The women and children of Iraq

by Rania Masri

"I am against war, since war means destruction, hurt and ruin. Nobody should like war especially when all the great powers of the world gang up against one country in an unequal war and try to destroy all signs of progress and make the country go back to the middle ages. People are starving to death and inflation is murder. Missiles and bombs do not think, they hit and explode—whether you are military or civilian, sick or well, old or young, men or women, you die. Where do you go to hide?"

—Iraqi woman over 30 years old

The war against the Iraqi people did not end in 1991 with George Bush’s cease-fire declaration; instead, the war against the Iraqi people—against the Iraqi men, women, and children—is continuing with savage intensity to this very day. It has only changed in form from the thunder of bombs to the eerie silence of a militarily-enforced blockade.

More than 300,000 Iraqis were killed in the 43-day military war in 1991. Since then, more than one million people—mainly young children—have died as a direct result of the US-led blockade on this small country. The lack of food and medicine, along with the deteriorating sanitary conditions in Iraq, have caused far more harm and suffering than the military war itself—despite the use of more than 142,000 tons of bombs and $500 tons of depleted uranium shells during the bombing campaigns. From a legal perspective, the maritime blockade, coupled with the air blockade, amounts to an act of war, thereby making the economic sanctions a continuation of the war that supposedly ended in March 1991.

What have been the effects of this continuing war, euphemistically referred to as sanctions, on the people of Iraq? Four million people, one-fifth of the population, are currently starving to death in Iraq (UN FAO report, 1995). The general human situation is deteriorating everywhere, while the situation for women in Iraq is even more precarious. Up to 95% of all pregnant women in Iraq suffer from anemia, and thus will give birth to weak, malformed infants. Most of these infants will either die before reaching the age of five due to the lack of food and basic medicines or will be permanently scarred, either physically or mentally. Furthermore, many mothers, due to their own weak bodies, are unable to breast-feed their children. Due to the run-away inflation caused by the blockade, these families lack the means to feed their children. The mothers often bring their children to the hospital to die.

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NRC Lets Shearon Harris Slide—Again

by Michael Steinberg

A US General Accounting Office report earlier this year lambasted the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for letting safety problems at the nation’s nuclear power plants grow. A recent review of the situation at the Shearon Harris nuclear power plant by this reporter confirmed the GAO analysis at that facility. And belittling measures by the plant’s owner and operator, Carolina Power & Light, are threatening to make safety conditions deteriorate even further.

The Untouchables

The GAO report entitled “Nuclear Regulation: Preventing Problem Plants Requires More Effective NRC Action,” was released on June 17. It was undertaken after public pressure mounted by communities near nuclear plants led to a request for an investigation of the NRC by Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware and Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut.

The report found that the NRC is not effectively overseeing the plants that have problems, that it is not getting licenses to fix deficiencies in a timely manner, and that “NRC enforcement actions are too late to be effective.” After the report’s release Senator Biden called for a Congressional investigation of the NRC, which itself replaced the Atomic Energy Commission in the 1970s after it became too obvious that the latter was too cozy with the industry it was supposed to regulate.

Let Them Drink Tritium

(FAI, 1996) Here’s the chronology for Shearon Harris. The NRC has indicated that the plant in question has received a "Limited License" to assume 20,000 gallons of reactor grade water, which is tritium in the form of water. This license is for 10 years. The license was granted in March 1992.

The plant, which is in the process of being decommissioned, was requested by the NRC because of a "need for water." The plant has been in operation since 1970 and has been used to produce electricity. The plant was shut down in 1991 due to safety concerns.

The NRC has stated that the plant will be used to produce tritium, which is a form of hydrogen used in fusion research. The NRC has stated that the use of tritium will not pose a health risk to the public.

Community activists in western Massachusetts have found elevated levels of tritium in drinking water and have called for the plant’s closure. The NRC has stated that the plant will be closed in 2005.