

**STATEMENT OF CHLOE O’GARA, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS,
SAVE THE CHILDREN U.S.A.
FOR**

**3rd WOOLSEY BIPARTISAN IRAQ FORUM ON:
THE MOUNTING COSTS OF THE U.S. MILITARY OCCUPATION OF IRAQ AND
LOST OPPORTUNITIES**

September 26, 2006

The ongoing conflict in Iraq is having a devastating impact on children and their families. Nearly half of Iraq’s 26 million people live in chronic poverty with the majority of adults unemployed and a large percentage of families dependent on public assistance for most of their food. Hospitals are short of supplies, schools are in poor shape and clean water is a perpetual problem as sewage is often dumped untreated into the water sources. Since 1990, the mortality rate of children under five has more than doubled and the maternal mortality rate has more than tripled – two key indicators that the needs of children and their families in Iraq are not being met.

Insecurity and uncertainty also persist across the country, putting women and children under continual psycho-social stress. As one Iraqi father told Save the Children, “...can anybody help the Iraqi people? We are suffering. We have been for 30 years. We don’t know what to do and we need help from the international community in dealing with the psychological effects of war.” The answer to this man’s question is “yes.” Schools provide a place where children can begin the process of recovering from trauma and grief, and voice their feelings without fear. Properly trained teachers can lead the process of identifying and supporting vulnerable children who are at immediate risk of harm.

The problem is that while safe, quality education can help to meet most child protection needs, conflicts have a devastating impact on children’s education. Many children in Iraq don’t go to school today. It is estimated that 818,000 primary aged children in Iraq do not attend school.

This statistic is particularly alarming because well-managed school space can increase a child’s chances of surviving conflict. Schools can protect children physically by offering them with child friendly safe spaces where they can play and learn. They can also learn how to avoid landmines and other physical dangers. The routine of school further helps to give children a sense of normality and hope for the future.

For societies affected by conflict, education is integral to building long-term peace and prosperity. The legacy of properly resourced schools with well-trained teachers and appropriate curricula is a generation of young people with skills for employment, and an understanding of equality, tolerance and peace. School can give children the knowledge they need, as they become adults, to reduce the chances of conflict happening again.

In our three years operating in southern Iraq (from 2003 to 2006), Save the Children helped more than 330 community groups complete 1,120 projects including the rehabilitation of 164 schools and the construction of ten new schools. We helped provide scores of communities with electricity and clean water, improved roads, created children’s parks and helped women

learn computer skills and start small businesses. Save the Children provided training to 1,500 health workers, rehabilitated 8 large health facilities, established and equipped 12 child nutrition centers and improved the classroom skills of more than 300 teachers.

In cooperation with Save the Children Denmark, we also developed an emergency education program. The goal of the program was to develop a more child friendly approach to learning. Working with the Department of Education and Basah Teacher Training Institute, Save the Children developed an Iraqi teacher training curriculum to increase the use of child focused teaching methodologies and to increase awareness among the teachers of children's psychological needs. Save the Children also developed a mine awareness training curriculum for teachers that included illustrated stories and posters for the classroom.

From our experience operating in Iraq and elsewhere, Save the Children has learned that women and children are particularly vulnerable in times of conflict. They need protection. One way to meet most of children's protection needs is through the provision of quality education. Along with food, water and shelter, education should therefore be included as a frontline service in every major humanitarian response. Too often, education is viewed as part of a longer-term development plan to be initiated when peace and stability returns. The problem with this approach is that children who are not in school are more likely to come into harms way and if they survive, less likely to be able to play a constructive role in rebuilding their society.

Although Save the Children is no longer operating in Iraq, we have just launched a campaign entitled Rewrite the Future which aims to ensure that the 43 million children currently out of school in conflict affected countries are in school by 2010.

To achieve this goal, Save the Children is calling on the international community to:

- Make education an integral part of every humanitarian response;
- Ensure adequate resources and systems are in place for education activities, not only as immediate responses to current crises but also as part of a long-term effort to prevent conflict and promote sustainable development.
- Fill the funding gap by providing an extra \$5.8 billion in aid to fund education in conflict-affected fragile states.

Thank you for your consideration of my remarks.