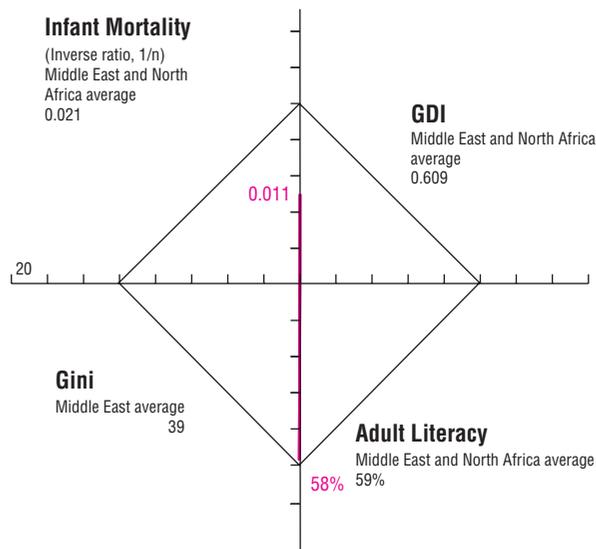


• LABID ABAWI

## IN EXCHANGE FOR OIL...



*The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.*  
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

*The political system in Iraq is characterised by arbitrary rule, the absence of democratic institutions, and monopoly of legislative, executive and judicial powers by the so-called 'Revolutionary Command Council' for 32 years. Such a system is incapable of creating the political, economic, social and cultural environment necessary for social development. On the other hand, the country has been under international economic sanctions for the last ten which have had a detrimental impact on the life of Iraqi people and caused suffering in all spheres. They are still an obstacle to human development. The economic sanctions have given the present rulers the pretext to freeze all legislation and laws and to embark on arbitrary and random policies that are inconsistent with the needs and requirements of society and citizens.*

The Iraqi regime attended the Copenhagen Summit, but has not translated the commitments made there into policies and programmes for implementation. With a few exceptions, the overall condition now prevailing in Iraq is worse than it was five years ago. One exception may be the Kurdistan area in northern Iraq, where some progress was made in reducing the poverty and improving social services. Another is implementation of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 986, better known as the «food and medicine for oil» agreement.

Economic stagnation has resulted in the closure of many factories and workshops, which numbered 59,413 in 1990, about 30,000 in 1995, and 17,500 today. This is coupled with a policy of systematic privatisation of public sector, which has direct negative results on working conditions and has caused deterioration of the production cycle.

Unemployment has risen to high levels especially among male workers. This, and the low wages (average income USD 3/month) forced many workers to quit their jobs and engage in marginal non-productive activities. Many educated and professional people have been forced to emigrate. The regime has no policy to reduce unemployment, nor does it have any rehabilitation schemes.

The situation of poverty has not improved in the last five years. According to UN reports, an estimated four million persons are living below the poverty line. Taking into consideration the high level of unemployment, high prices, extreme high inflation (over 7000%) and the lack of government policies to alleviate poverty, **it can safely be said that poverty is reaching catastrophic levels for the majority of people.** The overwhelming majority of the population depends on the monthly rations provided by SCR 986 for their living.

In December 1995, the Iraqi government decreed that all ministries and public institutions must decrease their expenditures and increase their incomes. As a result, several taxes and dues were imposed, which placed heavy burdens on the people and worsened their economic situation. Lack of administration reforms, continuing austerity policies, cuts in public spending and imposition of widespread taxes, have increased the number of poor people and led to corruption in both public and private sectors. Child labour has increased, as have crimes including organised crimes, theft and juvenile delinquency. Prostitution is widespread among young people of both sexes. Family life and social fabric are disintegrating.

The regime has systematically carried out undemocratic practices, perpetrating oppression and ethnic, religious and sectarian discrimination. The violation of human rights and disrespect for human dignity itself are features. People's participation in the political, social and economic life of the country is impossible. No civil society organisations may function openly, and all NGOs are controlled by the ruling party, which is the only political party legally allowed to function.

In recent years, the country has witnessed increased participation of women in the work force. This is a result of economic hardship in most families and the need for more family income. Women's wages are much lower than men's, and no equitable work contracts or social security is provided. Women in general suffer from dual discrimination and exploitation, in the society and at home. Participation of women in political life is non-existent, and the same is true of social life. There are no policies to provide for the integration of women, to give them a role in social development, or to raise awareness on gender equity.

Basic healthcare is diminishing, even after the implementation of SCR 986. This should have met Iraqi needs for medicines and medical equipment, but at the end of 1999, just over 50% of the supply that was to have been shipped since the start of implementation had been received.

In December 1998, the government introduced market principles in public hospitals and year later also in health centres as part of privatisation measures. This means that medical centres have to become self supporting financially. The government introduced user fees, stopped all financial aid, and called for reduced expenditures, reduced medical services, and the sale of medical equipment and medicines on the black market where prices are high to increase profits.

The income from these sales is distributed as follows: 40% goes to the hospitals and health centres for development, 30% goes to doctors and health workers as incentives, and 30% goes to the government. The result is the reduction in the number of

patients to one-third of those who seek medical treatment. People with chronic diseases who received medicine 36 times a year, now receive it only six times, and they are given enough medicine for only three days.

Mortality in public hospitals for children under 5 is the highest in the world. According to a report published by UNICEF in August 1999, infant mortality rose from 56 in 1984–1989 to 131 in 1,000 in 1994–1999. An estimated 90,000 deaths yearly occur because of the sanctions, and the situation is getting worse.

Malnutrition has become a desperate problem, especially for children. There are one million children under five who suffer from chronic malnutrition and one-quarter of these children suffer from acute malnutrition.

Privatisation of the educational system in Iraq since the end of 1995 has had negative consequences for education. The government introduced fees for students at all levels of education and forced parents to donate money to the schools to cover maintenance and building of new schools. Students have to buy their textbooks and pay for vocational activities. 86% of Iraqi families consider that having their children in school places a heavy economic burden on them.

According to ministry of education in Iraq, 10% of teaching positions were vacant at the beginning of 1999. The ministry reported last year that more than 150,000 student and 67,000 teachers had left schools and universities in 1998. One million students at all levels did so in 1999. The ministry estimates that the dropout is about 8.3% per year.

Without any doubt, Iraq not only did not meet the commitments it made in Copenhagen, but is also sliding backwards.

● **Iraqi Amal Association**  
alamal@email.msn.com