



A CALL TO END THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

**ADOPTED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES GOVERNING BOARD,
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INTRODUCTION

The War in Afghanistan – dubbed “Operation Enduring Freedom” at its onset – has been raging 10 since October 7, 2001. It is the longest war in U.S. history. The war began with significant popular support and in its initial stages was the lead story moved daily on U.S. media. Today, the story no longer tops the agenda of public interest. President Obama has set a deadline of July 2011 for the tactical end of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. The President has rejected calls from politicians, including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, to cancel the deadline and set an open-ended commitment to U.S. military involvement, but he is under continuing pressure to change his mind. It is the considered view of the National Council of Churches and its 36 member communions that the war must end as soon as possible – in July 2011 or before – and that the United States must hereinafter pursue a policy of just peace in all of its foreign engagements.

After nearly a decade of war in Afghanistan, it is clearly too late to correct the mistakes and miscalculations of the past. But we set before the churches a call to greater vigilance in the future. It is no mere cliché that history repeats itself, and there is little doubt that U.S. presidents and military leaders will again be tempted to choose war over diplomacy as a means of redressing grievances. When those circumstances arise, may the church, which too often has been silent in the face of war, be prepared to offer its Christian witness that war is always contrary to the will of God, and that there are alternatives to war that wise leaders must seek.

SUMMARY.

The War in Afghanistan, titled “Operation Enduring Freedom,” is one critical response of the United States to the al-Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001. The United States committed itself to a military operation with the expressed cognizance of further consideration given to

economic, political and diplomatic alternatives to end the war. The war continues at this time on several fronts due to a growing resurgent presence by Taliban forces in the country. The cost of the war to the United States as well as to Afghanistan is measured in the balance of human life and precious national resources. The effects on both resources have been staggering. From late 2001, and relative to the process of justifying an increased U.S. military presence in the Middle East, the Christian churches have expressed serious and informed reservations about how just the war has been and continues to be. *(See appendix)*

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America,

Cognizant of the valiant and courageous efforts of women and men of many nations who have served in Afghanistan as military personnel, diplomats and humanitarian workers, such as Church World Service and others, with the aim of bringing peace, justice and stability to Afghanistan, and

Concerned for the spiritual, physical and mental health of the veterans of this war, yet

Convicted by our common discernment that war and violence fall short of God's will for methods of rooting out tyranny and injustice, and

deeply grieved by the loss of life, homes and property in Afghanistan since U.S. and NATO forces launched "Operation Enduring Freedom," a war against the Taliban in October 2001, and

concerned that continued U.S. and coalition military operations against Afghan insurgents will solidify resistance and stimulate support for Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists, and

mindful of the millennia-long history of failed efforts by foreign powers to defeat entrenched and insular Afghan forces by military means,

and **deeply convicted** that we must reaffirm our witness to Christ's commandment to love our enemies,

Therefore calls upon the President of the United States to negotiate a withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan to be completed as soon as possible without further endangerment to the lives and welfare of U.S. and NATO troops, Afghan troops and Afghan civilians; and

urges the President of the United States to continue to monitor the human-rights situation in Afghanistan in the context of the United Nations declaration to use all available diplomatic means to protect the population from crimes against humanity, and to employ military means of protection only as a last resort; and

urges the President of the United States to continue, upon invitation of the Afghan government, the American support of the development of medical facilities, schools and other essential institutions in Afghanistan; and

calls upon the President of the United States to appoint a commission composed of high ranking government, military and religious leaders to discern and recommend policies through which the United States will pursue **the goals of a just peace**; and

calls upon the member communions of the National Council of Churches to engage in further study of the war in Afghanistan, the factors that led up to it, and the opportunities for non-military engagement with the people of Afghanistan to under gird a safe and stable way of life; and

calls upon the member communions of the National Council of Churches to articulate to one another and to government authorities the concept of a “Just Peace” as a proactive strategy for avoiding premature or unnecessary decisions to employ military means of solving conflicts.

