

Behind the news: Visions for peace – Voices of Faith

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Providing church, ecumenical and interfaith information, resources, and analysis on issues of current global concern

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1. Background

In response to the threatening global situation in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States, Action by Churches Together (ACT), the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), have set up a short-term response mechanism to offer a selection of statements, useful information, thought-provoking reflections and worship resources which might aid churches in responding to the unfolding situation. This weekly bulletin contains summaries and references to selected resources that can be found through our web site at <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews>. There is additional information on the web site that may not necessarily be referenced in the bulletin.

Please feel free to share this bulletin widely by e-mail and in hard copy. We apologize if you are receiving duplicate copies of this bulletin due to the multiple distribution lists we are using. We appreciate feedback on what you find helpful and what other information you may need. Please contact us at: bulletins@wcc-coe.org.

2. Statements and actions of the global church and ecumenical family

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches is writing to leaders of the Muslim community highlighting the spiritual significance of the fact that the month of Ramadan and the Christian observance of the Advent period almost coincide this year. The message is intended as an expression of WCC's solidarity with the Muslim community in these trying times and of WCC's commitment to the spirit of dialogue and mutual trust which has developed over these last decades. Dr Konrad Raiser has also written to WCC member churches, informing them of this letter and encouraging them to seek the most appropriate ways in their own situations to engage during these coming weeks with Muslim partners in acts of spiritual fellowship and prayer for peace with justice. A press release on these letters will be issued on Friday, 16 November. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/01/42pre.html>

The Executive Council of CEVAA, meeting in Papeete, Tahiti from 25 October-1 November, issued a statement rejecting the violence of the September 11 attacks and stating that “peace imposed by war can only be ephemeral because it provokes sentiments of injustice”. The Executive Council calls on the churches and their members to create a world of dialogue,

justice and peace. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/behindthenews/us132.html>. For more information about CEVAA, see <http://www.cevaa.org>.

3. Responses from other faith communities

Edward Said's "The Clash of Ignorance" argues that "unedifying labels like Islam and the West mislead and confuse the mind which is trying to make sense of a disorderly reality that won't be pigeonholed or strapped down as easily as that". The world is more complex and ambiguous than labeling cultures as Western or Islamic. He concludes that "these are tense times, but it is better to think in terms of powerful and powerless communities, the secular politics of reason and ignorance and universal principles of justice and injustice than to wander off in search of vast abstractions that may give momentary satisfaction but little self-knowledge or informed analysis." Available in English and French at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/behindthenews/us127.html>.

4. Humanitarian concerns

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers appealed to states neighbouring Afghanistan to open their borders to those in need of temporary protection and assistance, noting that 135,000 Afghans have entered Afghanistan since the conflict began. Many of them are afraid to seek help because they fear being deported as "illegals". Lubbers stated that "the fight against terrorism is necessary. But there is also a concomitant international duty to help the Afghan people – both inside and outside – and to make good on the promises made to them at the beginning of this conflict that they are not the target of this war and will not be forgotten." For Mr Lubbers' comments and additional information on the Afghan emergency, see <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/afghan>

The US Committee for Refugees recently conducted a field visit to Pakistan and issued a comprehensive set of recommendations to meet the humanitarian needs of both Afghans inside Afghanistan and Afghan refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries. Among others, USCR recommends that the international community, including the United States, commit to covering all costs associated with responding to the needs of Afghan civilians who seek refuge in neighbouring countries until the Afghans are able to return home. USCR further recommends that international humanitarian agencies should resist the creation of so-called "safe havens" inside Afghanistan for displaced Afghans. See: http://www.refugees.org/news/press_releases/2001/afghan110601.cfm.

UNHCR is undertaking a real-time evaluation of the organization's response to the Afghanistan emergency. The findings of this evaluation have been published as Bulletin No. 1 - which is available on the UNHCR website at: <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home?page=research>. (Click on Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit at the bottom of the page.)

