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GOVERNMENT MUST ADDRESS IRAQ'S HUMANITARIAN NEEDS FOLLOWING TROOP PULLOUT

The Uniting Church in Australia has today called on the Australian Government to address the humanitarian crisis affecting Iraq, even though Australian troops are on the way home.

The President of the Uniting Church, the Rev. Gregor Henderson, said that, while the Church commended the decision to withdraw 500 Australian troops, the Federal Government should commit more funding to rebuild the country.

“When Prime Minister, John Howard, sent Australian troops off to invade Iraq in 2003, the Uniting Church did not agree,” Rev. Henderson said.

“However, we prayed for the safety of our troops as well as for a just outcome for the Iraqi people.

“At that time, Uniting Church leaders also said they hoped Australia would spend as much money on healing and reconstruction in Iraq as on prosecuting the war.

“Sadly that has not come to pass and we are disappointed that, once again, more money has been spent on guns than on bread.”

Rev. Henderson said the Australian Government was to be commended for its commitment to humanitarian relief in Iraq, but called for more; asking the Government to spend as much on rebuilding, reconstructing and healing the desperately battered nation over the next five years, as was spent on the military effort.

“That would mean an extra \$2billion in aid over five years,” he said.

“We know, from a 2007 Oxfam International report, that the situation for many Iraqis is worse now than it was before the 2003 invasion.

“We urge the Australian government not to abandon the Iraqi people, most of whom are without food and adequate water, are displaced and living in absolute poverty, and who have little access to basic medical services.

“Providing increased aid to Iraq would at least give priority to peace and the needs of people who have suffered far too long.”

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Rev. Henderson is available for comment.