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## A Call for the Cancellation of All Odious Debt Issued by Fast for Economic Justice for Iraq

Geneva, Switzerland—June 21—This week the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is meeting in Geneva to discuss issues of debt accumulated by countries around the world. The debt crisis in Iraq is a central point of discussion during today's session.

Eight international social justice activists enter the 5<sup>th</sup> day without food in Geneva and Amman, Jordan demanding economic justice for Iraq. A central fast demand is that the odious debt incurred by Saddam Hussein's government be cancelled outright and without any economic conditions attached to the cancellation. Debt claims against Iraq would be submitted to an international arbitration tribunal. This tribunal would determine whether the debt is odious—that is, whether it was incurred by Saddam Hussein's regime to advance his own interests at the expense of the Iraqi people. All such odious debt would be cancelled.

The Fast for Economic Justice for Iraq also demands that debt cancellation for Iraq be provided without economic conditions attached. In particular, those participating in the fast are opposed to any of the economic conditions which normally are attached by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other international parties.

“Members of the Paris Club have agreed to ‘forgive’ eighty percent of Iraq's debt, but only with conditions attached,” says Jeff Leys, a member of Voices in the Wilderness who is engaged in the fast. “But only the first thirty percent would be ‘forgiven’ without conditions. The remaining fifty percent requires that Iraq adopt and then fulfil conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund. Even that first thirty percent could arguably be said to represent only a portion of the interest on

the debt which built up after 1991 when the imposition of economic sanctions precluded Iraq from making any debt payments.

“How long will the international community punish the Iraqi people for the actions of Saddam Hussein’s regime? The odious debt must be cancelled now,” concludes Leys.

Participants in the Fast for Economic Justice for Iraq maintain a daily vigil, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., at the entrance to the United Nations in Geneva. Those going without food from June 16 to June 30 include: Kathy Kelly, founder of Voices in the Wilderness and two time Noble peace prize nominee; Justin Alexander, of Jubilee Iraq, Rita Jankowska-Bradley, Board Member of Jubilee USA and founder of Jubilee Montana Coalition; Leisa Faulkner, founder of Coalition for Democracy in Haiti, member of Progressive Democrats of America, and organizer with School of the Americas Watch, Cathy Breen, member of the New York City Catholic Worker Community who has travelled to Iraq numerous times and was present in Baghdad when U.S. occupation forces entered the city, Cynthia Banas, who lived in Iraq from October 2002 to May 2003 as a member of the Iraq Peace Team effort to prevent the 2003 invasion of Iraq; Farah Mokhtarei, who also was a member of the Iraq Peace Team; and Jeff Leys, organizer with Voices in the Wilderness.