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Local groups begin Iraqi relief effort

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Local groups begin Iraqi relief effort

By DANIEL STURM

Local peace activists have begun to launch a fundraising campaign for Iraq.

"If we're not able to stop the onset of cholera, there will be more deaths in addition to the thousands of civilian war casualties," said Okemos resident Shrikumar Poddar, organizer of the Greater Lansing Network against War in Iraq's relief campaign.

The local relief effort will be launched April 24. Ghanim al-Jumaily, the co-founder and CEO of the Detroit-based international relief organization Life for Relief and Development will speak at the kickoff event at MSU.

"Iraq is in a very bad shape," said al-Jumaily, a Detroit resident, after returning from Iraq, the country of his birth, two weeks ago. The relief organizer said that patients were being left alone or even thrown out of hospitals, which have been heavily looted. Laboratory equipment, medications, and even chemicals were stolen due to a lack of security. "It is worse than in Afghanistan," said al-Jumaily. In addition to medical aid, emergency supplies such as beds, sheets and plastic gloves are most urgently needed.

Before the U.S.-Britain invasion began, 80 percent of Iraq's population depended on supplies provided through the "Oil for Food" program led by the United Nations. The program ended shortly before the war began.

Al-Jumaily said his organization is working with local authorities to establish a network for delivering goods. "As we speak we're delivering already to our hospital in Basra," he said, referring to a clinic that his organization runs in one of the poorest neighborhoods of the southern Iraqi city. The organization, which is headquartered with 12 staff employees in Detroit, runs offices in Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and West Africa.

The International Red Cross reports from Baghdad that although security remains volatile, a degree of calm has returned to the city center. Red Cross engineers working with local technicians have successfully re-established the water supply for the Al-Sadr area of Baghdad (formerly Saddam City), reaching an estimated 800,000 to 900,000 inhabitants. A major water-pumping station had been damaged during the bombings.

Local peace activists of the Greater Lansing Network against War in Iraq are also working with a Philadelphia-based Quaker group called American Friends Service Committee, which has shipped several thousand hygiene kits to Iraq. The GLNAWI relief campaign plans to raise \$10,000 in an initial relief fund, with an ultimate goal of \$50,000. This would enable GLNAWI to assist Life for Relief and Development in a project to build a new water purification plant in Iraq. GLNAWI is planning a benefit concert and walkathon in May to raise funds.

Contributions to GLNAWI's Iraqi relief fund can be made to the International Service Society, 2601 Cochise Lane, Okemos, Michigan 48864-2055.

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