

**Open Letter from Jean-Marie Benjamin
To Tariq Aziz**

Former Vice Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq

In the light of the painful events that strike the Iraqi population every day, events of which you have no knowledge since in your Baghdad prison you are not permitted to read newspapers, to watch television or to listen to the radio, I am addressing this letter to you.

It is a paradox of Western democratic societies and Constitutional States, yet unfortunately this is the way it is: those who spoke the truth are imprisoned by those who have lied to the whole world, those who have deceived and discredited the Security Council, the United Nations inspectors and worldwide public opinion. You are imprisoned for having spoken the truth and having accepted all the Security Council's conditions. I remember what you told me on the day following your audience with Pope John Paul II, on 14 of February 2003: "*I repeated to the Holy Father that we no longer had any weapons of mass destruction. By 1993 we had already destroyed all of them.*" It is the people who have unilaterally and in violation of International Law bombed the Iraqi population and caused more than 110,000 deaths, those who have militarily occupied Iraq after having overthrown the government of a country that was one of the founding members of the UN, those who have tortured the detainees held in Iraqi prisons that accuse your government of having eliminated its opponents! It is the people who preach sermons to you on your chemical weapons (after having sold them to you) that have contaminated Iraq with depleted uranium by bombarding the country, from 1991 until today, with more than 1,700,000 missiles containing uranium 238! Thousands of children and adults are currently suffering from various kinds of poisoning, from multiple infections and from pathologies which doctors haven't even been able to identify, all these illnesses having been caused by the effects of radioactivity, by the chemical gases released by bombing and by the new weapons with which the American army is experimenting for the first time.

These people who have destroyed the country's infrastructure, leaving the inhabitants without water or electricity, who terrorise the population by entering homes – brutalising parents in front of their children –, who shoot without motive or reason at passing cars and kill men, women and children, these people who declare the war over and then bomb whole cities (such as Falluja among others), causing thousands of deaths and leaving a population that is already tragically affected by misery without food and water, these members of an occupying army who finish off wounded men writhing in agony on the ground with a round from a machine gun: these are the people, Mr Vice Prime Minister, the authors of an unspeakable barbarity, who repeat to the whole world all day long that they are bringing freedom and democracy to Iraq!

In effect, as regards freedom, the south of the country is in the hands of the most radical Shiites who have imposed Koranic law (the schools, law courts, social organisations, trade and local institutions are in the hands of the religious). Women have been ordered to cover their heads and Christian shops which sell alcohol have been forced to close or to cease selling alcoholic drinks. Many have been the object of bomb attacks. As one may see, indeed a formidable democratic change for the country.

Unfortunately, Mr Vice Prime Minister, The People's Republic of Iraq which the world knew as the most westernised of the Arab countries is in the process of disintegrating and dissolving into an ineffable chaos. From Iran, from Afghanistan, from Indonesia, from Malaysia and from other countries, Shiites are hastening to Iraq. Islamic extremists have taken over entire regions. The Resistance (that which had been organised before the American invasion) continues to resist; it has indeed expanded and in recent months the division between Shiites has become much more marked (the supporters of Moktada al Sadr and of various other Islamicist organisations have rallied to the rebellion of the Sunni camp). The Kurds of Kurdistan are seeking more autonomy and ever more independence, while the Turks are becoming more and more nervous. In a word, the "liberation" of Iraq is offering a piteous picture to the world.

What is amazing in this tragic story is that the governments in London and Washington are striving to justify the attack on and occupation of Iraq as a response to terrorism! They have (voluntarily) chosen the wrong country: the American Commission of Inquiry into 11 September 2001, the report to the American Senate, as well as most of the secret services and diplomatic chancelleries of the world, have confirmed that Saddam Hussein's Iraq had no link to Al-Qaeda nor any connection with the September 11 attacks on the United States. Mr George W. Bush has himself admitted this in front of the television cameras. You told me, in October 2001, that Osama bin Laden pointed to Saddam Hussein, crying: "*Baghdad, that republic of non-believers and infidels*", and that your government and the Baath party had never tolerated Islamic extremists on Iraqi soil (in no way surprising for a populist party). Today these people are saying thank you for having had Iraq given into their hands.

