

# The Toll of U.S. Sanctions

## A First-Hand Account

Peter Werbe

2000

Rudy Simons, a 71-year-old social justice activist, was one of 13 people from Metro Detroiters Against Sanctions who visited Iraq in December 1999 to witness first-hand the effects of U.S. policies on the civilian population. *Fifth Estate* staff member Peter Werbe interviewed Simons soon after his return. A section of it follows.

**Fifth Estate:** The United States remains at war with Iraq nine years after Operation Desert Storm. In 1999, the U.S. and U.K. carried out 16,000 bombing sorties on a country that can't shoot back. Did you see evidence of the bombing on your trip there?

**Rudy Simons:** First, let me make this clear: Our dealings were not with the government of Iraq. We were there on behalf of the Iraqi population which is paying such a horrible price for its own government's actions and for the ongoing actions of our government which are a weapon of mass destruction.

Our group split up after a few days in Baghdad; half went south to Basra, and my half went north to Mosul, a large city not far from the Turkish and Iranian border. While we were in Mosul at a pediatric hospital, and preparing to leave to visit a school, we heard air raid sirens. So, what does this mean?

It means that U.S. or U.K. planes, possibly both, are flying over the area and the sirens go off as they told us they do almost every single day. There was no great alarm; they have their procedures to protect themselves as well as they could when that happens.

We left the hospital shortly thereafter and went to a school which had been hit by a bomb less than two weeks before. It had been dropped from a U.S. plane and landed 50 yards from the school building itself. It left shrapnel marks on the walls of the school, shattered glass windows, and glass shards injured eight students. From what we could see and were told, it clearly traumatized a great many of the students who were attending that elementary school.

**FE:** What was the target in the area? We're always told that the U.S. is responding to Iraqi radar locking on to U.S. planes, or going after military bases.

**Simons:** That reason is kind of a pro forma announcement 'from the Pentagon every time bombs are dropped. Indeed, that may be true, that they do lock on and there are military targets and that they do drop bombs on them but one would think that after a year of this kind of bombing, most of those targets would have been taken out. There are any number of reports and clear evidence of bombs dropping where they shouldn't have.

The day we were there at that school, when the sirens sounded we didn't hear any bombs drop, but a report in the newspaper the next day, said, yes, indeed, bombs had fallen and at least one woman, a civilian, had been killed.

**FE:** UNICEF reports that 250 Iraqi children a day die as a result of U.S. sanctions that have all but eliminated needed medical care for the population; did you see evidence of this?

**Simons:** Painfully so. That was my greatest concern in going over. It was not the fact that we were taking an illegal step or that harm might befall us; it was how I was going to be able to handle emotionally what I expected to see based on reports of others who had been there. Indeed, it was a very, very difficult thing for all of us.

We made visits to a number of different hospitals. We were in wards where young children—one, two, three-years-old, some only a few weeks old—were lying in beds with their mothers sitting along side of them stroking their brows and holding their hands and crying in many cases, or stoic in others. We were told by the doctors there that most of the children we were looking at would not survive the week.

I brought back photos of those children and their mothers and having a little boy at home of my own, every child I looked at, my little boy's face went on that child. I'm not ashamed to admit I wept openly. The evidence was there for all of us to see.

Interviews by Peter Werbe can be heard on Real Audio at [www.wrif.com](http://www.wrif.com) and [www.wcsx.com](http://www.wcsx.com) live Sundays, 11 pm and 7 am EST.

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