Policy base:

Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly, December 6, 1963

Imperatives of Peace and the Responsibilities of Power, adopted by the General Board, February 21, 1968

Human Rights, The Fulfillment of Life in the Social Order, adopted by the General Board, November 17, 1995

Pillars of Peace for the 21st Century, A Policy Statement on the United Nations, adopted by the General Assembly, November 11, 1999

Related Resolutions:

Out of the Ashes and Tragedy of September 11, 2001, a statement adopted by the General Assembly, November 15, 2001

Resolution on the Threat to Civil and Religious Liberties in Post-9/11 America, adopted by the General Assembly, November 9, 2005

Resolution on the Responsibility to Protect, adopted by the Governing Board, September 24, 2007

APPENDIX

BACKGROUND:

Most Americans, including the estimated 45 million persons who worship in the 100,000 congregations related to the 36 member communions of the National Council of Churches, have vivid and painful memories of the circumstances that led to the war in Afghanistan. On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four commercial airliners and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. A fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. More than 3,000 persons died in the attacks. Although none of the 19 hijackers were Afghan nationals, Afghanistan was the al-Qaeda base and President George W. Bush quickly drew up plans to invade Afghanistan as a means of combating terrorism. “Operation Enduring Freedom,” the war in Afghanistan, commenced on October 7, 2001.

DEEP CONCERNS

While there is no doubt that Operation Enduring Freedom was supported by persons of faith, including many members of churches related to NCC member communions, including church leaders, have nonetheless expressed profound concerns about the war. Costs in lives and property continue to mount, as does the political instability that continues in Afghanistan despite – or perhaps because of – the U.S. and NATO presence there. Neither the initial motivation to go to war nor the more recent decisions to escalate military operations in Afghanistan are consistent with the criteria some churches support for entering into a “just war.” Indeed, the decision to go to war was made without a considered deliberation about peaceful alternatives, including forms of economic sanction and diplomatic pressure.

Costs. Apart from the billions of dollars the United States has spent on the War in Afghanistan since 2001ⁱⁱ, the cost in terms of lives has been staggering. Precise figures are difficult to confirm. A report (<http://icasualties.org/oef>), based largely on Department of Defense sources, indicates that more than 2,070 coalition members were killed between 2001 and 2010, with Americans accounting for at least 1,275 of those deaths. Another source claims to have “conservative” counts estimating the number of persons killed – Afghan troops and civilians, U.S. troops, Coalition troops, contractors and journalists – at more than 19,600.

Just War. When U.S. and British air forces began a bombing campaign, “Operation Enduring Freedom,” against Taliban forces in October 2001, polls indicated a large majority of Americans – including persons of Christian faith – supported the military effort as an appropriate retaliation for the terror attacks of September 11. Among the leaders of most NCC member communions, however, there was even then considerable doubt that the retaliation satisfied the generally accepted criteria for a “just war”, including

- *The damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain.*
 - *All other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective.*
 - *There must be serious prospects of success.*
 - *The use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be evaluating this condition.)*
- (http://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/just_war.htm)

When many of the communions that form the National Council of Churches met in 1948 to form the World Council of Churches, the world looked to the gathering for a comment on the recently concluded Second World War and the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Our comment was blunt: "War is contrary to the will of God."

Moreover, the churches said in 1948:

There is a settled Christian conviction that the use of force, however unavoidable it may be for the fulfillment of the distinctive tasks of the state, is in itself absolutely opposed to the commandment of love. It can only be used as the lesser of two evils in reliance on divine forgiveness. (Christian Responsibility in a World of Power, The Amsterdam Series, 1948, p. 207.)

As the world reeled with the implications of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, the churches prayerfully sought to apply their theological convictions to current realities. On November 15, 2001, in the midst of the Afghanistan invasion, a statement adopted by the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service in Oakland, Calif. expressed the sense of the churches that, instead of war, it would be wiser to address the political, economic and cultural injustices that give rise to unrest and terrorism:

It is time for us as an ecumenical community to make a renewed commitment to a ministry of peace with justice, and to make real in these days the call of Jesus, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44) In his Beatitudes, Jesus calls us, his followers, to be merciful if we are to receive mercy; he reminds us that the peacemakers are blessed and will be called children of God. And, he proclaims us "the light of the world"; our good works should be a beacon to others so they may give glory to God. (Matthew 5:1-4 16).

We lift up "Pillars of Peace for the 21st Century," a 1999 Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. We reaffirm and highlight the Statement's call to build a culture of peace with justice characterized by these convictions:

1. *"the transcending sovereignty and love of God for all creation and the expression of that love in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, whose mission was to reveal understanding about that divine presence, to proclaim a message of salvation and to bring justice and peace;*
2. *the unity of creation and the equality of all races and peoples;*
3. *the dignity and worth of each person as a child of God; and*

4. the church, the body of 130 believers, whose global mission of witness, peacemaking and reconciliation testifies to God's action in history."

Just Peace. Not all member communions of the National Council of Churches subscribe to or believe in a doctrine that regards war as ever justifiable – for example, the Historic Peace Churches and growing minorities within other Christian traditions. Indeed, the perspective that war can ever be just is disputed by many Christians in the U.S. and around the world.

