

JCTR LINKS COST OF LIVING ISSUES WITH WAR IN IRAQ

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) says the monthly *Basic Needs Basket* continues to show that high demands are being placed on families to meet their daily needs of food and other non-food essentials.

In the latest *Basic Needs Basket* report for March 2003, a family of six in Lusaka requires K400,050 to meet its needs of food only. If other essential non-food items such as energy, wash and bath soap, housing water, etc., are added to the cost of food, the amount goes as high as K1,033,750. "Indeed the cost of the *Basic Needs Basket* would even be much higher if costs such as personal care, transport, clothes, health and education were added," says Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR.

According to Muweme, it is encouraging to observe that the *Basic Needs Basket* received significant consideration in recent salary negotiations by trade unions. "Demands by teachers for a salary of K1,500,000 are strongly justified," states Muweme, "when one takes into account the basic essentials that a family requires for survival."

More explicitly, the civil servants' demands are justified because they show a relationship between people's income and cost of living, a *fundamental* guide for arriving at wages at every level and type of employment. Muweme says, "It is through such an approach that we see the *imperative* nature of measuring living standards by quality of life indicators such as the number of meals a family has per day." Therefore, the government's settlement for less than what was requested by unions should be considered only as a *temporary* arrangement.

The government's frequent complaint that it does not have the resources to meet the workers' demands must be honestly evaluated in the light of other expenses that resources are easily found for, such as expensive travel abroad by large presidential parties, benefits for high government officials, proposed funding of political parties, large motorcades to accompany airport departures and arrivals, unnecessary defense spending, etc. Frankly speaking, the real issue is not *resources* but *priorities*!

Adding to the uncertainty of the socio-economic situation in Zambia is the tragedy of the war in Iraq. "We know very well that while Iraq is *very far away* geographically" says Muweme, "the consequences of the war are in fact *very close* to us in Zambia." The price of oil will go up, affecting food prices here, development assistance will be diverted, debt relief will be delayed, and political instability will be fostered.

Going to the war without the approval of the United Nations and arguing a doctrine of national security that allows the United States to impose its own administration in Iraq threatens sustainable international relations for peace and thus endangers Zambia's future also.

JCTR therefore joins church leaders, governments, and concerned people around the world that have opposed this war as unjust and immoral. It implores the United Nations to act to bring about an end to the war. JCTR takes this position because of its concerns about the lives of people in Iraq and in Zambia.

[For more information, contact Muweme Muweme, Social Conditions Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, P.O. Box 7774, Lusaka, Zambia; tel: 260-1-290410; fax: 260-1-290759; e-mail: socialjctr@zamnet.zm; internet: www.jctr.org.zm].

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