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Dear Ambassador,

Next Wednesday, US Secretary of State Colin Powell will address the Security Council in an effort to persuade you to support a military strike in Iraq. He will no doubt be encouraged by the recent letter signed by the leaders of eight European countries, calling on Europe to support the United States and ensure that the Security Council "face[s] up to its responsibilities". Indeed, these countries claim to fundamentally value the Rule of Law, a value which they believe is shared by the United States.

Yet some of these countries openly state they are prepared to participate in a US-led war against Iraq, even without the express approval of the Security Council. Such an act would be illegal, in direct contravention of the UN charter. Support from the Security Council will therefore be sought at all costs, in order to avoid the public condemnation which will surely follow from an unsanctioned war.

But if the Security Council bows to this demand, it will in itself be in contravention of established international law. Such an act would also lower existing well established barriers to war. A pre-emptive war on Iraq cannot be considered an act of self-defence from imminent attack or a valid method for ensuring the collective security of the world community. And if war on Iraq can be justified in this way, why not apply the same principles to India and Pakistan? Or Israel and its neighbours? Next year will you be asked to support a US-led war against North Korea or Iran? We therefore call on you, as a matter of the gravest urgency, to oppose any such resolution.

Greenpeace is opposed to war in Iraq because it would have devastating human and environmental consequences. According to military and health experts a conventional war could kill over 200,000 people, mainly civilians, and a further quarter of a million could die from famine and disease¹. If war escalates to involve chemical or nuclear the death toll could run into millions. Clearly Iraq has an obligation to comply with the internationally agreed framework for elimination of weapons of mass destruction as do all States. However to use pre-emptive force to ensure compliance, would undermine the rule of law and upset the existing framework for disarming all States who possess these weapons.

The US and its allies argue that the Security Council must face up to its responsibilities. But by this they mean that the Security Council should cave in to the threat that it must either support the war, or be left behind by the one remaining Superpower and its friends and face the threat of irrelevance, trade retaliation, or financial starvation. Greenpeace also believes that the Security Council must face up to its responsibilities: first and foremost its responsibility to uphold the UN Charter on behalf of all humankind.

Sincerely yours,

Gerd Leipold
Executive Director
Greenpeace International
Attached: Greenpeace open letter to eight European leaders

¹ Collateral Damage: the health and environmental costs of war on Iraq. Medact, Novemembr 2002.