Nevertheless, the pretext of links between Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's organisation, and Iraq has allowed President Bush to include the Iraq campaign in the "war against terrorism". The CIA itself did not believe in such a link, but 44% of Americans consider that some or most of the hijackers of 11 September 2001 were Iraqi; and 45% state that Saddam Hussein was personally implicated in these attacks. These polls confirm that, even in a society called "open", the manipulation relayed by the major media can totally falsify the debate and drain democracy of its meaning and credibility.

I shall give you another example of this manipulation of information by certain media (it would be more accurate to say by certain journalists). When I took part in a television programme in Italy called "Porta a porta", on 14 September 2001, broadcast by the Italian channel RAIUNO and hosted by the journalist Mr Bruno Vespa, I was subjected to an act of veritable verbal aggression by this gentleman. Without having consulted me before the transmission, when the programme was on the air, Mr Bruno Vespa asked me what were the names of those responsible for the attack on the United States of 11 September, who they were and where they were! Such questions were not only paradoxical and rude, but were also surprising from a journalist from whom one might have expected more professionalism. As if Father Benjamin had been informed of this hostile project and had under his arm a list of the names of those responsible for the attack! The journalist's question was so amazing that the other people taking part in the programme froze. Did this journalist's questions and the arrogance with which he put them to me give the impression or imply that I knew all about it and had allowed a monstrous crime to be committed? Why such aggressiveness towards me? The matter is simple. Bruno

Vespa knew of my activities to denounce the effects of depleted uranium in Iraq as well as the effects of the embargo on the population, and he knew of my efforts to denounce the lies that he himself was disseminating in his television broadcasts on Iraq in order to influence Italian public opinion and manipulate consciousness. This is why, by making people believe that I knew those responsible for the attacks of 11 September, because I was concerned with Iraq, he indirectly led them to think and believe that there might be some links between this country and the people who had organised the tragic happening. A true cloning of George W. Bush's thinking. I could have sued him for defamation, slander and false accusation. I would easily have won my case. I did not do so, not out of Christian charity towards a journalist who is factitious, seditious and subordinated to the ruling power, but out of consideration for several journalists and employees of Italian television. Before the famous broadcast of 14 September 2001, an editorial secretary on this Rai programme came to me and sympathetically told me in confidence: *"Be careful, Father Benjamin, during the course of the day Bruno Vespa has had several telephone conversations with important political figures. They are laying a trap for you when the programme goes out, we'll be broadcasting live."*

You will remember, this was the programme in which you were due to take part on the day of your arrival in Rome, on 12 February 2003, but which was cancelled at the last minute "on the Direction's orders", as I was told. You were not permitted to set foot in a State Television studio in Italy. Let me remind you that the party currently in power in Italy calls itself "Casa delle Libertà".

Fearful consequences

In your prison in Baghdad you are unaware of what has been happening in your country since the American occupation of it. The results are dismaying. Mr George W. Bush's preventive war (with its tens of thousands of deaths) has proved to be a sinister farce. He maintained before the entire world that Iraq was a threat to America, even though you were not even in a position to launch a single aeroplane to defend yourselves. The war against Iraq has had as its main effect the fostering, reinforcing, spreading and development of international terrorism. In terms of the struggle against terrorism, this is somewhat amazing. As far as democratisation is concerned, the country is on the brink of civil war, more than 70,000 Christians have left Iraq since the American occupation (and the Iraqis won't be having a Christian Prime Minister tomorrow!). These same Christians have practically disappeared from the new Constitution (supervised by an American Commission). As for peace in the region, there is a real geopolitical stagnation: Iran continues its nuclear research, in Lebanon Hezbollah (with a Shiite majority) can continue to count on the support not only of Iran but now also of Shiite Iraq, while the Kurds of the PKK in Turkey are beginning to be seriously restless. In the entire Middle East Al-Qaeda is stronger than ever, Jordan is getting more and more embroiled every day and the situation is becoming explosive. Saudi Arabia is having more and more difficulty concealing what is happening in the country and controlling a significant fraction of its population who are radical and extremist. In a large number of European countries, volunteers of English, French, Italian, German and other nationality – most of them Christians – have rallied to the cause of Islamic extremists and to their organisations, which now, overall, cover a worldwide network operating in more than 70 nations, while the populations of the Arab countries are becoming more and more exasperated by the