"The sky is too high and the ground is too hot", cries one woman who has been able to leave Kabul, and is now seeking refuge in Pakistan. This is the story of millions of people left homeless by years of drought, civil unrest and now a full-scale war on Afghanistan. **ACT Dateline** by Aloysius Milon Khan, Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) Bangladesh. http://act-intl.org/news/dt_nr_2001/dtafghan1401.html

For an update from the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) on Afghanistan, focussing on Western Afghanistan and insecurity in Badghis & Ghor, see: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for WFP Situation No. 22, 8 November 2001.) For the **WFP** Update with Weekly Wrap up, the Security situation and the Appeal Update: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for WFP Situation No. 23, 9 November 2001.) For the **WFP** Update focussing on Mazar-i-Sharif, trucks hit by shrapnel in North Afghanistan and the distribution update: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for WFP Situation No. 24, 12 November 2001.) For the **WFP** regular report on activities world wide: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for WFP Emergency Report No. 45, 9 November 2001).

For the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (**OCHA**) Report on Afghanistan, featuring population movements and deliveries and distribution of assistance, also visit: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for OCHA Situation Report No. 19, 8 November 2001.) For the OCHA report on deliveries in Northern Afghanistan and population movements in Southern Afghanistan: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for OCHA Situation Report No. 20, 12 November 2001.) For the UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network (**IRIN**) report on Afghans awaiting entry to Mahkaki refugee camp: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for IRIN report, 9 November 2001).

For the Central Asia (Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran and Pakistan) **IRIN** Weekly Round-up 31 covering the period 2 - 9 Nov. 2001: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for IRIN Round Up 31, 9 November 2001).

For the UNHCR Afghanistan Humanitarian Update on new refugee camps in Pakistan, statement from UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers, deportation of 350 Afghans, Swiss relief flight for Turkmenistan and transfer of first refugee families to new site in Pakistan and other UNHCR news: <http://www.reliefweb.int> then click on Afghanistan for UNHCR Updates No. 31 and 32, 8 and 11 November 2001).

For UNHCR briefing notes on Afghanistan by Ron Redmond, Media Relations: <http://www.reliefweb.int> then click on Afghanistan for UNHCR notes, 13 November 2001.

"Food deliveries inside Afghanistan increase but huge obstacles remain" - for this short report from Refugees International: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for RI report, 9 November 2001).

For the US Agency for International Development (**USAID**) fact sheet on the Central Asia Region - Complex emergency - Afghanistan, Pakistan, the region and on US government activities: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for USAID Fact Sheet # 23, 9 November 2001).

For some details on assistance provided by the Iranian Red Crescent Society to thousands of Afghans having reached Makaki camp: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for IFRC report, 11 November 2001..)

"Goal expects to be delivering substantial quantities of food deep inside Afghanistan before the weekend". For this short report, click on: <http://www.reliefweb.int> (then click on Afghanistan for Goal report, 12 November 2001).

The humanitarian challenge in Afghanistan - what can be done by the US and the international community is the challenge put forward by **Refugees International**: <http://www.reliefweb.int> then click on Afghanistan for RI report, 12 November 2001.

5. Contributions to the current debate

The Keston News Service has published “Afghanistan: What impact will fighting have on Uzbekistan?” which devotes particular attention to the impact on Uzbekistan of mercenaries from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan who are fighting with the Taliban. Available at: <http://www.keston.org>.

The Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University has set up a website which seeks to present alternative analytical reflections on the current situation. The website presently has over 20 analytical pieces and is available at: <http://www.emu.edu/ctp/bse-intro.html>.

The Japan in the World website has recently posted an article by Gavan McCormack entitled “Japan’s Afghan Expedition.” Available at: <http://www.iwanami.co.jp/jpworld/top.html>.

John Paul Lederach has written “Quo Vadis? Reframing Terror from the Perspective of Conflict Resolution.” In his effort to reframe the debate, Lederach suggests paradoxes such as “how can we pursue rigorous accountability for the atrocity committed and at the same time promote systemic prevention that stops this phenomenon from recycling into our children’s generation?” He argues that interdependence requires us to develop both short- and long-term goals. Among other recommendations, he proposes that the UN Security Council establish an ad hoc international criminal court on terrorism similar to those that have been set up for Rwanda and the Balkans. Available at: <http://www.nd.edu/~krocinst/sept11/ledquo.html>.

