

# Australia exits Iraq, but church urges rebuilding: Spending for reconstruction should equal spending for war

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An Australian church leader has said his country should spend as much on reconstructing war-torn Iraq as it did on military operations there. Gregor Henderson, president of the Uniting Church in Australia, made his comments after his nation ended combat operations in Iraq.

“We are asking the government to spend as much on rebuilding, reconstructing and healing the desperately battered nation over the next five years as was spent on the military effort,” Henderson said.

Australia’s defense department said June 1 that the country’s 550 combat troops had begun returning home from their deployment in Iraq.

Henderson said his church originally opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq and Australia’s involvement in it. Now that soldiers are coming home, he said, Australia must stay and help rebuild the country.

Australia’s involvement in Iraq was the subject of strong political debate, with the recently elected Labor Party government promising to withdraw the troops that had been sent in 2003 by former prime minister John Howard as a support to Australia’s alliance with the U.S. -*Ecumenical News International*