American hegemony. It is not either Father Benjamin or Michael Moore who says these things: it is political science experts.

Justifying the attack on and military occupation of a United Nations member-country before the whole world is a fairly complicated matter. Last year, in March 2004, Mr George W. Bush's former Secretary of the Treasury wrote that even before 11 September 2001 the Bush administration was obsessed with Iraq. In the same week, the former director of the anti-terrorist struggle declared on oath before a Commission of Inquiry that, only a few hours after the attack on the World Trade Center, the President asked him to find links between the suicide bombers and the regime of Saddam Hussein. Weapons of mass destruction didn't work, exporting democracy proved to be a fiasco, expatriating liberty was demagogic, overthrowing a dictator not very credible (after all, in the last fifty years the CIA has overthrown goodness knows how many governments throughout the world, often in order to place dictators in power), but, thank God, there was God.

Before he attacks your country, during the attack and after it, in all the American President's speeches there is God. The God who inspires him, the God who gives him strength, the God who protects America, and, hold on, the God who has revealed to him his mission: to bring Peace to the world. However, when George W. Bush was continuing to bomb Iraq while reading the Bible every morning, Pope John Paul II declared, on the first Sunday of Lent: "*In the heart of man resound both the voice of God and, more insidiously, that of the Evil One*". In October 2004, the American President responded in a speech delivered at Nashville, Tennessee, a State in the deep South, affirming that America had received "*the sacred mission to bring freedom to the world*". It is not the fact that George Bush refers to God that bothers us, it is the fact that he does so while ignoring the first rule of the Gospels which is charity, and that he makes warlike speeches of unbelievable arrogance, characterising nations as belonging to the "axis of evil" which offends the people of these countries, humiliating and outraging them to no purpose. This caricature vision of good and evil is crude in style and primitive in form. What public opinion reproaches Bush with is the way he justifies his wars by motives that are apparently noble and generous, presenting them as humanitarian, civilising and democratic, while in reality, as his actions show, they are wars that serve a global hegemony and have nothing to do with the freedom of the children of God. What shocks world public opinion is the fact that Mr George W. Bush declares that the main purpose of his foreign policy is to destroy tyranny throughout the world, whereas in reality he terrorises entire populations and massacres them with a terrifying arsenal of destruction and death. I was in Baghdad during the Anglo-American bombings of December 1998 and I can bear witness to the impressive dignity of the population; nevertheless this dignity couldn't hide the terror in their eyes. Terrorising populations by destroying them with bombs and then proceeding to tell them that you have come to free them from tyranny is morally repugnant. Specially when you say you have a divine mission. It is an offence to God himself to declare that you are an "Apostle of Liberty, of Peace and of Democracy" to liberate peoples, when all these fine phrases have been formulated only to legitimise in the eyes of the world the murder of hundreds of thousands of women, men and children, in order to appropriate a nation's oil and to position yourself strategically in the region. Personally, I find it sickening.

As we see, Bush's planetary lies do not cohabit very well with the ethics of the Gospels. There is, however, one consolation: the difference between God and George W. Bush is that God doesn't think that he is Bush.