Vandana Shiva’s article “Globalisation and Talibanisation” argues that globalization is contributing to the Talibanization of the world. “Economic globalization is fuelling economic insecurity, eroding cultural diversity and identity, and assaulting political freedom of citizens.” Thus, “terrorism is born from the death of democracy and can only be responded to by giving the power back to people. This is why the anti-globalization movement is an anti-terrorist movement.” Available at: <http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20011030&fname=shiva&sid=1>.

Glen Stassen and Steven Brion-Meisels have written “Ending Terrorism means Promoting Justice” which suggests six principles based on successful non-violent strategies which can address the roots of terrorism. The principles include: address the roots not just the symptoms; recognize the role of all parties; take independent initiatives that reduce violence and promote justice; re-engage with international forces; use force only to apprehend and protect; increase the capacity of multicultural, civilian-based organizations; and foster inter-cultural understanding and reconciliation. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/analysis15.html>

Ken Sehested, executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship, has written “The Believing community strikes back: baptism as political mandate” in which he argues that while the Gospel proclamation must be made from an informed analysis, that is not the most

important concern for our congregations. “Rather, the most important remedial reminders we need involve the character and content of baptism. In the rush to armaments, to international policies of retaliation and domestic policies of repression, we need reminding of our baptismal vows to cruciform life: of dying and being buried with Christ prior to resurrection. And in ‘practicing resurrection’ (Wendell Berry), we will likely locate ourselves on the minority end of public opinion polls. Why? Because baptism introduces us to a different political mandate.” For this article, an earlier reflection by Ken Sehested on the events of 11 September (“In the Valley of the Shadow”) and other news of how the BPFNA is responding to this crisis, go to their website at: <http://www.bpfna.org>.

Ron Kraybill, associate professor of Conflict Studies at Eastern Mennonite University, has written “Destroying Terrorists weakens our Security” in which he argues that a military response to Osama bin Laden plays directly into the terrorists’ hands. Rather, he asks, “suppose we bombarded Afghans with food, medicine, seeds and traditional farming implements for a year or two while blockading all importation of weapons and related technology” and accompanied those actions with measures to build Afghan institutions? <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/analysis16.html>

Thirteen years ago, John Maresca, vice-president of Unocal, presented testimony to the US Congress in which he emphasized the importance of Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics generally for production and transport of natural gas. He provided substantial information about the gas reserves in the region and made the case that the most logical location for a pipeline is through Afghanistan. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/analysis17.html>

After several weeks of intensive bombings on Afghanistan, the goals and objectives of this massive military action are still not clearly defined. When will it all end? asks Derek Brown in *The Guardian*. In this article, the author presents a selection of official prognostics on its duration and outlines the increasingly vague public statements about the US-led response to the attacks on New York and Washington. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/waronterror/story/0,1361,589425,00.html>

In the global context of the current crisis, Mwaganu wa Kaggia, president of the Philadelphia-based Kenya Children's AIDS Project, makes an instructive comparison between the current price negotiation on anthrax medicine led by the Bush administration and what happened in South Africa, Brazil and in other countries from the South when these countries tried to ignore the patent laws in order to develop cheaper AIDS drugs for their populations. Mwaganu wa Kaggia questions the 'two standards' logic behind the current negotiations with pharmaceutical firms and reminds us the fact that the anthrax threat has provoked until now four deaths in USA whilst the HIV/AIDS pandemic takes the lives of 8,000 Africans every day. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/analysis18.html>

In a recent issue of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Murray Hiebert observes that American journalism is endangered, in times of war, by a kind of blind patriotism. The search for the truth cannot objectively prevail in US media when journalists use so frequently words such as "our" and "us" when mentioning the US government and America. Consequently, many US citizens are looking for alternative news and views in order to be fully informed about the latest developments of the war. http://www.feer.com/2001/0111_08/p020region.html

How are Pakistanis perceiving the war in Afghanistan ? What do they feel when, living under a military dictatorship, they see how CNN, Sky and BBC cover the events ? This new article of Robert Fisk reports a certain number of "disturbing arguments" that a Western journalist could hear today in the Middle East and in Pakistan.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/story.jsp?dir=1&story=103717&host=1&printable=1>

