

Iraq resentfully agrees to new U.N. inspections

Diego Ibarguen
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — With a U.S. gun to his head, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Wednesday accepted a U.N. demand to open his country to weapons inspections without conditions.

Iraq's U.N. ambassador delivered a rambling, angry nine-page letter to Secretary-General Kofi Annan agreeing to abide by the tough inspection terms set last Friday when the U.N. Security Council voted 15-0 to order Iraq to submit to new inspections. The letter was signed by Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri, but he clearly was speaking for Hussein, who as dictator has total power.

The letter denounced the U.N. action as unjust, denied that Iraq has any weapons of mass destruction and attacked the United States and Great Britain, the co-sponsors of the resolution, as liars. Nevertheless it concluded that "the important thing is trying to spare our people any harm" and

said Iraq was "prepared to receive the inspectors within the assigned timetable." The Security Council had given Iraq until this Friday to respond.

An extensive U.S. military buildup continues around Iraq. President Bush has made it clear that if Iraq does not disarm, he will unleash a U.S.-led military coalition to invade the country.

Iraq's decision to accept Security Council Resolution 1441 clears the way for Monday's arrival of chief U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Blix is to focus on chemical and biological weapons; ElBaradei is charged with inspecting for nuclear weapons.

Iraq's letter got a cold reception at the White House. President Bush made no reference to it in comments he made at the start of an Oval Office meeting with Annan. Instead, he congratulated the United Nations for last week's unanimous Security Council action. Earlier Wednesday, after a meeting with his Cabinet officers, Bush

repeated his near-daily call to Hussein to disarm or face the consequences.

"We hope that he disarms. We hope that he will listen to the world. The world has spoken. . . . If he chooses not to disarm, we will disarm him," Bush said. "There's no negotiations with Mr. Saddam Hussein. Those days are long gone. And so are the days of deceit and denial. And now it's up to him."

The next test comes Dec. 8, a deadline the U.N. resolution set for Iraq to submit a "currently accurate, full and complete" report of its military and civilian chemical, biological and nuclear programs and on other weapons systems, such as ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles.

The resolution warns of "serious consequences" for failure to comply and says Iraq has been and remains in "material breach" of previous U.N. resolutions — diplomatic parlance often used to authorize military force.

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Catholic bishops approve revised sex abuse policy

Donna Gehrke-White
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

MIAMI — U.S. Roman Catholic bishops Wednesday overwhelmingly approved revisions to their clergy sexual abuse policy that would allow bishops to conduct preliminary investigations in private and set up church tribunals to judge accused priests.

In voting 246-7 for the policy, with six bishops abstaining, the bishops said the measures would still keep accused molesters away from children in the church. A priest found guilty of a single offense — even from years ago — still would be relieved of ministerial duties.

"The new norms make very clear that sexual abuse and molestation by priests will not be tolerated by the Roman Catholic Church," Phoenix Bishop Thomas J. O'Brien said.

Victims' advocacy groups remained unconvinced. They noted the new charter calls for keeping preliminary investigations of accused priests confidential, limits lay review boards to an advisory role, and requires accusers to file complaints by age 28.

"It is a real setback for the church as a whole," said David Clohessy, national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. "It is going to deepen the divide between the bishops and their flock."

Especially troubling is the confidential preliminary investigations, Clohessy said. "The secrecy is what got us into this mess."

The Rev. Thomas J. Reese, editor of the national Jesuit magazine America, was particularly critical of keeping the review boards' work confidential. "If you are trying to restore credibility, you have to be open and transparent."

Still, Reese said, the revisions do "have a clearer procedure for determining who is innocent and who is guilty."

When the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops met in Dallas in June, the group adopted a policy that said a priest accused of sexual misconduct would be barred from any work connected to the church.

The Vatican balked, saying accused priests deserved due process protection. Under the new charter, the bishops

would decide whether to remove a priest while the preliminary investigation is conducted. If the bishop deems the allegation credible, the accused priest would be put on leave, then go before a clerical tribunal.

The Vatican must approve the new policy before it can become church law for the more than 190 Catholic dioceses across the nation. Rome will likely approve it, as the revisions resulted from a committee of four U.S. bishops and four Vatican officials.

"We are now much further along to a final conclusion to this terribly painful scandal," Chicago Cardinal Francis George said.

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