The Empire of Lies

Do you remember George W. Bush's statement on 7 October 2002? Here it is: "*Iraq has attempted to purchase tubes of highly concentrated aluminium and other technologies necessary for a gas centrifuge to enrich uranium*". This is one of the numerous pieces of false information put out by the "Empire of Lies" in order to deceive public opinion. President Bush explained, in his State of the Union speech on 28 January 2003, that Iraq had attempted to purchase 500 tonnes of uranium oxide from Niger, which could be used in the manufacture of an atomic weapon. The Secretary of State, Colin Powell, passed these documents to the United Nations to shore up these accusations and to convince the Security Council to adopt Resolution 1441 for the complete disarmament of Iraq (which would make the American attack a lot easier).

On 7 March, the edifice of deceit collapsed. The Director General of the International Agency for Atomic Energy, Mohamed El Baradei, announced that the dossiers received contained crude forgeries, and the UN inspectors for the disarming of Iraq (Mr Hans Blix and his colleagues) declared two months later that these documents were fakes. The British secret services, who had been engaged since 1997 on a disinformation campaign on Iraq, were behind these fake documents (and not only the British services). Iraq had never bought uranium from Niger or sought to acquire it. What did one lie more or less matter! It did not discourage the American Administration from pursuing its bellicose plans. The American media barely mentioned these refutations and on the eve of the conflict more than 40% of Americans remained convinced that Baghdad possessed nuclear weapons. Manipulating consciousness is not an art, it is a science, which is even taught at certain universities in the United States.

The Niger uranium was a little bit like the oil allocations. Hundreds of persons have been accused of having received oil from Saddam Hussein, in recompense, it is said, for having denounced the effects of the embargo on the population and for having taken a position opposed to the attack on and invasion of Iraq. The technique is always the same, though this time it had a much more subtle variation: inserting the names of people who had never received the smallest barrel of oil into a list (hand-written in Arabic on a scrap of paper) containing the names of companies or individuals who had in actual fact received oil allocations. This is a much more skilful and credible way. It was the first phase. The second phase was to make the world believe that those who received allocations went to collect the oil with tanker lorries in order to sell it to companies and pocket the whole income from it. You can see the picture! It is easy for anyone who takes the trouble to contact the "Sanctions Office" at the UN to find out that all the oil allocations were entirely paid for to Iraq by companies which bought the oil, paid for down to the very last drop. The third phase has been to make people believe that the oil allocations, made to brokers, traders, intermediaries, individuals or directly to oil companies, were illegal, while on the contrary they were all perfectly legal, since, according to the "Oil for Food" agreements ratified between Iraq and the Security Council, your country had the full right to choose to whom it would sell or allocate its own oil. Besides, the oil could not

be loaded on to an oil tanker without a green light from the Sanctions Office at the UN and without payment being made by the company to the Iraqi account at the BNP controlled by the UN. Moreover, the commission to the broker, trader or intermediary was paid by the petroleum company that bought the oil, not by Iraq. This is the practice, even today, on the international petroleum market and in all stockmarkets. Iraq has never paid any commission to anyone.

I have recently received direct proof of this. In January 2005, in Geneva, I met at my own request two inspectors from the UN's Independent Commission of Enquiry (two Americans). I had, to begin with, the opportunity to confirm and prove to them, supported by documents, that I had never accepted anything from Iraq, neither money nor oil, and that during the past seven years I had financed the making of my films on Iraq, my work towards the publication of my books, my journeys and all my activities entirely from my own savings resulting from forty years of professional work and with the help of my family and friends. I then asked the two inspectors whether the allocation of oil by Saddam Hussein's government was illegal and contrary to the sanctions imposed by the UN, and received a clear and straightforward answer: "*No, the allocations were not illegal, Iraq could sell its oil to whomever it wished*". I then asked why there was all this fuss about it. They replied: "*Washington is making a moral question of it*". It is true that where morals and truth are concerned, the Administration in Washington has always distinguished itself particularly.

