

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

Table of Contents

- 1. Background to “Behind the News: Visions for Peace – Voices of Faith”**
- 2. Statements and actions of the global church and ecumenical family**
- 3. Responses from other faith communities**
- 4. Summaries of inter-governmental response**
- 5. Humanitarian concerns**
- 6. Contributions to the current debate**
- 7. Resources**
- 8. Calls for action**

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 than may not necessarily be referred to 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

a) Peter Storey, retired bishop of the Methodist Church in South Africa, wrote an open letter to Friends in the United States shortly after the 11 September attacks. The letter asks “how is it that we continue to be defrauded by the false security of military might?... When will we have the courage to identify all fundamentalism as the well from which hatred drinks?” www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us145.html

b) The presidents of the Federation of Italian Protestant Churches and the Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy signed a “Joint Declaration for Religious Dialogue” this month in which they declared that mutual understanding is the basis for living together, and which renewed their condemnation of all terrorist acts. The statement recognizes that dialogue is carried out step by step, and there may sometimes be errors, but that sincerity and love can break down the walls of prejudice. (Source: ICPRESS)

c) The Church of Scotland’s responses to the terrorist attacks in the United States of America on 11 September and to the bombing campaign that began in October in

Afghanistan is available at

<http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news/september11.htm>

The site includes a 1 November statement on the military campaign in Afghanistan issued by the Kirk's Church and Nation Committee. In calling for the bombing to stop, addressing the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and long-term, sustainable solutions to international terrorism, the statement concludes: "Answering violence with more violence rarely overcomes the complex international problems which blight humanity. We recall again that the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has consistently opposed the solving of international disputes by resort to violence. The killing of thousands is not to be answered by killing thousands more. We are in grave danger of devaluing our humanity by a course of action contrary to the teaching of Christ."

3. Responses from other faith communities

a) The World Conference on Religion for Peace convened a symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations. H.E. Mohammad Khatami, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, told a panel of US religious leaders that they must wrest the language of belief away from those "who concoct weapons out of religions". <http://www.wcrp.org>.

b) The first World Congress for the Preservation of Religious Diversity was held in New Delhi, 15-17 November. The Congress was convened as an opportunity for leaders of indigenous religious and cultural traditions to share views on preserving the richness of their cultural heritage and easing conflicts and tension among various religious groups. It resolved to form a Global Commission for the Protection of Religious Diversity. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us146.html>

4. Summaries of inter-governmental response

a) The United Nations General Assembly's Legal Committee approved a draft resolution on 21 November strongly condemning all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, wherever and by whomsoever committed. The adopted text also has a provision for the Assembly's Ad Hoc committee on terrorism to meet at the end of January to continue its work on a draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism. The committee came "tantalizingly close to completing a comprehensive convention"; disagreement on the last few remaining articles led to an agreement to postpone further discussions until January. Human Rights Watch has raised a number of concerns about the draft treaty, particularly its potential impact on refugee protection and freedom of expression. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=2230>. See also: <http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/11/terror1121.htm>

b) UN secretary-general Kofi Annan's message to the Fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention said that "in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks, the task of preventing the threat of biological weapons and implementing a key treaty banning such arms has taken on special importance". He also urged the meeting in Geneva, beginning on 19 November, to overcome any differences in an effort to fully implement the treaty. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=2201>.

c) At a recent symposium convened by the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, experts were virtually unanimous in agreeing that the legal framework to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear, biological and chemical weapons exists. Under UN

auspices, the international community has negotiated more than a dozen treaties and protocols. What remains to be done, as the experts explained, is to build a stronger commitment by all states to that framework.

http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/feature_terror_disarm.htm.

d) The International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors will meet beginning 29 November to consider proposals to strengthen nuclear security and safety in light of the September attacks. The agency convened an international symposium on nuclear verification and security of material in late October which considered measures to safeguard against nuclear terrorism. See: http://www.iaea.org/worldatom/Press/Focus/Nuclear_Terrorism/ (note that this website also includes a number of papers and articles on challenges of nuclear non-proliferation in light of the 11 September attacks.)

e) The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, meeting from 7-8 November, issued a communiqué on international action against terrorism which defined the three cornerstones of the contribution of the Council of Europe to international action against terrorism as: identifying legal cooperation to combat terrorism, safeguarding fundamental values, and investing in democracy. They also adopted a Convention on Cybercrime as the first international instrument concerning criminal offenses committed via computer networks.

http://www.coe.int/T/E/Communication_and_Research/Press/Themes_files/terrorism/

f) The European Directive on Money Laundering was adopted on 19 November. According to European ministers for foreign affairs, this directive will enter into force in 18 months' time. While the directive currently in force applies only to drug offences, the newly-approved directive obliges member states to combat laundering of the proceeds of all serious crimes. <http://www.coe.int>.

