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Administrator
Coalition Provisional Authority
Turning the Page
Baghdad
23 April 2004

Good Evening

Iraq faces a choice.

You could take the path which leads to a new Iraq, a peaceful, democratic Iraq, an Iraq of political freedom and economic opportunity, an Iraq where the majority is not Sunni, Shia, Arab, Kurd or Turcoman, but Iraqi. This is the path to a bright and hopeful future.

Or you could take the path which leads to the dark Iraq of the past where violence and fear rule, where power comes from a gun, and where only the powerful and ruthless are secure.

Thousands of conversations with you over the past year have made me certain that the vast majority of Iraqis reject the brutality and darkness of the old days. You have told me you want a new Iraq that honors the best of your past, but provides freedom, equality and opportunity for all.

As Delivered
Friday, April 23, 2004

The Coalition shares your vision of Iraq's future, a future of hope. Working together we can create the future you want.

But we have much to do as we walk this path.

The enemies, domestic and foreign, of your bright future are trying to force you to take the path that leads backwards to brute force, division and hatred. These anti-democratic forces will not disappear by themselves, but working together we can defeat them. We in the Coalition will do our part to restore security. But you must do your part, too.

If you do not defend your beloved country it will not be saved.

For the past three weeks my Coalition colleagues and I have asked Iraqi citizens all across the country--workers, students and professionals—about the current situation. Our military commanders are meeting regularly with local sheiks and notables to get their views on ways to reduce tensions. Your fellow citizens recommended ways to reduce tensions in Iraq.

We listened to you and tonight I want to tell you what we plan to do about the issues which are most on your minds: security, jobs, healing the nation's wounds and the political process.

Everyone we spoke to said security was their first priority and that we should use Iraqis to provide security.

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Security is our top priority.

The threats to your security come from members of the former regime's intelligence services and Republican Guards, and from foreign terrorists. These groups do not want a democratic Iraq. They must be defeated.

The Coalition has over 130,000 troops providing security in Iraq. We recognize that we cannot provide real security unless Iraqis stand shoulder to shoulder with us.

Our training of an Iraqi Army and an Iraqi police service continues at an extraordinary pace.

Sunday the Minister of Defense announced his appointment of the top Iraqi generals in the new Iraqi Army. Iraqi officers, drawn almost entirely from the many honorable men of the former Iraqi Army, already command these forces. Over 70 percent of all the men in the Iraqi army and Iraq Civil Defense Corps served honorably in the former army. They have asked to serve their country again and we welcome their renewed service. In reconstituting these forces, we have also benefited from the skills of the many who served in armed groups that fought against Saddam's regime. We will continue to welcome these individuals into the army, the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, the police and border guards.

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The Minister of Defense informs me that he intends to have a meeting with vetted senior officers from the former regime next week to discuss how best to build the new Iraqi military establishment.

More of these officers with honorable records—from the former army and elsewhere-- will serve in the months ahead as your new Army grows. In the coming months, we will steadily strengthen our security partnership, placing increasing responsibility in the hands of Iraqis. By June 30, Iraqi soldiers in the ranks will report up through an Iraqi chain of command to Iraqi generals.

Every Iraqi can help defeat these threats. The Coalition has instituted a robust rewards program to pay those who provide information about foreign fighters and others threatening your security. If you have such information, you should provide it to the nearest police or military post.

When we transfer sovereignty to an Iraqi government on June 30, Coalition and Iraqi forces will continue to work as partners to defeat the terrorists. These forces, Coalition and Iraqi, will provide you and your families with security.

I understand from my conversations around the country that you are concerned by the situation in Fallujah.

So are we.

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The situation in there has calmed in recent days. But those responsible for the lawlessness and unrest that began in Fallujah in February with the murder of 17 Iraqi policemen still bear heavy arms in the streets. Some of these men belonged to the banished instruments of Saddam's repression-- the former intelligence services and former Republican Guards. Others are foreigners working for professional terrorists like Abu Mussah al-Zarkawi. These are the people who have brought death and destruction to Fallujah. And Fallujah cannot be peaceful while such men remain at liberty.

To reduce the suffering in Fallujah I have twice sent my deputy along with Governing Council members to negotiate with the city's leaders. These leaders say they do not support those who are holding the city hostage from within. These talks have eased access to hospitals, allowed ambulances to evacuate the dead and wounded. Medicine and food have come in and we have permitted doctors, police, civil defense members and technicians to enter the city to provide critical services to its citizens.

We call upon the people of Fallujah to support the legitimate Iraqi authorities in bringing this crisis to an end. We hope that they join in ridding the city of heavy military weapons. Those who turn in weapons voluntarily will not be arrested for weapons violations.

The current ceasefire is a good start, but without exception, armed bands in the city must submit to national authority. If these bands do not surrender their military weapons and instead continue to use them

against Iraqi and Coalition Security forces, major hostilities could resume on short notice.