I am, as you know, a former functionary of the United Nations. I still have quite a few friends in the Organisation. During the past two years I have learned some surprising things (the adjective is a mild one). The things that have happened as regards Iraq within the "whatsit" (as General de Gaulle called it) are unimaginable. At the UNCC (the commission for the reimbursement of war debts imposed on Iraq), one of the biggest scandals in the UN occurred without any UN member-country ever demanding a commission or exercising the slightest control or protesting at the violations of several treaties and conventions. The United States are certainly not about to do so. They would be the first to be found guilty. They prefer to concern themselves with Saddam's "oil allocations", in order to stifle their own true scandals. Also, what took place in the corridors of the Security Council before the vote on Resolution 1441 was just as outrageous. In reality, it was outrageous only to those who haven't the slightest idea just how far Washington will go to arrive at its ends; to everyone else it was not so much outrageous as pathological.

As regards the "Oil for Food" question, what former colleagues of mine at the UN reported to me about certain procedures, "instructions" discreetly given to various functionaries, pressures and manipulations on the "sources" of the information has something alarming about it. Moreover, several American companies which were awarded "broad" contracts with Iraq during the embargo have not been included in the list of companies under investigation.

In the forty square metres within which you have been confined for two and a half years, you cannot know the things that have happened. Allow me to tell you about some of them.

The Western press has repeated very widely the information that 270 figures opposed to the war against Iraq have supposedly been remunerated by Saddam Hussein. But many journalists have not bothered to verify the truth of this

information, or even its likelihood. They could have discovered that the Iraqi newspaper which published this accusation, Dar Al-Mada, was created with funds supplied by George Soros, aide to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an offshoot of the CIA, and with advice from the former boss of the "Voice of America" who enjoyed the support of the provisional governor of Iraq, Mr Paul Bremer himself. The daily paper Dar Al-Mada was founded in Baghdad in November 2003 by the president of the "Movement for Peace", Mr Fakhri Karim. As you know, he was in charge of propaganda for the Communist Party of Iraq. When he changed his gun to the other shoulder, he left Iraq for exile abroad. During the first Gulf War, in 1991, his party was contacted by the Saudi secret services who wished to support all forms of opposition to the Rais. Mr Fakhri Karim headed the delegation received at Riyadh. On his return to Damascus, he announced to his comrades that he had refused the monarchy's money but nevertheless called on them to support the Coalition and to bomb his own country. However, the Saudi secret services were not slow to put in an appearance in anticipation of a more significant change of allegiance on this man's part. Considered to be a traitor, Fakhri Karim was expelled from his party. A few months later, suddenly rich, he started a publishing house and a newspaper, Dar Al-Mada, in Beirut. Within a few months he had established a media empire in Damascus, with television channels, publications, newspapers, the Al-Mada foundation, Arab cultural centres and festivals.

When Fakhri Karim returned to Baghdad in 2002 in the Coalition's baggage, he asked the Occupation Authority's help in forming the "Movement for Peace" which gathered together Iraqis who had returned from exile. This was the tank from which the "Coalition" recruited new collaborators according to its needs. Following the American occupation of Iraq, Mr Fakhri Karim's fortunes suddenly improved ten-fold and he bought various premises, he imported goods, opened a daily paper and started a satellite television channel. To do this, he profited from the encouragement of the philanthropist George Soros, who offered him rotary presses, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) – the CIA's public shopfront – which recruited and trained the journalists who were to work for Mr Fakhri Karim's media operations. The governor L. Paul Bremer in person made sure that he lacked for nothing, neither paper nor electricity, while the former boss of the Voice of America (official organ of the State Department) went to Baghdad to offer him various pieces of advice. Dar Al-Mada is thus an "independent" daily newspaper, independent of the Iraqis at any rate, if not of the occupation forces. In such conditions, it is hard to understand how an individual stripped of all credibility can brainwash the Western press by spreading incoherent allegations.

