

1997

HISTORY OF VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

1995

DECEMBER - Voices in the Wilderness Founded - A small group of friends who were active in protesting the Gulf War in 1991 meet in Chicago and start Voices in the Wilderness (VITW), with intention to use nonviolent civil disobedience to provoke a confrontation with the powers behind the illegal and immoral sanctions against Iraq.

1996

JANUARY 15 - VitW notifies Attorney General Janet Reno of their intention to deliberately violate the US/UN sanctions against the people of Iraq by soliciting and transporting medical supplies to Iraq.

JANUARY 16 - Twenty-five people rally in front of the White House holding up medical supplies and announcing their intent to deliver them to Iraq. Rallies are also held in Rock Island and Chicago, IL and Birmingham, AL. Seven VitW members are arrested for refusing to disperse.

JANUARY 22 - VitW receives a letter from the Office of Foreign Assets Control warning VitW to refrain from engaging in any unauthorized transactions related to the exportation of medical supplies and travel to Iraq or risk penalties, including up to 12 years in prison and one million dollars in fines.

MARCH 17 - First VitW delegation leaves for Iraq.

JANUARY 10 - VitW members sneak into Madeline Albright's senate confirmation hearing for her appointment as US Secretary of State and hold up pictures of suffering Iraqi children and call on her to show compassion for the children of Iraq. Five VitW members were detained and later released. USA Today and other major news sources cover the disruption.

1998

JANUARY 3 - Kathy Kelly is detained by US Customs upon return from a VitW delegation to Iraq. Her passport is impounded and held as evidence of her violation of the embargo. She is issued a new passport in 2000.

JANUARY 15 - Four members of a VitW delegation to Iraq stage a three-day fast outside the United Nations building in Baghdad to call for an immediate lifting of the sanctions. VitW members in at least 25 other cities fast or demonstrate in solidarity.

FEBRUARY 9-26 - The 11th VitW delegation travels to Iraq at the height of a threatened US attack over alleged non-cooperation with weapons inspections. The nine-member delegation is the first joint US/UK delegation and leads to the beginning of VitW UK.

JULY 25 - AUGUST 13 - Fast for Life: VitW members, in repentance for the loss of life caused by the sanctions, gather in New York City to undertake a vigil and fast, calling for an immediate end to the sanctions. Fasters vigil each day and evening at a site opposite the US Mission to the UN from July 25 until UN Weapons Inspection Director Richard Butler and Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz conclude their round of meetings on weapons inspections.

SEPTEMBER 19-28 - A small group of VitW members gather in Duluth, MN for a ten-day, water-only fast to commemorating eight years since the imposition of the sanctions.

NOVEMBER 10 - As the US again threatens military strikes against Iraq, five VitW members recently back from Iraq hold a press conference at the Federal Building in downtown Chicago. They report on their interviews with UN officials in Iraq and the effect of eight years of sanctions imposed on Iraqi civilians.

DECEMBER 2 - VitW receives a "Prepenalty Notice" from OFAC in Washington DC. The notice proposes penalties totaling \$160,000 directed at VitW and four individual delegates: Bert Sacks, Randall Mullins, Dan Handelman, and Joe Zito. VitW was charged with violating the embargo on Iraq through "exportation of donated goods, including medical supplies and toys, to Iraq."

DECEMBER 17 - In response to US military strikes against Iraq, VitW sends emergency delegation to Iraq to call for peace, deliver medicines and report back on the effects of the bombing.

1999

JANUARY 15 - Walk Against War: On the eve of the eighth year since the Gulf War began (and on Martin Luther King's birthday), VitW members begin an 18-day walk from the Pentagon in Washington, DC to United Nations headquarters in New York City. Their itinerary includes gatherings in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. The walkers urge the United Nations to cease allowing US foreign policy to pervert it into an instrument of economic warfare against Iraqi civilians. At United Nations headquarters, walkers deliver hundreds of signed declarations from people across the US pronouncing that they have deliberately violated the sanctions by contributing toward delivery of medicines to Iraq or by personally traveling to Iraq with medicines and supplies.

FEBRUARY 12-14 - We Remember, We Resist: A national action in New York City to end the economic sanctions against Iraq. Organized by VitW, *Fellowship of Reconciliation*, and *Atlantic Life Community*. Solidarity vigils and actions are held throughout the country.

FEBRUARY 17-APRIL 2 - Lenten witness to end the US war against Iraq: a national call for fasting, prayer, and action. From Lent to Good Friday, people wishing to join the Lenten Witness are invited to fast in repentance for the death and suffering the US has inflicted on the Iraqi people. People are encouraged to fast each Friday or more. Art Laffin of the DC Catholic Worker conducts a 20-day liquid only fast. Fasters are also invited to pray for a personal and national conversion of heart, away from killing and war making, to nonviolence and peacemaking and act to end the economic sanctions and the US war against Iraq.

MARCH 4-12 - VitW members Rick McDowell, Kathy Kelly, and Mike Bremer assist with a delegation to Iraq organized by the Fellowship of Reconciliation consisting of Nobel Peace Laureates Mairead Maguire (Ireland) and Adolfo Perez Esquivel (Argentina).

JUNE 8-18 - Commence With Compassion fast and vigil: Six VitW fast and vigil on the Northwestern University campus in Evanston, Illinois to protest the University's decision to award an honorary doctorate of law to Madeleine Albright, who was invited to give the commencement speech on June 19. Fasters began day 8 of the fast by going to Northwestern University President Henry Bienen's office to express their dismay over awarding an honorary doctorate of law to Albright, given her active support of a foreign policy that has violated international law and directly caused the deaths of several hundred thousand Iraqi civilians. The six were later arrested. Albright cancelled her appearance at the last minute for a trip overseas.

AUGUST - VitW members Kathy Kelly and Jeff Guntzel join *Institute of Policy Studies* Fellow Phyllis Bennis in accompanying five US Congressional Aides to Iraq. The delegation's primary focus was the impact of US-UN economic sanctions on the humanitarian situation.

NOVEMBER 10 - Aiming to draw attention to civilian suffering in Iraq, five activists are arrested at the Hilton and Towers Hotel on charges of trespassing during Madeleine Albright's November 10th address to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Those

arrested are VitW members Kathy Kelly, Karl Meyer, Danny Muller, Brad Simpson, and Kristin Sundell. Fifteen stood to question Ms. Albright on the current suffering in Iraq, while displaying enlarged photos of sick and dying Iraqi children.

2000

JANUARY 15-FEBRUARY 14 - Let Iraq Live: A fast for Peace with Iraq. VitW members began a month-long fast in Washington DC, ending at a retreat gathering in New York City.

FEBRUARY 18 - 250-300 people gather at a VitW and *Fellowship of Reconciliation* sponsored demonstration at the US Mission to the United Nations. 86 are arrested, Reporters from Time magazine, CNN, AP, Fox, ABC, and UPI are on hand to cover the events. Many of the reports of the protest piggy-back news that the top United Nations official in Iraq, Hans Von Sponeck, has decided to resign. Mr. von Sponeck is the second Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq to resign in protest of the sanctions (Denis Halliday was the first). Jutta Burghardt, the head of the U.N.'s World Food Program in Iraq, joins von Sponeck and resigns her post.

APRIL 28 - *The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)* nominates Denis Halliday and Kathy Kelly for a joint 2000 Nobel Peace Prize, saying, "The commitment and courage of these nominees illustrate the far-reaching impact of the actions of individuals in the cause of peace."

JUNE 29 - VitW member Danny Muller interrupts a Chicago presidential campaign event for Al Gore and asks, "Mr. Gore, why should anyone vote for an administration that kills five thousand innocent children a month through sanctions in Iraq?" Gore refuses to answer his question directly and Muller is removed.

JULY 6 - Dan Handelman of Portland reaches a settlement agreement with the US government regarding the return of informational materials seized by Customs in 1997 after he traveled to Iraq. As part

of the agreement, the US agrees to pay \$15,000 in lawyers' fees and damages, as well as returning all materials seized, including film and videotape. Handelman went to Iraq with three other members of VitW to deliver medicine to children's hospitals.

JULY 12-SEPTEMBER 12 - A six-member VitW peace team engages in a two-month sojourn to Basra, in southern Iraq in solidarity with the Iraqi people. The purpose of the delegation is to witness, record, and partake in the experience of daily life under the ten-year old embargo. Delegation members live with Iraqi families, without air conditioning or telephones, and subsist only on the contents of the Iraqi food basket, administered by the Iraqi government in conjunction with the UN. They file weekly reports detailing their activities. VitW members have since used their experiences to further focus attention on the blighted conditions of ordinary Iraqis under the sanctions.

AUGUST 6 - In Baghdad, VitW begins a three-day fast and vigil across from UN headquarters in Baghdad to commemorate those killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and call for an end to economic sanctions against Iraq. Activists in Washington, DC and London held solidarity fasts.

National Mobilization to End the Sanctions Against Iraq: Days of Action in DC: Activists from around the country converge on Washington for workshops, training and a march and rally marking the tenth anniversary of sanctions.

SEPTEMBER 18 - George Bush makes a campaign appearance on the Oprah Winfrey show in Chicago. Before the show, VitW members give out information on the sanctions to audience members waiting in line. VitW members Danny Muller and Andrew Mandell get tickets to the show and interrupt the interview and manage two questions about the sanctions against Iraq before being berated by Oprah and escorted out.

OCTOBER 7 - VitW and the Middle East Children's Alliance launch the "Remembering Omran Bus Tour" from Los Angeles to Vancouver, BC and later around

the US visiting schools, homes, and places of worship to educate people on the effects of sanctions against Iraq and to collect school supplies for the children of Iraq. The bus tour is named for a 13-year-old shepherd killed in May 2000 by the illegal US bombing of Iraq.

NOVEMBER 11 - Veterans Day: A national day of protest, prayer, and action to help end the 10-year long sanctions on the people of Iraq. VitW members participate in Day of Silence demonstration commemorating the Iraqi people who have lost their lives because of sanctions.

2001

JANUARY 13 - US to Baghdad Airlift defies Iraq sanctions: Twenty-eight religious and humanitarian leaders bound for Baghdad, Iraq, converge on the USS Intrepid to challenge the US-led UN sanctions on Iraq. They are met there by the "Remembering Omran" Bus, which had just completed a trans-continental tour. Six members of the group were arrested and cited for criminal trespass after they approach the museum entrance in order to invite workers to join them in a simple meal.

JANUARY 16 - Ten years since the start of the Gulf War, VitW activists from all over the US gather outside of the US Mission to the UN and hold a meal symbolizing effects of the war on the civilian population of Iraq. The simple meal is based on the daily food ration of ordinary Iraqi families under the UN/US economic sanctions against Iraq. The meal consists of lentils and rice. Unpurified water from the East River is brought to the meal to symbolize the contaminated water that many Iraqis have to drink because the country has not been allowed the means to restore its water purification systems, destroyed during the Gulf War. After sharing this simple meal, the group attempts to proceed to the US Mission to the United Nations in order to invite Ambassador Richard Holbrook and other workers at the Mission to share the meal and reflect on the deadly effect of UN sanctions on Iraqi children and other civilians. Sixteen people are arrested on the steps of the US Mission to

the UN as they protest ongoing sanctions and bombings of the Iraqi people.

SPRING 2001 - Kathy Kelly of VitW is nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for the second time.

APRIL 7 - Iowan Church members and peace activists who believe the Iowa National Guard's participation in the continued bombing of Iraq is illegal and immoral protest and engage in a nonviolent blockade at noon at the headquarters of the Iowa Air National Guard in Des Moines.

APRIL 18 - US Citizens Challenge UN Resolution on Iraq: VitW urged members of the UN General Assembly not to become immune to the glaring violations of fundamental human rights to education, potable water, and a decent livelihood in a letter to the UN Human Rights Commission.

MAY 31 - Faith-based communities, sponsored by VitW, deliver a letter to President Bush urging an immediate end to economic sanctions on Iraq.

JUNE 18 - 27 - VitW leads a fast and vigil for the Iraqi people at Federal Plaza in Chicago from June 18 to June 27.

AUGUST 6 - SEPTEMBER 14, 2001 - Breaking Ranks: A Fast to End the Siege of Iraq. Besides fasting, participants vigil across the street from the UN in New York City (the corner of 45th Street and First Avenue), perform street theater, attend Arabic lessons, and hold nightly public discussions on the effects of the sanctions. They also sought meetings with UN and US representatives.

AUGUST 15 - Nine participants in the VitW Breaking Ranks fast along with three supporters and are arrested for bringing a meal of cooked lentils and rice to the steps of the US Mission to the UN. Staff members were invited to share the meal and engage in dialogue about how sanctions affect Iraqi civilians. The NYPD jailed the nine for 8 - 10 hours of processing.

AUGUST 22 - Ten members of VitW are arrested after bringing a symbolic meal of lentils and rice to the steps of the US Mission to the UN, inviting members of the staff and the Ambassador's office to share the meal across from the US Mission to the UN.

SEPTEMBER 4 - Seven VitW members are arrested as they carry a simple meal of cooked lentils and rice to the steps of the US Mission to the UN, having invited staff members to share the meal and talk with them about why they are on their 30th day of a fast to end the sanctions against Iraq. Three previous efforts to share a meal and initiate conversation met with arrest and charges of trespass and obstruction.

NOVEMBER 25 - December 3: A Walk For Healing and Peace - Washington, D.C. to New York City. Family members of 9/11 victims led the peace walk saying "Our Grief is Not a Cry For War." VitW, in cooperation with numerous other organizations, endorsed the walk, and several VitW members joined in the walk.

DECEMBER 27 - Several members of the forty-first VitW delegation to Iraq bring new blood bags from the United States as a gift to one of Iraq's hospitals and then donate their own blood for use in the hospital's ward serving children with leukemia.

2002

JANUARY 14 - Iraq Activists Offer Hugs, Cookies, and Counseling to "Battered" U.N. A group of American peace activists and Iraqi street children hold a demonstration at UN Headquarters in Baghdad, offering UN workers milk and cookies, as well as free hugs and counseling. The group, from VitW, likened the U.N. to a "battered woman in need of help," and the US to "her abuser."

JANUARY 22 - Citizens from across the country gather in front of the US Mission to the UN, advocating a change in US foreign policy that would continue the legacy of peacemaking begun by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the spirit of King's anti-war stance, 55 men and women occupy the steps of the mission,

demanding an end to the war in Afghanistan and renouncing any possible expansion of the war. The act of nonviolent civil disobedience was the culmination of a four-day series of presentations and training reflecting on the life of Dr. King.

FEBRUARY 14 - *Peaceful Tomorrows* forms amongst people who participated in "Our Grief Is Not A Cry For War" walk from Washington, D.C. to New York City. *Peaceful Tomorrows* is an organization founded by family members of those killed on September 11th who have united to turn their grief into action for peace.

APRIL 7 - Kathy Kelly and Jeff Guntzel leave Chicago for Israel/Palestine, along with three Catholic Worker companions. They remained in the region until April 25. Each felt very compelled by the extraordinary witness of Palestinians, Israelis and internationals who, at considerable risk, have nonviolently resisted the Occupation, invasion and acts of random violence that afflict people in Israel and Palestine. They were among the first internationals to enter the Jenin refugee camp.

MAY 24-30 - Compassion Iraq Coalition Peace Walk to Baghdad: VitW members co-organize "Walk for Peace" across the Iraq Desert. The sanctions-defying walk raised funds for cancer-stricken Iraqi children. Sixteen Americans journeyed to Iraq to participate in the seven day walk across the desert to dramatize the need for the US and the international community to "go the extra mile" in averting the all-out war against that country reportedly being planned by the Bush Administration.

JUNE 17 - Declaration 2002: Press conference to announce Bert Sacks' noncompliance with the \$10,000 fine imposed on him by OFAC for bringing medicine and food into Iraq. He is instead raising \$10,000 for medicine to be sent to Iraq.

JULY 29 - U.S. Government serves Voices summons for not paying \$20,000 fine.

JULY - VitW launches the Iraq Peace Team, inviting people to live alongside ordinary Iraqis and help voice their concerns both before and during a war we hoped would not happen. Chicago office begins extensive work to select and prepare participants and maintain Iraq Peace Team website.

AUGUST 3-SEPTEMBER 11 - VitW organize the second 40-day fast entitled "Break Ranks - Build Bridges" in New York City across the street from the US Mission to the UN. Fasters encourage the member states of the UN to "break ranks" with the US in its insistence on endless sanctions for Iraq as well as to oppose any new US-led military onslaught against Iraq.

AUGUST - 30 day "Breaking Ranks II" Fast; participants ask the U.S. Mission to the U.N. to dialogue with them about the effects of U.S./UN economic sanctions against Iraq.

SEPTEMBER 12 - VitW joins Pax Christi New York and other concerned groups to begin the "Mirror of Truth" Bus Tour. The caravan leaves from New York City on a three-month trip visiting weapons sites and speaking all along the East Coast, ending at the gates of the School of the Americas during SOA Watch's annual vigil and protest in Ft. Benning, GA in November.

SEPT 18 - first Iraq Peace Team delegation goes to Baghdad.

FALL - 3 month "Mirror of Truth" bus tour to sites where the U.S. develops, stores and prepares to use weapons of mass destruction.

DECEMBER 2002 - U.S. Government serves VitW with a summons to federal court regarding non-payment of a \$20,000 fine; Voices filed a counterclaim on September 26, 2003.

2003

SEPTEMBER 2003 - MAY 2004 Wheels of Justice Bus Tour.

FEBRUARY 8 - Electronic Iraq founded by respected Middle East alternative news publishers, The Electronic Intifada (EI) and Voices in the Wilderness, incorporating on the ground reports from veteran Voices in the Wilderness campaigners. Electronic Iraq receives over 1/2 million unique visitors during the first months of the war. This publication becomes one of the most accurate and up-to-date sources for information about the war. In June 2003, eIraq was awarded ADC's "Voices of Peace" Award.

FEBRUARY-MARCH - Iraq Peace Team members coordinate vigils at sites in and around Baghdad, posting banners that say: "To Bomb This Site Is A War Crime" and maintain regular vigils across from UN headquarters in Baghdad.

FEBRUARY 15 - "World Says No to War" Voices delegates in many locales participate in demonstrations against the war.

FEBRUARY 25 - Iraq Peace Team holds four day "Courage for Peace, Not for War" fast at Demilitarized Zone between Kuwait and Iraq. Iraq Peace Team remains in Iraq throughout Shock and Awe bombardment and the initial weeks of U.S. led Coalition occupation of Iraq. VitW long-term delegations go to Iraq, Aug-Oct, 2003 and Dec, 2003-Jan 2004

MARCH 13 - The Boeing 9 arrested ; trial October 7th

MAY 2003-FEBRUARY 2004 - Tomorrow House a house of hospitality for people of diverse backgrounds in Iraq; also housed a newspaper 'Al Muahaja' organized by Iraqi students.

SEPTEMBER 2003 - FEBRUARY, 2004 Chicago Voices network welcomes Iraqi friends Umm Heider and Mustafa and Umm Heider to visit in Chicago for six months. Umm Heider's son, Heider, was killed by a U.S. missile on January 25, 1999; Mustafa was badly wounded.

MAY 9-11 - Mother's Day Weekend at Project Elf. Voices delegates Jerry Zawada and Kathy Kelly arrested at Project Elf in Northern Wisconsin. ELF was used to task U.S. submarines in launching attacks in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Each sentenced to serve 30 days in jail.

NOVEMBER 2003 - Kathy Kelly and Jerry Zawada are among several dozen activists who cross the line at a military combat training school in Fort Benning, GA.

2004

APRIL-JULY - Kathy Kelly imprisoned for civil disobedience at the School of the Americas.

APRIL-SEPTEMBER - Jerry Zawada imprisoned for civil disobedience at the School of the Americas.

APRIL 15 - day of action for war tax resistance.

JUNE 4 - OFAC hearing in Washington, D.C..

AUGUST 6-9 - Life Under Occupation campaign initiated August 6-9th with a series of walks, protests, and gatherings.

SEPTEMBER 1-12 - "We Want to Live like Everybody" fast in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners at Water Tower in Chicago.

AUGUST - Voices delegates participate in workshops, discussions, planning and protest in New York City during the Republican National Convention.

OCTOBER - Camilo Mejia, conscientious objector to the war in Iraq, solidarity action in Oklahoma; Voices delegates vigil outside of the prison. Camilo refused redeployment to Iraq; he was sentenced to one year in military prison and was released in February 2005.

NOVEMBER - Loyola and Depaul students participate in a three-day electricity fast as part of the "Life Under Occupation" campaign.

NOVEMBER - Counter-recruitment group, *Non-Military Alternatives Project*, spins off.

FALL 2004-SPRING 2005 - Wheels of Justice tour, 9 month tour throughout the United States as a nonviolent witness to war and occupation in Iraq and Palestine; partnered with Al-Awda.

2005

JANUARY-APRIL 15TH - Counter Terror Build Justice: Voices coordinates grassroots actions around the country against the war on terror.

MARCH-APRIL - Voices and other Chicago area peace groups meet with the offices of Senator Obama and Senator Durbin about the \$82 billion supplemental bill for the war. Four Voices delegates were arrested at Senator Dick Durbin's office in Chicago.

MAY - Kathy Kelly's book, Other Lands Have Dreams: From Baghdad to Peking Prison, is published.

Voices endorses the "National Call to Nonviolent Resistance to the War in Iraq" issued by the Iraq Pledge of Resistance.

JUNE 15-30 - Voices members join Jubilee Iraq for a 15-day fast in Geneva, Switzerland, before and during the UN Compensation Committee meetings that determine how much of a remaining 65 billion in war reparations claims will be imposed against Iraq.