Militias also threaten security. Ultimately, Iraq cannot be secure, free and united if people can set up armed militias and define the law of the land to suit their own ambitions. That is why all armed elements in Iraq must be controlled by the central government, not just now, but during the next government and the next and the next.

This applies equally to those armed groups who fought valiantly against Saddam's tyranny. For some time we have been engaged in talks with these groups over how their members can be integrated into Iraq's armed forces or move into civilian life. I urge our partners in these talks to move quickly to comply with the Transitional Administrative Law, including those provisions which prohibit militias and other armed groups.

Militias present a particular problem in Najaf and Karbala. We in the Coalition recognize the holy nature of these cities. I add my voice to those of the religious authorities who have called for disarmament in these holy cities. We are prepared to work with these authorities to achieve disarmament. Armed militias should not be allowed to exploit holy shrines to advance personal political interests.

Earlier this week, a group of professors told me their concerns about those detained by the Coalition. It is a familiar complaint. During the war and since, Coalition forces have detained thousands of Iraqis, and

hundreds of foreigners. But we have already released over 75 percent of those detained.

I understand your concerns and want to tell you what we are doing. We have simplified the processing of detainees. All cases are reviewed within 72 hours by an attorney. In many cases, the person detained is released immediately. Two months ago, we established a special board to expedite the review of all detainees. Since then we have released over 2,500 detainees. We give highest priority to reviewing the records of female detainees. Right now fewer than 10 females are detained. Of course we will not release any detainee guilty of serious crimes, as Saddam did when he flooded the streets with criminals in 2002.

Many of you have told us that you are frustrated by the lack of information about individual detainees. So we now publish a complete list in Arabic daily on the Coalition website. This list is available at Coalition Information centers across the country and we are going to post it regularly at the country's police stations and courthouses starting on May 10.

A couple of days ago I met with 25 Iraqi women who told me that their primary concern was security against common criminals. Criminals, many of them released from prison by Saddam Hussein before the war, continue to prey on innocent Iraqis. The answer is to build a highly capable police force and we are doing that. The Coalition, using funds provided by the American people, has embarked on the biggest police training program in history. Two thousand highly trained police officers

will graduate from the police academies every month from now until next February. They will make your lives more secure from criminals.

A number of different Iraqi groups have told us of their concerns about border security. These concerns are well founded. Iraq's long borders, especially those with Iran and Syria are difficult to defend and there is evidence that foreign terrorists are coming into Iraq. But here too we are working towards solutions.

When interim government takes office on June 30 that government will have the equipment, staff, training and materials necessary to operate each of its 20 major border crossing points. We expect to have 16,000 Iraqis devoted to border security by June 30. Until that time we are going to limit and control the number of people crossing into Iraq from other nations. Additionally, the Coalition is providing Iraq with sophisticated technical systems to help screen and track foreign visitors.

The lack of security affects everyone, even those not directly touched by violence. Saboteurs and insurgents attack the country's power lines and oil facilities. These attacks deny electricity to you and your family and oil revenues to all Iraqis. We are working with Iraqis to improve protection of your national infrastructure. Today over 20,000 Iraqis in specialized electricity and oil security forces work with Coalition Forces to guard your national property against these attacks.

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The second subject we have heard from you about is economic security. For too long, Saddam used economic resources to create divisions between Iraq's people and regions. Some were punished, others were rewarded. Now, we have the chance to correct the terrible economic legacies of the past and ensure opportunities for all Iraqis.

We understand that Iraqis need jobs and the Coalition is working to create them. Since Liberation, the Coalition has completed over 20,000 individual reconstruction projects worth billions of dollars. These projects have employed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis building and renovating schools, orphanages and medical clinics; roads, bridges and dams. Iraqis from Dohuk to Basra have worked on these projects and millions have benefited from them. Thousands of additional projects will be financed by over 19 billion dollars from America.

I have told my colleagues in the Coalition to accelerate these projects everywhere in country. We expect that they will create over a million and a half jobs over the next year. I have instructed the Coalition to give priority to Iraqi firms whenever possible in order to create as many opportunities for Iraqis as possible. To date, the firms working on these projects have given contracts to several hundred Iraqi firms. I have also give our military commanders and Coalition offices around the country an additional $500 million to spend on reconstruction projects which can be quickly completed, like fixing roads or schools, and which will provide jobs for you. Already our officials are meeting with provincial and municipal leaders to hear their priorities.

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But Iraq's reconstruction requires more than security, more than bricks and mortar, more than jobs.

While this is a time for all Iraqis to work together on the future, some things must not be forgotten, must not be forgiven. You have spoken to us on this subject, too.

