

***Speech for 18 March anniversary of war on Iraq rally***

***Rev. Dr. Ann Wansbrough***

Today we remember 20-03 2003, the day the war on Iraq began.

Memory is the enemy of empire. Governments do not want to remember.

Because we remember what we did and said, and what they did and said.

Memory is the enemy of empire.

We remember that in 2003, we were right, and they were wrong.

We remember the people of Iraq,

and remember that we took a stand

against those who think war is the way to peace

and invasion is the way to democracy.

We were right, but we wish we had been wrong.

We rejected the idea of war as a means of safeguarding ourselves.

We were right.

War did not lead to peace, but rather to violent insurgency.

The presence of Australian and USA troops goes on fuelling the violence.

We see the violence in Iraq,

the profiteering by US companies,

the sidelining of Iraqi professional expertise in the rebuilding,

the hardening factions .

And we know that we were right when we said such things would happen.

And we wish we had been wrong.

20-03 2003 is a day we Australians must remember

the day we must confess

the day we must learn from

the day we must never repeat.

20-03 2003 was and is a day of shame for the Coalition of the Killing.

We opposed the war because we expected it to be long and drawn out, with many deaths and much harm.

We were right when we were cynical about the war in the first place, and cynical about Bush's declaration "mission accomplished".

For the sake of all the maimed, injured and traumatized people, we wish we had been wrong.

War is the way to death, not the way to safety and freedom.

I wear this purple stole today because the Christian churches are in the season of Lent: the season of confession and repentance. On this day, we do not confess what we did in 2003 – we were right – we confess what our nation did, and call it to repentance.

20-03 2003 is the day Australia collaborated with the bombing of cities and towns where women and children, young people and old, were living

the day Australia ignored the United Nations charter and the decisions of the Security Council

the day Australia deserted the rule of law

the day Australia started to live, as a nation, by fear and not by hope

the day illusion took over from reality.

The Prime Minister's own website listed the weapons of mass destruction

The weapons that did not exist.

The weapons that we knew did not exist,

As we went on the streets time and again

To say: we will not live by fear

We will not live by the blood of Iraqi sisters and brothers.

Not in our name we said then. Not in our name we say now.

We want to live by hope, not fear, by the rule of law, not violence.

20-03 is a day of shame because it was a day of hypocrisy.

The dictator to whom the US had given weapons became the target of war.

That hypocrisy was bad enough.

But we now know that Australia had its own hypocrisy

While women and children in Iraq died as a result of sanctions, the AWB poured money into the pockets of the powerful in Iraq, in defiance of the United Nations.

And then Australia went to war claiming we had to overthrow someone who failed to do what the United Nations required.

What hypocrisy.

They now claim to have provided democracy.

War has never been the way of founding a democracy.

Almost 70 nations have become democracies in the last three decades or so.

Research shows that the strength of the democracy depends on the strength and cohesion of the civil society, the non-violent movements that created the democracy.

Research shows that democratic freedom does not come from “top-down” transitions that were launched and led by elites.

The best research available puts the number of deaths at over 100000 over 18 months ago. Too many deaths.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation in the US has noted that

According to recent polls, over 80 percent of the Iraqi people want the U.S. forces out of Iraq;

Polls also indicate that 45 percent of the Iraqi people feel that the attacks on U.S. forces are justified.

It is time for the troops to withdraw.

    Their presence fuels the violence.

        They get in the way of democracy.

You cannot bomb civil society into existence.

    You cannot bomb a nation into justice.

        You can only support the local people in their own  
        moves towards liberation.

How do we create a society where people can live in safety and  
freedom?

    Only by peace-building.

We are here because we are pledged to work for peace.

Throughout this year, the Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition, the  
churches, local peace groups, and institutions devoted to peace and  
justice will offer events where we can learn more about the  
situation in other parts of the world, and learn what action to take  
to bring about change. We can all support those events.

There are also filmmakers who offer us records of the peace  
movement in the last four years, to help us remember, reflect,  
learn.

Keep on remembering.

We need to keep on with our stance, to tell our politicians, in  
letters, emails, public meetings and rallies,

    with non-violent assertiveness,

        that we want Australia to stop following the militarism  
        of the USA,

and instead to engage in peacebuilding and to seek security through diplomacy and aid.

20-03 2003 was an outrageous day.

We are here to tell the politicians it must not happen like that ever again.

May the God of peace and justice, the God who stands beside the victims of violence and injustice, strengthen and empower us to keep on working for peace. Amen

Thank you for being here. Thank you for listening.