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### Media Availability

#### EMPTY CHAIRS AT THE HOLIDAY TABLES OF MILITARY FAMILIES

December 21, 2006 – Military Families Speak Out (MFSO), a national organization of over 3,100 families opposed to the war in Iraq who have relatives or loved ones in the military, has members across the country who are suffering this holiday season with pain, tears and fear rather than holiday cheer. As the Bush administration and Congress engage in a seemingly endless debate about how to make the war in Iraq “go better”, the number of U.S. troop deaths is approaching the next horrific milestone of 3,000. For military families who oppose the U.S. occupation of Iraq with loved ones currently serving in Iraq or soon to be deployed or redeployed, as well as those who have returned as hollow-eyed strangers suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and those with loved ones who will never again join them at any holiday table – this is not an abstract policy debate.

*“I miss Bob every day but the holidays are an especially sad time,”* said **Debbie Whitfield of Pittsburgh, PA whose son-in-law was killed in Iraq in 2005.** *“Last year as I decorated my house, so many things reminded me of Bob. I hang a stocking for everyone. I took his out and just held it, wondering what to do with it. I don’t want to confuse my granddaughter, I don’t want her to forget her Daddy, but I have to keep reinforcing that he can’t come home. Three Christmases ago Bob spent the holidays with us, two Christmases ago we sent him gifts to Iraq and last Christmas we laid a wreath on his grave. I hope it gets easier but right now it doesn’t feel like it. It is hard for all of us. We all miss him a lot. I pray that this is over soon so that families will be spared the grief that we live with every day.”*

*“We have only one child. This year he is in Iraq,”* said **Tim and Laura Kahlor of Temecula, CA, whose son is currently serving his second extended deployment to Iraq with the Army’s 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division.** *“We will not decorate, it’s just too sad, because all the memories of unpacking decorations are associated with our son. When Ryan was in Iraq in 2003, he told us to decorate like he was at home. This year he says it will be just another day in Iraq. He doesn’t even care about getting anything. We wanted to send him a small tree and a Santa hat, but he said he didn’t want anything this year. He just wants to go home safely to be with his wife. When you are surrounded by death and trying to survive why would anyone care about celebrating anything?”*

*“This is probably going to be one of the hardest holidays we will ever have to face, when it was supposed to be our most joyous. It is the baby’s first Christmas and my husband won’t be here to*

*share it,” said Haeley of the Hudson Valley area, NY whose husband is serving in Iraq with the National Guard, under a stop-loss order. “I sometimes want to throw away the ornament that I have for the tree proclaiming this year as our first Christmas together because I feel it’s a blatant lie. I want him home so he doesn’t have to miss out on anything more with his son. I shed a lot of tears for what I will miss and many more for what he is being forced to miss.”*

<b>WHO:</b>	Military families
<b>WHAT:</b>	Available for interview to share what the holiday season is like for military families who oppose the war in Iraq and have loved ones who are, have been or will be in harm’s way.
<b>WHERE:</b>	In states across the country and military bases around the world.
<b>WHEN:</b>	Holiday season 2006, beginning Thursday, December 21, 2006
<b>VISUALS:</b>	Families have pictures of loved ones who will not be at their holiday table

**For more information about *Military Families Speak Out*, please visit: <http://www.mfso.org>**