The tissue of fabrication and brainwashing is only partly known. The initial documents concerning the famous "oil allocations" appear to have been fabricated in the United Kingdom by an office editing a confidential financial letter. They combined in one same list the traders authorised by the "Oil for Food" agreement, and hence legitimately remunerated for their services under the control of the Sanctions Committee of the UN, and the groups or individuals to be defamed. Some names were randomly added in order to mask the rationale behind the choice of targets. At any rate, what was essential was to discredit, either directly or indirectly, all those who were opposed to the war. This list was passed by a "public relations office" to Dar Al-Mada, which understood that it was expected to publish it without verification. Following this, it was repeated on an Arab website, Elaph.com, directed by an individual known to have been close to the King of Morocco, Hassan II. The list was then translated into various languages and disseminated by the Middle East Media

Research Institute (MEMRI), a "press agency" created by officers of Tsahal. One of the reasons for the success of this operation was the choice of specific targets. Thus, in order to attack Jacques Chirac, the finger was pointed at his friends Patrick Maugein, Charles Pasqua and Gilles Munier, in Italy at the Hon. Roberto Formigoni and Father Benjamin, and at hundreds of other figures throughout the world. All of them were for various reasons making the Administration in Washington uncomfortable. No convincing indication (documents concerning these "allocations", acquisitions by the petroleum companies or other) was presented to support the accusations made by Dar Al-Mada, whose editors protected themselves behind the "confidentiality of sources of information". In 46 countries, the individuals and organisations called into question published their denials.

Why this obscene orgy of deceit? To discredit and defame those who worked and expended their energies and their money to help the Iraqi people and to speak the truth about what was happening in Iraq. To achieve this end, anything went: inventing and giving out false information, fabricating forged documents, making insinuations and manipulating information and awareness. They knew that the wider public has no means of verifying the background and the truth of sources of information.

These oil allocations are rather like the weapons of mass destruction: they are much spoken of but no one ever sees them!

The great mystification

You will remember the project which I set in motion in 2002 regarding the setting up of a team of experts for a scientific field study in the south of Iraq, which would have made it possible to establish proof of the radioactive contamination caused to the population and the environment by the depleted uranium weapons that the Anglo-American forces used during the Gulf War and in other bombings of Iraq, particularly those that took place in December 1998. I had gathered together several expert nuclear scientists from several European countries, all of whom were ready to travel to Iraq in order to collaborate with your own experts, especially those whose job was to monitor the contaminated zones. I had myself made several trips to Iraq in order to co-ordinate the arrival and activities of this independent Commission. In November, the worsening of the situation and the international tension fostered by Washington, as well as the sending of the UN inspectors, made it impossible for these European experts to set out.

After one and a half years of research into the effects of depleted uranium weapons, I published in Switzerland a book on this subject entitled "Iraq: The Apocalypse". At that time the world was completely uninterested in what was happening in Iraq. People did not believe in the reality of depleted uranium weapons. Nor did they even believe in the effects of the embargo on the population, with 5,000 children dying each month (UN-UNICEF reports): there was a total indifference. Those who tried to do something, to say something, to publish something, were accused of being "pro-Saddam" or "anti-American". This was an easy short-cut, worthy of the mediocre mentalities that washed their hands of the blood shed by the constant bombardments and by the embargo, and from the height of their contempt declared, "it is the fault of the regime in Baghdad, which uses its

money to manufacture weapons of mass destruction instead of using it to help its people".

