


100,000 Rings

International bell ringing ceremonies to grieve and protest the deaths of Iraqis in the US/UK war and occupation

www.IraqMortality.org

Voices for Creative Nonviolence and Justice Not Vengeance call for bell ringing ceremonies **October 24th – 28th**



During the era of sanctions on Iraq, the US and British governments sought to obscure the “price” being paid by the Iraqi people for US and British foreign policy. Today, George W. Bush and Tony Blair seek to hide the mounting toll of death in Iraq as a result of the war and occupation. In doing so, they seek to limit our compassion. They seek to stifle our opposition and resistance. They wish to manage our compassion for our fellow citizens fighting in Iraq and the depth of our grief for the families of those who have died. They wish to silence us.

George W. Bush and Tony Blair ask for patience. They claim that “staying the course” and “completing the mission” are the best ways to “honor” the coalition forces who have died or been injured in this war.

We disagree.

We reject the fantasies President Bush and Prime Minister Blair are constructing, claiming to increase security through military adventurism. We are appalled by their disregard for the welfare of American and British citizens sent to fight in Iraq. We are appalled by the silence surrounding the suffering and death of the Iraqi people, caught on a battlefield without borders in the crossfire of a war they didn’t start or invite.

In the last year, three major published reports have estimated deaths caused in Iraq by war and occupation. All three studies, the *Lancet* study, published in October 2004, the *UN Development Program* report published in May 2005 and the *Iraq Body Count* study published in July 2005, found that tens of thousands of people had died in Iraq as a result of the US/UK invasion and occupation of Iraq.

All three studies have been performed with care and professionalism. Each study demonstrates the gravity of the crisis into which the Iraqi people have been plunged. Even so, we believe that all three studies under-estimate the death toll in Iraq.*

We mourn these lives lost, and we wish to do so publicly.

In April 2004, 52 former senior British diplomats wrote that ‘it is a disgrace that the coalition forces themselves appear to have no estimate’ of Iraqi deaths due to the invasion and occupation.¹ We echo their condemnation. Lives lost by US and ‘coalition’ soldiers are carefully recorded and mourned. The lives lost by Iraqi citizens have no official importance. They are nameless. They are not even numbered. They do not even exist as statistics.

We support the call of the *Count the Casualties* campaign² for a government commissioned comprehensive, independent, peer-reviewed inquiry into Iraqi casualties since the US/UK invasion in March 2003. We note that this call is supported by: *Amnesty International UK*, *Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT)*, *Human Rights Watch*, *International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)*, *Iraq Body Count*, *Medact*, *the National Union of Students*, *Oxford Research Group* and *Waging Peace*.

As people opposed to the US/UK war and occupation of Iraq, we act to end the silence about the suffering and death in Iraq and to publicly unlock the grief that it has caused in our communities. **On October 24th – 28th**, to mark the anniversary of the release of the Lancet Study on 29 October 2004, we will act out our grief, our anger, and our solidarity by gathering in a public place for a simple and solemn **“Bell Ringing” ceremony. We will ring a bell every minute, 1,000 times**, each solitary ring symbolizing the death of an Iraqi person as a result of the war and occupation. We call upon other communities to organize similar bell ringing ceremonies on these days. **One hundred communities ringing a bell 1,000 times would equal 100,000 rings.** The format of the ceremony is open to meet the needs of individual communities.** At intervals during the bell ringing, we will read the names of Iraqis who are known to have died in the violence.³ We will have printed materials for people who are interested, and we will interact with people who approach us, but in everything we do we will seek to maintain a solemnity that befits the recollection of people recently killed in war.

Together we can help end the silence on suffering and death in Iraq. With our combined strength, we will send a clear message to our governments and media, a message as clear as the sounding of a bell. Our combined rings will reverberate with our grief, strengthen our solidarity, and break the silence surrounding the suffering and mounting toll of death in Iraq.

For more information about the “100,000 Rings,” or to organize a bell ringing ceremony in your community, see www.IraqMortality.org or e-mail Scott Blackburn (U.S. - scott@vitw.org) or Milan Rai (U.K. - info@j-n-v.org).

—Kathy Kelly, Milan Rai, David Smith-Ferri, Babak Bazargan, and Scott Blackburn

* For a more thorough discussion of these different studies, please visit www.iraqmortality.org.

** To sign up and for suggestions on how to participate in the 100,000 Rings Project, please see our guide to organizing a bell-ringing ceremony at www.IraqMortality.org

NOTES:

1.) Doomed to failure in the Middle East, *The Guardian*, 27 April 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1204085,00.html>

2.) *Count the Casualties* campaign can be found at www.countthecasualties.org.uk

3.) Two websites which list names of Iraqi civilians killed in the war are <http://civilians.info/iraq/> and http://www.iraqbodycount.net/editorial_may2703.htm