



**CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY
COMMITTEE ON THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR IN IRAQ**

The Church in Society Committee of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland is acutely aware of the deep concern felt by members of the Irish public North and South and at all levels of the Church as fears of armed conflict in Iraq escalate. We share the concerns expressed by Anglican Church leaders around the world, particularly those in the Middle East, and are aware of the growing concerns of church leaders and people from all traditions.

Already a consistency can be discerned in statements made by members of the Church of Ireland in highlighting concern in the areas of what today constitutes a just war and what practicalities are in place to respond coherently, constructively and compassionately to the humanitarian imperative in the event of war.

The Committee holds that it is necessary to revisit the criteria by which we have historically judged wars to be just or otherwise as a matter of human and theological urgency not least as the theory itself is now questioned from within the churches. It also accepts that in the short term it will not be possible to deliver a theologically rounded statement of criteria applicable to the situation of modern warfare with which children, women and men are now faced.

Among issues which need to be revisited are:

- The embroilment of civilians in modern warfare and the specific problems of targeting unprotected civilian areas from the comparative safety of centres of military operations;
- The sophistication of military technology and the devastation which it inflicts not only in immediate accuracy of targeting but in long-term genetic damage to individuals and communities through the chemical, biological and nuclear warfare;
- The affront made by war itself to responsible care for the environment in human and ecological terms;

At the same time the Church in its ministering role acknowledges the need to provide appropriate pastoral care to members of the armed forces who seek to serve peaceful concerns and to protect not only national but international interests appropriately defined. Ministering in war is as vital as speaking out for or against war.

The Committee notes the imbalance, too often insufficiently examined or challenged, in relation to the holding of weapons of mass destruction by Western powers in comparison with emerging nations. We ask: Who will set an example and what form will that lead take?

The Committee further requests that every effort be made to proceed diligently and efficiently with the UN Weapons Inspection initiative in Iraq and that this be done without prejudice. It also requests that the appropriate UN Resolutions and Conventions be adhered to throughout this process.

Finally the Committee urges that every diplomatic step be taken to avert armed conflict and that all Christians pray for peace.

The Rt Revd Michael Jackson, Bishop of Clogher,
Chairperson, The Church in Society Committee January 23 2003