The Historic Peace Churches believe that the life and teachings of Jesus Christ are a trustworthy ethical guide when faced with the issues of war and violence in our world. In Jesus' life and teachings, as communicated in the gospels and the New testament, it is clear that love for the enemy must be the norm – and this is not compatible with military action.

In fact, the World Council of Churches in its first Assembly in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, in 1948 provided a glimpse to where that worldwide ecumenical body has come in its thinking about an appropriate response of Christianity toward warfare and violence. The first Assembly's clear statement that "War is contrary to the will of God" presaged current work by the WCC that may well entirely replace the concept of "just war" with an understanding of "just peace." While the just war position only defines criteria under which the use of force is acceptable, a just peace perspective describes foundations for nonviolent conflict and the building of justice, reconciliation, and abundant life. The engagement of "just peace" is not merely a reaction to conflict. "Just peace" is proactive, requiring governments and other authorities to address in advance those conditions that may lead to future violence: poverty, hunger, economic injustice, climate change and many more.

One outcome of this historic and emerging stream of thought has been the initiation of the Decade to Overcome Violence (2000-2010). However, the events of this decade – specifically the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan -- led the World Council of Churches to wrestle anew with the ethics of war and violence, and the WCC is now drafting an ecumenical declaration on just peace – a major document that is expected to reflect a crucial shift in global Christian teaching on the issue of war.

For an increasing number of Christians, there are no gospel criteria that may adequately justify going to war. Instead, these Christians earnestly seek a just peace that is grounded in the God who loves all creation and all the peoples of the earth, and that seeks the help of the Holy Spirit to love the enemy and friend alike.

COMPLICATING FACTORS

While the church's message of justice and peace is firmly based on a common understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the incarnational love of God, it is nonetheless important to consider the implications of the gospel in a world where evil reigns. If the United States and NATO forces were to withdraw unconditionally from Afghanistan, what would be the effect? Most analysts express concern that the current government of President Hamid Karzai is too

Taliban and al Qaeda forces would soon regain control of the country. If President Karzai's government falls, one fear is the re-establishment of safe havens in Afghanistan for al-Qaeda and other terrorist factions whose goals are to strike at the vital interests of American and European societies. Perhaps an even more imminent and compelling scenario of a Taliban restoration is the bloodbath that might be inflicted on women and men who failed to observe fundamentalist religious law, and the abusive subjugation of women and girls. In these situations, what is the moral obligation of the United States, and what must be the counsel of the churches?

Responsibility to Protect. Atrocities on a civilian population inspired by religion are a frightening and unacceptable outcome, in Afghanistan or elsewhere. The National Council of Churches has endorsed the "Responsibility to Protect," a declaration adopted by the United Nation's General Assembly in 2005 that "each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity" and that the international community, through the UN, should "take collective action" to prevent these crimes "should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations" from these crimes.

The NCC resolution on the Responsibility to Protect, adopted September 24, 2007, recognizes "that war is always a failure to find peaceful resolution to conflict" and encourages the U.S. government and the international community "always to first seek non-violent means of intervention, and exhaust all opportunities for peaceful resolution, as a means of protecting those threatened by genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity."

A STRATEGY OF PEACE

Committed to our call to be Christ's witnesses for peace and love in an unredeemed world, we believe it is imperative to raise the question as to whether military intervention by powerful outside forces is the most effective way of compelling governments to live within the acceptable guidelines of civilized nations. In addition, armed conflict has increasingly involved non-state actors, such as insurgencies and terrorist groups, the actions of which are not bound by these guidelines, thus creating an additional set of moral and ethical issues and responses. Given the limitations of military solutions to threats in Afghanistan and elsewhere, the member communions of the National Council of Churches welcome and endorse peaceful efforts already undertaken by the United States and its allies to strengthen the infrastructure and support the development of well-trained law enforcement specialists, health-providers and educators in Afghanistan. Bombs and guns can destroy lives and infrastructures, but that kind of devastation may be the most frightening nightmare of all. And bombs and guns can also sow hatred and resolve in the hearts of those we call our enemy – and one of the safest predictions we can make is those who hate us will remain in their native Afghanistan long after we are gone. In the long-run, we believe, peaceful partnerships and humanitarian aid will be far more effective in achieving our goals of eliminating extremist insurgents. A peaceful American partnership in Afghanistan will go a long way towards effectively refuting claims by insurgents and al Qaeda

combatants that we are an occupying power intent on destroying Afghan way of life. It is our faith that convicts us that arms and violence are not the way to assure security, but even the most pragmatic observers will conclude that clinics and schools are more powerful alternatives against extremism than guns and bombs.