

# The War in Iraq

Submitted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council

**T**HE AFL-CIO SUPPORTS the brave men and women deployed in Iraq, which include our members in all branches of the armed services.

Our soldiers—the men and women risking their lives in Iraq—come from America’s working families. They are our sons and daughters, our sisters and brothers, our husbands and wives. They deserve to be properly equipped with protective body gear and up-armored vehicles. And they deserve leadership that fully values their courage and sacrifice. Most importantly, they deserve a commitment from our country’s leaders to bring them home rapidly. An unending military presence will waste lives and resources, undermine our nation’s security and weaken our military.

We have lost more than 1,700 brave Americans in Iraq to date, and Iraqi civilian casualties are in the thousands. In recent months, the insurgency increasingly has focused its terror on the Iraqi people, engaging in a deliberate campaign to frustrate their aspirations to take control of their own destiny. These aspirations were clearly demonstrated earlier this year when Iraqis defied widespread intimidation and escalating violence by turning out in the millions to elect a new Iraqi interim government tasked with writing a constitution. The AFL-CIO applauds the courage of the Iraqi people and unequivocally condemns the use of terror in Iraq and indeed anywhere in the world.

No foreign policy can be sustained without the informed consent of the American people. The American people were misinformed before the war began and have not been informed about the reality on the ground and the very difficult challenges that lie ahead.

It is long past time for the Bush administration to level with the American people and for Congress to fulfill its constitutionally mandated oversight responsibilities. The AFL-CIO supports the call from members of Congress for the establishment of benchmarks in the key areas of security, governance, reconstruction and internationalization.

Since the beginning of the war almost two-and-a-half years ago, the AFL-CIO has emphasized the support and participation of a broad coalition of nations and the United Nations is vital to building a democratic Iraq. Greater security on the ground remains an unmet precondition for such efforts to succeed. The AFL-CIO calls on the international community to help the Iraqi people build its capacity to maintain law and order through a concerted international effort to train Iraqi security and police forces.

Future efforts to rebuild the country are hampered by the weight of the massive foreign debt accumulated under the Saddam Hussein regime. The AFL-CIO calls for cancellation of Saddam’s foreign debt without any conditions imposed upon the people of Iraq, who suffered under the regime that was supported by these loans. Further, the AFL-CIO calls for the cancellation of reparations imposed as a result of wars waged by Saddam Hussein’s regime and the return of all Iraqi property and antiquities taken during the war and occupation.

The bedrock of any democracy is a strong, free, democratic labor movement.

That is true in the United States and Iraq.

Our returning troops should be afforded all resources and services available to meet their needs. Our members should return to their jobs, with seniority and benefits.

The AFL-CIO calls on Congress and President Bush to expand benefits for veterans and assist those affected by military base closings, including a G.I. Bill for returning Iraq veterans and a Veterans Administration housing program that meets current needs.

The AFL-CIO supports the efforts of Iraqi workers to form independent labor unions. In the absence of an adequate labor law, the AFL-CIO calls on the Iraqi government, as well as domestic and international companies operating in Iraq, to respect internationally recognized International Labor Organization standards that call for protecting the right of workers to organize free from all government and employer interference and the right to organize and bargain collectively in both the public and private sectors. These rights must be extended to include full equality for working women.

The AFL-CIO condemns the fact that Saddam's decree No. 150 issued in 1987 that abolished union rights for workers in the extensive Iraqi public sector has not been repealed. Under current laws, payroll deductions for union dues are not even permitted. The AFL-CIO calls on the Iraqi government to place as a top priority the adoption of a new labor law that conforms to international labor standards to replace the old anti-worker laws and decrees.

Despite legal obstacles, Iraq's workers and their institutions are already leaders in the struggle for democracy. Trade unionists are being targeted for their activism, and some have paid for their valor with their lives. The AFL-CIO condemns these brutal acts of intimidation.

The AFL-CIO has a proud history of solidarity with worker movements around the world in their opposition to tyranny. In concert with the international trade union movement, the AFL-CIO will continue to provide our full solidarity to Iraq's workers as they lead the struggle for an end to the violence and a more just and democratic nation.