

Saddam's execution decried by WCC, Rome. Punishing "a crime with another crime": Punishing "a crime with another crime"

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The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, a body that opposes the death penalty, asked God to grant Iraq “the mercy, justice and compassion that it has long been denied” and “an end to the fear and death that marked Saddam Hussein’s rule.”

After the execution December 30 of the former Iraqi dictator, WCC leader Samuel Kobia said from Geneva that while leaders must be held accountable for crimes they commit, “each taking of a person’s life is a part of a larger tragedy, and nowhere is this more apparent than in a land of daily killings.”

The toll of U.S. soldiers’ lives reached 3,000 by the end of 2006, and untold numbers of Iraqis have died in the conflict.

Before the execution, Cardinal Renato Martino, the top Vatican cleric dealing with justice issues, said Saddam’s execution would punish “a crime with another crime.”

After a long, tumultuous trial, Saddam was convicted for the killing of 148 people in Dujail, Iraq, in 1982. On December 28 the court ordered Saddam to be hanged within 30 days, but he was executed by Iraq shortly after he was released by U.S. authorities.

Saddam struck a pious tone in a letter posted on a Web site under his name. “Here, I offer my soul to God as a sacrifice,” Saddam wrote. He also called on Iraqis “not to hate the peoples of the other countries that attacked us and differentiate between the decision-makers and people.”

After Saddam was hanged, another Vatican spokesperson called the execution “tragic” and said it could lead to an escalation of the fighting in Iraq. “The killing of the guilty is not the way to reconstruct justice and reconcile society,” said Federico Lombardi in a statement. -*Ecumenical News International, Religion News Service*