as there is no hospitable forum in the United States in which to adequately and appropriately address these issues. As

detailed in the accompanying report, the rule of law and basic human rights principles have also been casualties of the past decade which has seen the waging of aggressive war, policies of rendition and torture, indefinite and arbitrary detentions, increasing secrecy and even targeted, extra-judicial killings. So far efforts at redress and accountability for grave violations of fundamental rights arising out of these policies have met dead ends judicially and roadblocks politically.

The war is not over for Iraqis and U.S. servicemembers still suffering devastating harms. And it will not be over for a long time to come with skyrocketing cancer rates and birth defects among both Iraqis and U.S. servicemembers attributable to the munitions used by the U.S. military that have contaminated the environment. Nor is it over for those Iraqis and U.S. servicemembers suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other physical and psychological injuries. Indeed, the U.S. military has seen unprecedented levels of suicides among servicemembers who were subjected to brutal redeployment policies, often being sent back to war zones wounded and damaged.

Moreover, there is a wealth of evidence, which continues to emerge, which shows that senior officials of the administration of George W. Bush were intimately involved in formulating policies and approving practices which amounted to and resulted in torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. To date, there has been no accountability whatsoever for their role in these offenses.

In addition to the Commission's mandate and interest in helping to ensure compliance by Member States with basic, fundamental rights principles, the U.S.'s policies of the last decade also have serious implications for the region. As set out in the report, it has been increasingly reported that the U.S. government is using tactics honed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in its ever-expanding "war on drugs" throughout Latin America.<sup>1</sup> The reverse is also true as it has been documented that violent tactics notoriously used by U.S. military and civilian officials in covert counter-insurgency operations in the 1980's and 1990's in Central America have been applied in Iraq.<sup>2</sup>

If the Commission grants this request for a hearing, we propose to provide the Commission with testimony by both U.S. servicemembers and war-affected Iraqis on issues of mutual concern including the rights to life, health and to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as by experts on some of the issues mentioned above and explored in more detail in the accompanying report.

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<sup>1</sup> Thom Shanker, *Lessons of Iraq Help U.S. Fight a Drug War in Honduras*, The New York Times, May 5, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/06/world/americas/us-turns-its-focus-on-drug-smuggling-in-honduras.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>2</sup> See Mona Mahmood, Maggie O'Kane, Chavala Madlena and Teresa Smith, *Revealed: Pentagon's Link to Iraqi Torture Centres: General David Petraeus and 'Dirty Wars' Veteran Behind Commando Units Implicated in Detainee Abuse*, The Guardian, March 6, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/06/pentagon-iraqi-torture-centres-link>.

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Please let me know if you require any further information. We thank the Commission in advance for its consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Pamela C. Spees

*on behalf of the requesting organizations*

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Ms. Amadee Braxton, Iraq Veterans Against the War  
Ms. Yanar Mohammed, Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq