






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Thursday, May 15, 2003

Ambassador Bremer Statement from Baghdad, Iraq

(Opening statement from Ambassador Bremer's press conference in Baghdad, Iraq.)

Good afternoon. Before I take your questions, I'd like to make a few comments.

I'm delighted to be in Iraq. President Bush sent me to help the Iraqi people retake and rebuild their own country. In the short time that I have been here, I have seen many symbols and examples of the depth of depravity and evil of the former president, Saddam Hussein.

I've seen dozens and dozens of buildings, built purely for his own self-aggrandizement. And I've seen the poverty in which he forced so many of his people to live. In the last few days, I've seen the shocking and haunting pictures of mass graves which contain some of the thousands and thousands of Iraqis he murdered. I have heard from dozens of Iraqi citizens about their gratitude that the coalition has freed them from this horror.

Saddam Hussein was a truly evil man who repressed, tortured and murdered his people. He didn't go a day too soon. And now that the Iraqi people are free from his terror, they are rightly looking forward to a new beginning.



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It is my responsibility as administrator of the international coalition to help the Iraqi people to turn Iraq into a stable, safe, peaceful and prosperous country. I take it seriously. And I'm going to make sure that we help them in every way possible.

Across most of Iraq, life is already better.

- The regime of fear and oppression is gone.
- The Shi'a of Iraq have been able to honor their religious traditions for the first time in decades.
- Town councils and local politicians are starting to meet, and openly and freely select their leaders.
- Water quality is better in Basra than it has been for years.
- More Iraqis now have access to electricity than ever before.

But there remain a number of problems, particularly law and order in Baghdad. I've travelled around Baghdad, and seen the shops open and people going about their lives. But there is a serious law and order issue, which we continue to address. Saddam released over 100,000 convicted prisoners onto the streets last October. Many of these people were political prisoners, but many of them were common, violent criminals. It's time the criminals were back in jail. And that's where we'll put them. In the past 48 hours, we have arrested about 300 criminals.

Police are coming back to work, and we're starting to train them.. In the old days, they received their orders from on high. In the new Iraq, they will be answerable to the Iraqi people. And those who were on high, the Ba'athists who used their power to repress the Iraqi people, will be removed from office. The Coalition Provisional Authority banned the Ba'ath Party on April 16th.

Shortly, I will issue a further order on measures to extirpate Ba'athists and Ba'athism from Iraq forever.

- We have and will aggressively seek to identify these people, and remove them from office.
- We have hunted down and will continue to deal with those members of the old regime who are sabotaging the country and the coalition's efforts.

- We will ensure that representations of Saddam Hussein and other Ba'athist symbols are removed systematically from public display.
- And we will work with the Iraqis to set up a process of bringing Ba'athist officials to justice for their past crimes.

But we must do more than deal with the past. We will provide the conditions for Iraqis to govern themselves in the future. To that end, the Coalition Provisional Authority will work with responsible Iraqis to begin the process of establishing a government representative of all the Iraqi people.

Finally, I'm delighted to confirm that the United Nations mission here has agreed that the U.N. will use oil-for-food funds to purchase the Iraqi cereal crop, now being harvested. This will be a first. Saddam Hussein preferred to manipulate the cereal harvest for political ends, while he used much of the oil-for-food money to build projects like his Olympic stadium. When I met with the U.N. representative yesterday, we both agreed on the importance of securing a new United Nations resolution to allow the Iraqi people quickly to make use of their money now held by the United Nations. I hope that the Security Council will work swiftly on the draft resolution before them.

Thank you, and I am pleased to take your questions.

(Questions and answers unavailable at this time.)



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