

44th ASSEMBLY, 2003
GLOBAL ISSUES

What is might? When you see people about to fall and rescue them.
(Midrash Tehillim 52:24)

Issue

Current global challenges include the need to rebuild Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the economic crisis in Argentina.

Background

An ill wind is blowing through the world, bringing malaise and despair. Accelerating wars in many countries and the fear of weapons of mass destruction weigh heavily on many minds. Terrorist attacks worldwide rob us of confidence. Financial hardships increase in developed as well as in developing countries. We watch with apprehension diminishing water supplies, polluted air and seas, as well as deadly diseases traveling across borders. Our children see and often know too much. Anxiety corrodes their joy. Their heroes are assassinated, and they and their friends are endangered. Yes, many children become too old before their years.

Yet it is possible that even an ill wind can bring some good. Stewardship of the earth is a goal well known in Judaism, the United Nations is a valued agency for negotiation, and children join adults in bringing strength and resilience to help alleviate many situations. Humanity has lived through dark ages in other eras. In a time of crisis, our spiritual and ethical foundations sustain us. There have been beacons of light to lead the way, persons who became the models of hope, despite spending decades in prison or detention. When freed they may lead their country to freedom and forgiveness or their people to a continuing life of faith.

The world has already advanced to a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There are many other national and international resolutions, declarations, statements or conventions to mark the effort to further help people and countries. Thus the role of resolutions at every Women of Reform Judaism assembly is to show not only sensitivity to urgent crucial issues but also to register possible response to them. In doing so we honor the memory of Anne Frank who, even as she heard the tramp of the approaching Nazis, wrote, "I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart."

Rebuilding Afghanistan and Iraq

In the aftermath of September 11th, the United States has sought to reduce the threat of terrorism in the world by removing the Al Qaeda-connected Taliban from power in Afghanistan. Two years have passed since the war in Afghanistan, yet the country is neither revitalized nor stable. The US government initially failed to provide Afghanistan's new president, Hamid Karzai, with the help he needed to rebuild his country's economy and institutions. The rebuilding of vital roads, including the main road between Kabul and Kandahar, has still not been completed. Thousands of students are still studying outdoors in tents.

Although the Pentagon has spent billions on the troops fighting Taliban remnants, the administration has spent far less than is needed on reconstruction. Encouragement of the government to rebuild and strengthen the country is needed. Moreover, additional funding from

the United States could prompt additional contributions and peacekeeping efforts from other countries.

The situation in Iraq is equally dire and exacerbated by the influx of foreign terrorists. The British and American coalition does not seem to have as much control in Iraq as they anticipated, and Iraqi resistance continues to grow. The country, which has been under the rule of the Baath party for 35 years, grapples with a shift in power. Although US military superiority made victory seem a foregone conclusion, the same is not necessarily true about successful rebuilding.

Crucial items like air conditioners or refrigerators (particularly in hospitals) function only sporadically due to insufficient electrical restoration. Toxic chemicals from ammunition and missiles pollute the environment. The fragile desert ecosystem, now damaged, will take decades to recover. Unspent ammunitions lay hidden or exposed all over the country, particularly near big cities, posing a risk to people and animals. Broken water mains and pipes are leading to a contamination of the water supply. A suitable framework for United Nations participation in rebuilding post-conflict Iraq is essential.

Economic Crisis in Argentina

Just a few years ago, Argentina was a middle-class nation with the highest per capita income in Latin America. Today it is one of the world's most intractable economic trouble spots. The economic collapse in 2001 has left 60% of the population living in poverty (income below \$220 a month for a family of four) with 25% classified as "indigent" (less than \$100 per month).

The economic downfall can be traced to 1991, when the government pegged the *peso* to the US dollar. By linking the *peso* to the dollar, Argentines adopted a currency with an exchange rate that bore little relation to their own economic conditions. When the Brazilian *real* plummeted in 1999, the *peso* was unable to follow suit, leaving Argentine exports vastly more expensive than those of its neighbor.

The new Argentinean government has now devalued its currency and ended the fixed link with the dollar. It has reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund in relation to its \$140 billion in international debt. These actions will bring stability to the country but will make life more difficult for those who have borrowed money in dollars - for example, individuals owning small businesses and many with mortgages.

The singular characteristic of this situation has been the impoverishment of all classes of society. The Jewish population of Argentina is about 220,000 with 80% living in Buenos Aires. The Jewish community, which was the second most economically successful Jewish community in the world, has suffered additional crises with the bombing of the Israeli embassy in 1992 and the Argentine Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA) Community Center in 1994. Then, in 1998, the Jewish banks collapsed.

Until recently this middle and upper middle class community had only about 4000 poor individuals. There are now approximately 60,000 Jews living under the poverty line. The AMIA feeds about 5000 people each day, and Buenos Aires synagogues are running soup kitchens. More than 33,000 Jews are receiving community assistance. Children are leaving Jewish schools

for lack of tuition help. The Progressive Jewish congregations in Argentina have organized a network of services to support the community, but they are in dire need of financial assistance.

Resolution

Based on the Jewish mandate to seek peace, act justly and secure human rights for all and in accordance with prior WRJ resolutions, Women of Reform Judaism:

1. Calls on Sisterhoods worldwide to urge their governments to support the rebuilding of Afghanistan and Iraq, including:
 - a. Economic and humanitarian aid: shelter, food rations, medical care, teachers, and assistance for the victims of trauma;
 - b. The efforts of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Emergency Action Plans for Iraq and Afghanistan. These include the UN's Transitional Assistance Programme for Afghanistan that is addressing national capacity building requirements, emerging reconstruction challenges, while at the same time responding to ongoing humanitarian needs;
 - c. The work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women to include women in all rebuilding and redevelopment efforts;
 - d. Increased resources for the aid program being implemented by the US Agency for International Development, which is working to rebuild Iraq's infrastructures, including electrical and gas production and distribution, sewage systems, clean water resources, roadways and the availability of transportation and communications services;
 - e. Reconstruction of many urban and rural communities throughout Afghanistan to enable the return of over 1.9 million refugees and 400,000 internally displaced people, as well as the return to school of over 3.6 million children. Reconstruction of Iraqi communities is also needed to enable the return of approximately 400,000 refugees and over one million internally displaced Iraqis;
 - f. Removal of deadly landmines in Iraq and Afghanistan by the UN Office of Projects;
 - g. The efforts of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization to distribute fungicides to grain farmers in Iraq whose crops will otherwise be lost; and
 - h. Advocating the empowerment and active participation of Iraqi and Afghani agencies and citizens, with an emphasis on including women in every aspect of rebuilding their countries.

2. Calls on the United States, Canadian and other governments to encourage international financial institutions to aid Argentina and other nations in similar economic crises without requiring drastic reductions in social services.
3. Urges its affiliates worldwide to:
 - a. Hold programs and study groups to help members stay informed about current economic, social and political issues in Latin America, particularly in Argentina;
 - b. Keep members up to date about the situation in Argentina; and
 - c. Work in coordination with ARZA/World Union and the Progressive Movement in Argentina to address the needs of the Argentine Jewish population.