In June 1999, I drew up a report entitled "*Iraq-Kosovo: the effects of depleted uranium weapons on the population and the environment*". I had 700 copies of this report printed and with my assistant delivered a copy to the post-boxes of all Italian Members of Parliament at the Chamber of Deputies in Rome. On 1 July 1999 I was called on to make a deposition before the Commission on Foreign Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies. The session lasted one hour and twenty minutes. I handed an important dossier on the question to the Members of Parliament. On 16 November of the same year, the Commission on Foreign Affairs ratified a Resolution which urged the Italian Government to set up an expert scientific commission to study the radioactive contamination in Kosovo and Iraq caused by the use of these weapons. At the time, the Italian Minister for Community Policies, Mr Gianni Mattioli, was ready to leave for Iraq. We had worked for several months to prepare for this visit under the greatest secrecy. But elections were about to be held in Italy and, with the change of government, the Minister as well as the commission of experts were obliged to cancel their departure for Iraq.

However, I am carefully keeping the dossiers entrusted to me by your experts. The day will come when the effects of this contamination, a true genocide, will lead the government in office, whatever it may be, to seek the intervention of international organisations and experts in order to carry out a serious study of the situation.

Mr Vice Prime Minister, I have no need to speak to you of the activities of the team of European lawyers for your defence, since your lawyer in Baghdad, Mr Badie Arief Izzat, has at last been permitted to meet you and has given you this information in person.

I should nevertheless like to admit that when you were in power in Baghdad everyone wanted to see you and to meet you. From all over the world. Politicians, figures from the worlds of science, of culture, of the arts and of the media, leaders of political parties, of associations and others. Since your arrest, many of them have not spoken a word to defend you, but there remain many others who are ready to do so. The witnesses for your defence will not only be lawyers, but also high-ranking political figures, even several Ministers currently in power, ambassadors, Nobel prize winners, artists, doctors, men of religion, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and of other faiths, as well as writers and journalists.

While on the subject of journalists, do you remember our meeting in Baghdad in January 2003, when I went to tell you about your audience with Pope John Paul II? I had expressed to you the astonishment I felt when I went to the Iraqi Embassy in Rome for my visa and asked the Consul why Italian journalists who wished to go to Baghdad were not given visas. I still have thirty or so faxes from journalists, asking me whether I could find out why they couldn't obtain visas. When I put this question to the Consul, he replied, "*Father, I am waiting for instructions from Baghdad. I cannot issue a visa without the authorisation of my Government*". I spoke to you of this problem and even added that it was important to let Italian journalists visit Iraq, firstly so that they could carry out their work, secondly because it was of prime importance to inform Italian public opinion, and finally in order to allow you to reply to the accusations Washington was making against you. You were perplexed for a

moment, then replied that you would request your Embassy in Rome to send all visa applications directly to your Principal Private Secretary. From that day on, all visas for Italian journalists arrived (from your office). Subsequently, I learned and understood what was happening in Baghdad as regards visas. I attempted to tell you of it, but was no longer able to do so as bombs were already falling on Baghdad.

Then the American occupation took place, and a journalist on a major Italian daily newspaper published an article (at the end of 2003) in which he wrote that it was Father Benjamin who decided in Baghdad which journalist should receive a visa and which should not. This was the gratitude of a journalist whom I had helped extensively and provided with information during his stay in Baghdad. It is true that this particular journalist had always obtained his visa very easily. It would be interesting to know why.

If this had been the only seditious information published on Iraq, one would thank Heaven. Unfortunately, the lies that have been circulated since 1991 on your country, your government and the Iraqi people are monstrous. It has probably been one of the greatest and most hypocritical mystifications of History. For these traffickers in iniquity, their favourite weapons are not bombs but rather denigration and defamation. All those who have worked honestly to defend the Iraqi people and to speak the truth, at risk of their own lives, are now personally experiencing unjust accusations, unfounded briefs for the prosecution, factitious imputations, perfidious scandalmongering and trivial slanders. What will your trial be like, if trial there be, managed by this raving mystification machine?

St Thomas Aquinas said: "*Denigration is the passion of inadequacy*". God knows how much these people, in this affair, reveal the level of their own inadequacy.

Yours sincerely,

Jean-Marie Benjamin
Rome, 21 September 2005