The French newspaper *Le Monde* has introduced a new book written by two specialists close to the US and French Intelligence services which reveals that the Bush administration maintained close ties with the Taliban until 11 September. Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquié, the authors of "Ben Laden, La Vérité interdite", affirm that the FBI was bridled in its counter-terrorism mission because of intensive negotiations held by the American diplomacy with the Taliban in order to assure the interests of American oil companies involved in Saudi Arabia and in Central Asia. The book details the financial networks of Bin Laden in Saudi Arabia and in other Gulf states, the diplomatic discussions organized in Berlin in 2001 with the Taliban, and various activities of the main intelligence services around the issues of oil economy and terrorism. In French at:

http://www.lemonde.fr/imprimer_article_ref/0,9187,3230--243578,00.html

In this article written from Islamabad for the *Asia Times*, Pepe Escobar highlights and denounces concepts of new forms of imperialism and colonialism which have emerged during this global crisis. These "defensive" forms of imperialism are more and more "defended" by strategists and opinion leaders from the West in order to control "failed" and "rogue states". The new imperialism scenario would be based on a Western "coercive apparatus" and legitimized by the United Nations, which would have to be in charge of "temporary protectorates". <http://www.atimes.com/c-asia/CK06Ag01.html>

In "An imperial nightmare," Seumas Milne reflects the temptation for Britain to recreate an imperial project. This project could be legitimized by the necessity to establish "international colonial" regimes on rogue states but also to protect big power interests in dictatorial countries like Saudi Arabia where "colonialism" would be "progressive and enlightened".

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/waronterror/story/0,1361,589660,00.html>

Human Rights Watch has expressed concern about European-wide security measures proposed in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks. Human Rights Watch's critique of two European Commission proposals and other security measures was released in anticipation of the mid-November Justice and Home Affairs meeting at which the proposals figure prominently in the agenda. The ministers aim to conclude the new security measures by December. The human rights group expressed particular concern over a broad definition of terrorism that threatens freedom of speech, assembly and association; the lack of fair trial guarantees in the proposal for a European arrest warrant; and threats to the international refugee protection system. They also recommended that EU member states commit to holding perpetrators of international crimes accountable in their countries, noting that the perpetrators can be tried in any country for crimes against humanity under the doctrine of universal jurisdiction. For the complete text, see

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/11/eusecurity-memo.htm>

6. Resources

Herm Weaver and John Paul Lederach have produced a CD for children and adults which includes a song and a story with an alternative twist on the response to 11 September. For more information or to order the CD (US\$6), see <http://www.dreamthelight.com>.

Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and the Mass Media (RAM) Project produces an electronic newsletter containing articles related to the media's coverage of refugee issues and the current situation. For example, the PressWise Trust has published the instructions issued to BBC staff about their conduct in handling war reports during the current conflict. (Available at: <http://www.ramproject.org.uk/bulletins/bulletin.php?story=6>). Their regular bulletin can be downloaded from <http://www.ramproject.org.uk/contents.php>.

7. Calls for action

Endorsed by the National Coalition for Peace and Justice, a Walk for Healing and Peace will be held from 25 November - 4 December. Led by Buddhist and Franciscan monks, and joined from time to time by various leaders of faith-based and peace-making communities, participants will walk from Washington to New York, with stops in Baltimore, Trenton, Philadelphia and Princeton. At each stop along the way, walkers and supporters will invite members of the public to join them for public events. For more information about the walk or the itinerary, contact dc2nywalk@yahoo.com. Concurrent with this walk will be national days of prayer and fasting coordinated by the National Network to End the War against Iraq. For more information about the network, see <http://www.endthewar.org>.

Media Workers against the War have relaunched the organization that sought to consolidate opposition to previous conflicts in which the UK has been involved. Full story at: <http://www.ramproject.org.uk/bulletins/bulletin.php?story=5>.

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees is organizing their ninth International Conference from 16-18 November in Stockholm, Sweden. The programme includes sessions on 'Asylum after September 11', 'Political Islam', and 'Solidarity with Afghan refugees.' For more information, contact ifir9conference@yahoo.co.uk or visit the website at <http://www.hambastegi.org>.

In an Action Alert, ACT member Church World Service urges churches to speak out to stop the bombing, so that humanitarian assistance can be delivered in safety. <http://navigation.helper.realnames.com/framer/1/262/default.asp?realname=Church+World+Service&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Echurchworldservice%2Eorg&frameid=1&providerid=262&uid=17422742>