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Iraq Sanctions Kill Children, U.N. Reports

By BARBARA CROSSETTE

UNITED NATIONS, Nov. 30— As many as 576,000 Iraqi children may have died since the end of the Persian Gulf war because of economic sanctions imposed by the Security Council, according to two scientists who surveyed the country for the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The study also found steeply rising malnutrition among the young, suggesting that more children will be at risk in the coming years. The results of the survey will appear on Friday in *The Lancet*, the journal of the British Medical Association.

I had a sense that the situation had gotten worse, but I didn't think that there would be such a dramatic difference," said Mary Smith Fawzi, a researcher at the Harvard University School of Public Health, who conducted the survey for the Food and Agriculture Organization. The co-author is Sarah Zaidi, science director of the Center for Social and Economic Rights in New York.

Dr. Fawzi, who surveyed 2,120 children under 10 years of age in 25 neighborhoods in Baghdad in August, said 28 percent were stunted in growth, up from 12 percent in 1991.

In 1991, she said in an interview, rates of malnutrition in Iraq were similar to those in Kuwait. In the paper for *The Lancet*, she says Iraq has now sunk to the levels of poor developing countries, with underweight rates among children comparable to those in Ghana or Mali.

The percentage of Iraqi children affected by "wasting," or emaciation requiring urgent attention, rose to 12 percent in 1995, from 3 percent in 1991, Dr. Fawzi reported, adding that these figures are extraordinarily high, similar to those found in Malagasy and Myanmar.

Several United Nations agencies, including F.A.O. and Unicef, have expressed concern about the damage being done to Iraqis, especially children, by United Nations economic sanctions. Two years ago, F.A.O. warned that Iraq risked widespread starvation.

The Security Council responded to these concerns earlier this year when it offer Iraq the opportunity to sell \$2 billion worth of oil to purchase food and medicines under United Nations supervision, the second such offer in four years. Iraq rejected both as infringements of its sovereignty and has continued to demand an unconditional end to sanctions.

The sanctions were imposed by the Security Council after Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Led by the United States, the Council has rejected many Iraqi appeals to lift the restrictions, which have crippled the economy, until Iraq accounts for all its weapons of mass destruction and United Nations inspectors can certify that they have been destroyed in accordance with several Council resolutions.

Recent revelations about significant secret biological and chemical weapons programs have set back any chances of an early end of sanctions.

In 1991, after the war ended, Dr. Fawzi and other researchers found that mortality rates for children under five had tripled during the war and its immediate aftermath. By this year, the rate had increased fivefold.

Deaths related to diarrheal diseases have tripled in an increasingly unhealthy environment, the study says. Water and sanitation systems have deteriorated, hospitals are functioning at 40 percent of capacity, food prices are high and many people are living on Government rations that provide only 1,000 calories a day.

Infant deaths, which had doubled during the gulf war, continue at a high rate, Dr. Fawzi wrote.

"These findings illustrate a strong association between economic sanctions and increase in child mortality and malnutrition rates," the study says.

"The United Nations humanitarian arm offers palliatives for the alleviation of suffering while the U.N. Security Council is intent on continuing the sanctions," the authors write, adding that the situation poses a challenge to "the moral, financial and political standing of the international community."

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