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The Most Cowardly War in History

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World Tribunal on Iraq

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Opening Statement of Arundhati Roy on behalf of the jury of conscience of the world tribunal of Iraq.

Istanbul, Turkey

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This is the culminating session of the World Tribunal on Iraq. It is of particular significance that it is being held here in Turkey, where the United States used Turkish air bases to launch numerous bombing missions to degrade Iraq's defenses before the March 2003 invasion; and has sought and continues to seek political support from the Turkish government, which it regards as an ally. All this was done in the face of enormous popular opposition by the Turkish people. As a spokesperson for the jury of conscience, it would make me uneasy if I did not mention that the government of India is also, like the government of Turkey, positioning itself as an ally of the United States in its economic policies and the so-called War on Terror.

The testimonies at the previous sessions of the World Tribunal on Iraq in Brussels and New York, have demonstrated that even those of us who have tried to follow the war in Iraq closely are not aware of a fraction of the horrors that have been

unleashed in Iraq.

The Jury of Conscience at this tribunal is not here to deliver a simple verdict of guilty or not guilty against the United States and its allies. We are here to examine a vast spectrum of evidence about the motivations and consequences of the US invasion and occupation, evidence that has been deliberately marginalized or suppressed. Every aspect of the war will be examined - its legality, the role of international institutions and major corporations in the occupation, the role of the media, the impact of weapons such as depleted uranium munitions, napalm, and cluster bombs, the use of and legitimation of torture, the ecological impacts of the war, the responsibility of Arab governments, the impact of Iraq's occupation on Palestine, and the history of US and British military interventions in Iraq.

This tribunal is an attempt to correct the record. To document the history of the war not from the point of view of the victors but of the temporarily - and I repeat the word temporarily - anquished.

Before the testimonies begin, I would like to briefly address as straight-forwardly as I can a few questions that have been raised about this tribunal.

The first is that this tribunal is a Kangaroo Court. That it represents only one point of view. That it is a prosecution without a defense. That the verdict is a foregone conclusion.

Now this view seems to suggest a touching concern that in this harsh world, the views of the US government and the so-called Coalition of the Willing headed by President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair have somehow gone unrepresented. That the World Tribunal on Iraq isn't aware of the arguments in support of the war and is unwilling to consider the point of view of the invaders. If in the era of the multinational corporate media and embedded journalism anybody can seriously hold this view, then we truly do live in the Age of Irony, in an age when satire has become meaningless because real life is more satirical than satire can ever be.

Let me say categorically that this tribunal is the defense. It is an act of resistance in itself. It is a defense mounted against one of the most cowardly wars ever fought in history, a war in which international institutions were used to force a country to disarm and then stood by while it was attacked with a greater array of weapons than has ever been used in the history of war.

Second, this tribunal is not in any way a defense of Saddam Hussein. His crimes against Iraqis, Kurds, Iranians, Kuwaitis, and others cannot be dismissed in the process of bringing to light Iraq's more recent and still unfolding tragedy. However, we must not forget that when Saddam Hussein was committing his worst crimes, the US government was supporting him politically and materially. When he was gassing Kurdish people, the US government financed him, armed him, and stood by silently.

Saddam Hussein is being tried as a war criminal even as we speak. But what about those who helped to install him in power, who armed him, who supported

him - and who are now setting up a tribunal to try him and absolve themselves completely? And what about other accomplices of the United States in the region that have suppressed Kurdish peoples and other peoples rights, including the government of Turkey?

There are remarkable people gathered here who in the face of this relentless and brutal aggression and propaganda have doggedly worked to compile a comprehensive spectrum of evidence and information that should serve as a weapon in the hands of those who wish to participate in the resistance against the occupation of Iraq. It should become a weapon in the hands of soldiers in the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Australia, and elsewhere who do not wish to fight, who do not wish to lay down their lives - or to take the lives of others - for a pack of lies. It should become a weapon in the hands of journalists, writers, poets, singers, teachers, plumbers, taxi drivers, car mechanics, painters, lawyers - anybody who wishes to participate in the resistance.

The evidence collated in this tribunal should, for instance, be used by the International Criminal Court (whose jurisdiction the United States does not recognize) to try as war criminals George Bush, Tony Blair, John Howard, Silvio Berlusconi, and all those government officials, army generals, and CEOs who participated in this war and now profit from it.

The assault on Iraq is an assault on all of us: on our dignity, our intelligence, our humanity, and our future.

We recognize that the judgment of the World Tribunal on Iraq is not binding in international law. However, our ambitions far surpass that. The World Tribunal on Iraq places its faith in the consciences of millions of people across the world who do not wish to stand by and watch while the people of Iraq are being slaughtered, subjugated, and humiliated.