

## **Freezes aid to some nations: U.S. law assailed as risk to terror fight**

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NY Newsday

December 10, 2004

MEXICO CITY -- Global efforts to combat terrorism and drug trafficking will be curtailed under a new U.S. law that suspends foreign aid to nations that won't back Washington's stance on an international court, legal and human rights groups said yesterday.

Under a provision in a sweeping spending law signed Wednesday by President George W. Bush, Washington will freeze aid to nations that don't sign pacts with Washington exempting U.S. nationals from prosecution before the International Criminal Court in the Netherlands.

Between eight and 50 nations will be disqualified from receiving money under the U.S. government's Economic Support Fund, which helps U.S. allies promote democracy and combat terrorism, drug trafficking and internal conflicts.

Court supporters slammed the new measure as a bullying tactic that would curtail programs that help Washington's interests while alienating valuable allies. Human Rights Watch also called U.S. opposition to the court hypocritical in light of reported U.S. abuse of detainees in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay.

"This latest sanction shows that the president would rather allow drug trafficking and terrorism than support the prosecution of war crimes and atrocities," said Brian Thompson of Citizens for Global Solutions in Washington.

The International Criminal Court, which opened two years ago and boasts 100 member nations, is the first permanent world tribunal to judge genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Bush opposes the court on grounds that U.S. citizens could be subjected to politically motivated charges. Supporters including the European Union counter that the tribunal has numerous safeguards against frivolous prosecution.

Officials from Peru and Trinidad and Tobago, two countries targeted for aid freezes, said their governments would continue refusing to sign agreements shielding U.S. nationals from the court but declined to comment immediately on the cuts.

The measure would withhold \$250 million for economic and social development in Jordan, but Bush can waive the freeze for that key U.S. ally.

Ecuador, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru and Venezuela stand to lose \$32.5 million for promoting democracy and free trade, and fighting drug trafficking and corruption. Caribbean nations could lose all or some of \$9 million for fighting the flow of illegal drugs and undocumented immigrants - including potential terrorists - to the United States.

Legal experts fear Ireland could lose \$12 million for a visa program and Northern Ireland peace initiatives.

