



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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July 17, 2007

The Honorable Tim Ryan
Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Ryan:

I write in response to your letter of June 28. The Catholic Bishops of the United States share your deep concern for the dangerous and deteriorating situation in Iraq. Too many Iraqi and American lives have been lost. Too many Iraqi communities have been shattered. Too many civilians have been driven from their homes. The human and financial costs of the war are staggering. Representatives of our Conference welcome the opportunity to meet with you and other policy makers to discuss ways to pursue the goal of a “responsible transition” to bring an end to the war in Iraq.

The current situation in Iraq is unacceptable and unsustainable, as is the policy and political stalemate among decision makers in Washington. Our Conference hopes to work with the Congress and the Administration to forge bipartisan policies on ways to bring about a responsible transition and an end to the war.

Prior to the war when too few members of either party in Congress opposed authorizing the use of force, our Conference of bishops, in solidarity with Pope John Paul II, repeatedly raised grave moral questions about military intervention in Iraq and the unpredictable and uncontrollable negative consequences of an invasion and occupation. Sadly many of the tragic consequences we and others had feared have come to pass.

In November 2006, our Conference expressed the hope that the report of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group would lead to the candid assessments and honest dialogue that our nation needs to find a responsible way to end U.S. military engagement in Iraq. We subsequently noted with satisfaction that the Iraq Study Group shared our goal of a “responsible transition.” Although as bishops and pastors we have not taken positions on all of the detailed proposals in that Report, its broad outlines mirror the benchmarks and new approaches that our Conference has advocated in promoting a “responsible transition” with U.S. troops leaving “sooner rather than later.”

U.S. military action in Iraq brought with it new moral responsibilities toward the Iraqi people. For more than a year and a half our Conference has called for a “responsible transition” and withdrawal in Iraq. In January 2006, our Conference stated: “Our nation’s military forces should remain in Iraq only as long as their presence contributes to a responsible transition. Our nation should look for effective ways to end their deployment at the earliest opportunity consistent with this goal.”

Our Conference has expressed particular concerns for Christians and other minority groups who have suffered in the aftermath of military action in Iraq along with the rest of the Iraqi population. In a special way, our nation must make provisions for refugees who have fled their native land in search of safety and security for their families.

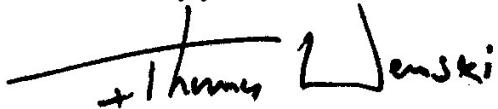
Letter to The Honorable Tim Ryan
July 17, 2007
Page 2

In our most recent public statement this year, our Conference reminded policy makers that each course of action in Iraq ought to be evaluated in light of its moral and human consequences and the traditional principle of “probability of success.” The moral measure of “probability of success” weighs more heavily with each passing month.

Our Conference is under no illusions regarding Iraq. None of the alternative courses of action are without consequences for human life and dignity. There is no path ahead that leads to an unambiguously good outcome for Iraq, our nation and the world. It was for this very reason that we raised serious moral questions regarding military intervention in Iraq in the first place. Nevertheless, our nation must have the moral courage to change course in Iraq and to break the policy and political stalemate in Washington so that we can walk a difficult path that does the most good and the least damage in human and moral terms.

I understand that representatives of our Bishops’ Conference are in communication with your office to explore the best way to move forward. In preparation for our discussions, I have enclosed our Conference’s three most recent public statements on Iraq. These and other public actions of our Conference both before and after the decision to invade Iraq can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/iraq.shtml>. Our shared moral tradition can guide this effort and inform our dialogue with other leaders as we seek a way to bring about a morally responsible end to the war in Iraq.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W".

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Policy
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

cc:

Rosa DeLauro, Member of Congress
Marcy Kaptur, Member of Congress
Anna Eshoo, Member of Congress
Jim Moran, Member of Congress
Jose Serrano, Member of Congress
Jim McGovern, Member of Congress
William Lacy Clay, Member of Congress

Hilda Solis, Member of Congress
Bart Stupak, Member of Congress
Joe Baca, Member of Congress
Grace Napolitano, Member of Congress
Dennis Kucinich, Member of Congress
Charlie Wilson, Member of Congress

Encl: 3