I know that memories of Saddam's tyrannies haunt many of you. I have stood at the edge of the mass graves in Hillah. I have looked into the faces of the survivors in Halabja. I have seen the torture chambers and rape rooms in Saddam's prisons. I have seen these things and I think about the horror of them. I think about them, but you have lived them.

It is justice you demand and it is justice you will have.

That is why the Governing Council created the Iraqi Special Tribunal--to try those accused of grievous crimes during the past administration, people like Saddam, "Chemical" Ali and others. This Iraqi court, run by Iraqis, has just appointed seven judges and five prosecutors. As soon as the court asks us, the Coalition will turn these criminals over to face justice in this Iraqi court.

To further the cause of justice for you, I pledge to give all possible assistance to the Iraqi Special Tribunal as it prepares for these trials. The United States will pay $75 million for the court's annual budget and

we will provide judicial training for the newly appointed judges and prosecutors.

This Special Tribunal serves a purpose beyond bringing criminals to justice. The Tribunal becomes a national remembrance for the hundreds of thousands murdered by Saddam's regime.

We must attend to the spirit. We must recall suffering; we must honor sacrifice.

To commemorate those who suffered the atrocities of Saddam's regime, I have directed the establishment of a National Commission for Remembrance. This Commission will be part of a broader effort to come to terms with Iraq's immediate past. The Commission will administer a $10 million fund for remembrance and will consider proposals from across the nation on how best to memorialize the suffering of Iraq's many communities under Saddam. In addition the Commission will seek to raise private funds to establish a national museum in Baghdad to ensure that the nation forever recalls Saddam's depredations. The commission and museum will probably want to focus their efforts on the sufferings during the 1991 Intifada, the 1988 Anfal campaign and Saddam's "Arabization" campaign that savaged Kurds, Arabs and Turcomans alike.

Remembering is indispensable both as a comfort to the oppressed and tyrannized and as a cautionary tale for the future. It is necessary protection against future tyranny, but it is not enough by itself.

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The Baath Party poisoned Iraqi political life. Baathism was one of the most brutal instruments of Saddam's tyranny. There is no room in the new Iraq for Baathist ideology, for Baathist criminals. Banning the party and removing from public life those who used it to commit crimes was necessary and remains necessary if we are to achieve your vision of a democratic Iraq.

But many Iraqis have complained to me that debaathification policy has been applied unevenly and unjustly. I have looked into these complaints and they are legitimate. The debaathification policy was and is sound. It does not need to be changed. It is the right policy for Iraq. But it has been poorly implemented. The requirement to join the party was strongly enforced among teachers and university professors. A group of teachers told me yesterday that poor execution of the debaathification process has had a severe impact on teachers and university professors.

We cannot shortchange the children of Iraq. They are your future. I have discussed this matter with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education and with the Chairman of the Debaathification Commission. We have agreed that decisions made by local appeals committees of the Ministry of Education will be effective immediately. This will allow thousands of teachers to return to work. Thousands more will begin receiving pensions this week. Those primary and secondary school teachers formerly of the rank of *firqah* members whose appeals have not yet been heard will have their appeal adjudicated within

20 days. I have asked the Commission to handle the cases of hundreds of university professors with the same urgency. Professors who did not use their posts to intimidate others or commit crimes should be allowed to return to work promptly.

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You have asked us about the future.

In our consultations, many Iraqi groups asked whether the occupation is really going to end on June 30. They asked what kind of a government will follow.

President Bush promised the Iraqi people that the occupation would end on June 30. And it will end on June 30. But our military forces will remain, working alongside Iraqi forces as partners to provide security after that date.

The Coalition Provisional Authority will dissolve. The Iraqi government that replaces it will be a fully sovereign one, invested with the authority to govern Iraqi until elections are held in January 2005. This government, described by UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, will be made up of competent people of the highest integrity and reflecting the broad diversity of the Iraqi people.

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You will determine what kind of government will follow this interim period. The process for you to create a government of your choice is explained in the Transitional Administrative Law.

Under the Transitional Administrative Law, you will have free, fair and national elections for a National Assembly in January. That assembly will have responsibility for choosing a government. The same Assembly will also write Iraq's new, permanent Constitution. In writing your new, permanent constitution the National Assembly will guided but not bound by the Transitional Administrative Law. This will be your constitution. Your elected representatives will write it and you will approve it and it will determine how you are governed.

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Much is going to happen in the 10 weeks before Iraqi sovereignty.

In the days and months ahead the Coalition will work with you to provide security, justice and prosperity for all Iraqis.

Such an Iraq will honor Iraq's history, a proud and ancient history stretching back to the beginnings of civilization.

Such an Iraq will honor the generations who came before you.

Such an Iraq will serve the generations who will come after you.

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Such an Iraq will place Iraqis securely on the path to a future of hope for all.

Mabruk al Iraq al Jadeed.

Aash al-Iraq!

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