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# \"Our childhood is killed in Iraq. It is killed.\"

Joan Chittister | Apr. 10, 2006 From Where I Stand

***[Program Note:***

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tt*carries a video and written transcript of each program soon after*
*ttairing.]*

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**T**he question to the group of women delegates from Iraq was "What would you like to see come out of this meeting?"

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I was not prepared either for the answer or for its explanation:
tt"What we need now," one of the Iraqi woman said, "is the end of the blood-letting. Women are very necessary to this operation. Fifty-five to 60 percent of Iraqis are women. The minority is ruling ... Women must interfere in the affairs of men. We should take over."

It was hardly a statement I expected to hear in this place from these
ttwomen. But I couldn't forget it.

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"The minority is ruling." Right. And not too well, it seems,
tteither here or there.

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When men sit down to negotiate peace treaties -- when there's even
ttsomeone to negotiate with, which, given al-Qaeda, is not a luxury we seem to have anymore -- they disband armies and guard borders and hold military
tttribunals and form new governments and punish old ones. But they put no faces on the victims.

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When they tote up the cost of the war, they do not include the number of
ttwomen raped, the number of families displaced, the number of schools bombed, or the number of babies without milk.

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The victors take their spoils, monitor the guns, forget the defenseless
ttand leave the people to clean up the rubble. War becomes the daily dirge of the anonymous victims.

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But when you bring women together to discuss the effects of war, the
ttthings that need to be changed, the real problems of a war-torn society, the conversation takes a sudden turn.

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At the first Iraqi-American dialogue convened by the Women's Global
ttPeace Initiative in New York on March 29, the differences were plain. The
ttwomen's first agenda did not concentrate on who did what or who profited or lost by the doing of it. "Take the oil. We don't care about the oil," one woman called across the room. "We never got any value from it anyway," she went on. "Never mind yesterday," another woman said in answer to the Sunni- Shi'ite tensions. "Forget who did what to whom. We must turn the page now. We must rebuild the country."

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"And what is the first thing that must be done to rebuild the
ttcountry?" we asked them. I sat with my hands over the keyboard, sure that the list would be long and varied. I was wrong. To a woman, the call was clear: "Take care of our children."

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It was a sobering moment. Take care of our children. "Oh,
ttthem," I thought. "The tiny, the forgotten, targets of this
ttwar."

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Take care of the ones who now carry within themselves the sour taste of
ttfear that came as bombs dropped through the dark sky shaking their houses,
ttdestroying their streets. Take care of the children, the ones who went cold as stone at the loss of brothers and fathers and dead playmates.

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Take care of the ones who felt the sweat of terror when the doors of the

tthomes in which they were sure they were safe broke down in the middle of the night or the lights went out or their mothers wrapped their shawls around their heads and cried. Take care of the ones who went into psychic paralysis at the sight of blood and bodies. Take care of the ones who woke up one morning to find their lives completely disrupted for no apparent reason.

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Take care of the ones to whom then Secretary of State Colin Powell was
ttapparently referring when a reporter asked him how many Iraqis had been killed or injured at that point in the war and his answer was, “That is a number in which I have absolutely no interest whatsoever.”

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But maybe he and we should all rethink that answer. Because these
ttchildren do not feel “liberated” by this war; in these children the seeds of the next war have already been planted.

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The Iraqi women were very clear: the most injured of all in this war are
ttthe children of Iraq. “The war has made deep wounds that have become part of our souls,” another woman said. “They can never be forgotten. The living conditions, the lack of security is affecting everything the children do. They cannot even deliver newspapers anymore.”

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Their schooling has been interrupted. Even if the school buildings still
ttstand, there are no supplies for them. And there are few people in them anyway.
ttTeachers are dead. Classmates are gone from the area -- refugees somewhere or dead themselves. Most of all, their parents are afraid to send them out of the house even if the schools are undamaged.

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“Our childhood is killed in Iraq,” a woman said. “It is
ttkilled.”

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The small jobs children once held to help with family expenses are gone
ttnow. No one buys flowers on the street now. No one drives a car whose windows they can wash.

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Drugs are flooding the streets now and drugs are the best and quickest
ttway to ease the pain.

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The number of street children -- children whose parents are dead, whose
ttextended families are fractured -- have multiplied beyond anything modern Iraq has ever known.

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Orphans are a commodity now in Iraq but orphanages are not. “We are
tttaking care of the orphans, trying to give them love,” the woman said.
tt“But they are traumatized. They don’t speak.”

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Recreational programs are a thing of the past, so children are restless
ttor rebellious or simply bored with life.

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“Fifty percent of the bodies in the hospital are women and
ttchildren,” the doctor said. “We are afraid that a large number of
ttchildren will be affected by the depression of their mothers and the loss of
tttheir fathers and the poverty of their families.”

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The future of Iraq is at stake. But it is not the banking system the
ttwomen are concerned about. It is the treasure of the nation that is being
ttsquandered, they know. It is their future. It is their children.

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The U.S. budget for fiscal year 2007, according to The National
ttPriorities Project, earmarks 51 percent of all discretionary spending for
ttmilitary use. “Spending on the Iraq War in fiscal year 2006 alone will
ttreach $96 billion,” the Project reports. (**tt HREF="http://www.nationalpriorities.org/" style="text-decoration: none">www.nationalpriorities.org**)

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The Bush budget calls for the elimination or reduction of 141 domestic
ttprograms. Among other things, we cut the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and

Children by $200 million and the department of education by 9 percent and eliminate vocational education. “Level funding” is provided for other domestic programs.

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The overall cost of the war in Iraq for the United States is already
ttbeing estimated at at least a trillion dollars. But so far not a penny of it is specified for the children. Neither theirs nor ours.

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“We see the prisoners’ rights,” another delegate said
ttsadly, “but where are the rights of the children.”

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From where I stand, I can’t help but wonder that if we sold some of
ttour weapons and used the money to buy crayons, food, houses and schools for
ttIraqi children, we could stop worrying about being terrorized ourselves.
ttIndeed, the minority is ruling. Maybe the Iraqi woman’s idea about what to do about it wouldn’t be a bad one after all.

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