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## Communications

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### **Bishops' Moral Concerns About War In Iraq: Still "Valid And Useful"**

WASHINGTON (February 11, 2003) -- Amidst new initiatives by the Holy See to prevent a war in Iraq, the Chairman of the U.S. Bishops' International Policy Committee, Most Reverend John H. Ricard, SSJ, affirmed in a letter to all bishops that while much has transpired since the bishops' November statement on Iraq, "the serious questions and concerns that we raised at that time remain valid and useful as Catholics and others reflect on the morality of a possible war with Iraq."

In his February 7 letter, Bishop Ricard recalled that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has issued two major documents on Iraq. These were: a statement of the full body of bishops issued at their General Meeting on November 13; and a September 13 letter from Bishop Wilton Gregory, President of the USCCB, to President Bush. Bishop Gregory personally delivered the letter to National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice on September 16, during a joint meeting that included Bishop Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Bishop Frank Griswold, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, USA.

"In our November statement," Bishop Ricard wrote, "we acknowledged that 'people of good will may differ on how to apply just war norms in particular cases,' but made the prudential judgment that "based on the facts that are known to us, we continue to find it difficult to justify the resort to war against Iraq, lacking clear and adequate evidence of an imminent attack of a grave nature."

Bishop Ricard said the U.S. Bishops' International Policy Committee and its Subcommittee on Iraq have met on a regular basis since November to assess on going developments. "In the judgment of the Committee, while much has transpired since November, the serious questions and concerns that we raised at that time remain valid and useful as Catholics and others reflect on the morality of a possible war with Iraq," the Bishop said. "The November statement is also consistent with recent statements by the Holy See and other episcopal conferences," Bishop Ricard noted.

(The statements by Catholic Bishops' Conferences throughout the world included those by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, the French Bishops' Conference, the German Bishops' Conference, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, the Joint Pastoral Letter by Pakistan's Church Leaders, and the Southern African Bishops' Conference).

In his letter to the bishops, Bishop Ricard reported that Catholic Relief Services, the overseas relief agency of American Catholics, is working closely with the local church in the region to prepare for possible humanitarian consequences of military action.

"We are aware of so much activity in dioceses and parishes around the country," Bishop Ricard said. "As we continue to dialogue, reflect and advocate at this critical time, it is especially important to call the Catholic community to pray for all those most likely to be affected by a war, especially the long-suffering people of Iraq, the men and women in our armed forces who are being deployed, and our national leaders who have the responsibility to make wise judgments in service of the common good."

Background information on the Iraq issue and statements by Church leaders throughout the world, as well as statements by Pope John Paul II and officials of the Holy See, accompanied the letter to the bishops.

On February 10, Bishop Ricard addressed 500 church leaders from around the country who are in Washington for the Social Ministry Gathering. During the meeting, these leaders will be urging their representatives in Congress to step back from the brink of war in Iraq and to give greater attention to the needs of the poor at home and abroad.

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