g) The Permanent Council of the Organization of American States adopted a "Resolution on the Social and Economic Impact of the Terrorist Acts of September 11, 2001 on Member States and the Damage Done Especially to the More Vulnerable and Smaller Economies". The resolution makes a number of specific recommendations to inter-American organizations and requests the OAS secretary-general to report back to the Council on implementation of these measures by 15 January. <http://www.oas.org/>

i) In a special session on 31 October, the secretary-general of the Organization of American States and the head of the Inter-American Development Bank issued a joint call for support by the inter-American community for those countries suffering consequences of the 11 September terrorist attacks. <http://www.oas.org/>

j) The European Parliament's Women's Rights Committee heard a report on the situation of women in Afghanistan and discussed proposals to create a budget line to support Afghan women, to send a delegation of female MEPs to Afghanistan and to insist that the forthcoming meeting in Bonn include women participants.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=PRESS-NEWSRP&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+PRESS-NEWSRP+NR-20011123-1+0+DOC+SGML+V0//EN&LEVEL=2#SECTION3>

5. Humanitarian concerns

a) “**Unblock Afghan Aid**” is the title of an editorial in *The Toronto Star* that draws attention to a situation where Afghans are dying when they might be saved. The article warns that while there is a sense of giddy liberation and hope as the Taliban regime crumbles, while Afghan leaders meet trying to forge a new government, while donors consider a multi-billion dollar rebuilding programme, there are Afghans eating grass.

http://www.torontostar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article_Type1&c=Article&cid=1006816210002&call_page=TS_Editorial&call_pageid=968256290204&call_pagepath=News/Editorial

b) **Human Rights Watch** this week called on the United States and its Northern Alliance allies to guarantee the humane treatment of surrendered or captured forces from the Afghan town of Kunduz, and to institute fair screening procedures to determine who should face prosecution later for serious violations of international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

<http://www.humanrightswatch.com/press/2001/11/fighters1126.htm>

c) Also on the site for Human Rights Watch is an article highlighting how the new war in Afghanistan Puts Women's Rights In Peril. Afghan women are likely to face further suffering at the hands of warring factions in Afghanistan and to endure some of the most serious humanitarian consequences of the US-led military action.

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/10/afghan-women.htm>

d) Despite uncertainties, ACT agencies respond to the crisis in Afghanistan, writes ACT information officer, Paul Jeffrey on November 26, 2001. "Watching the country only on the television, it would seem to be easy. Yet the task of providing aid seems only to be getting more difficult," said Kjell Godtfredsen, director of the emergency programme here for Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), a member of Action by Churches Together (ACT), an international alliance of church agencies.

http://act-intl.org/news/dt_nr_2001/dtafghan1801.html

e) See an overview (<http://act-intl.org/>) of the most recent information on ACT members' and partners' humanitarian work in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A photo gallery is also available on the site. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/photo/act-news/actnews.html>

f) Amnesty International sets a human rights agenda for the future, stating ahead of the Bonn meeting that those human rights must be at the core of any discussion on the future of Afghanistan. "While Amnesty International appreciates the need for national reconciliation after years of war and repression, any future political agreement must not allow for impunity for those who have abused human rights in the past. Avoiding the truth about a country's past and ignoring accountability will not achieve peace."

<http://www.web.amnesty.org/web/news.nsf/WebAll/17C4845098A3F0F880256B0C005EE3FB?OpenDocument>

g) Reuters AlertNet site offers a comprehensive overview of the situation in Afghanistan with the latest report from the region. <http://www.alternet.org/>

h) ReliefWeb (<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf>), a project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), also offers a comprehensive overview of information relating to human relief agencies.

i) There are increasing reports from the United States of immigrants being terrorized by FBI agents investigating possible leads in the 11 September attacks. Over 1,000 individuals remain detained by US authorities with little information about their names, the charges filed against them, or even their whereabouts. In addition federal officials will interview 5,000 young Middle Eastern men who are legally in the country but who are wanted for questioning in the criminal investigation of the 11 September attacks. The interviews are to be completed by 21 December. The chief of police in Portland, Oregon has refused to cooperate, saying state law prohibits him from questioning immigrants who are not suspected of any crime, the only issue being their foreign citizenship. See

<http://www.kcstar.com/item/pages/home.pat.local/3acd2a56.b26..html>

6. Contributions to the current debate

a) Robert Fisk, in Taliban-controlled Kandahar province, writes on the experiences of the “losing side” in the current military conflict, “I saw my house disappear. It was a big plane that spat smoke and soaked the ground with fire.’ For a man who couldn’t read and had never left Kandahar province in all his life, it was a chilling enough description of the Spectre, the American ‘bumble bee’ aircraft that picks off militiamen and civilians with equal ferocity.” “Blood, tears, terror and tragedy behind the lines”, by Robert Fisk in *The Independent*.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/story.jsp?story=106834>

b) *The Sunday Times* (UK) reports that the war on terrorism is to be extended to three new countries as soon as the campaign in Afghanistan is over. Targets linked to Osama Bin Laden in Somalia, Sudan and Yemen will be at the top of the hit list, according to senior sources in London and Washington. <http://www.sunday-times.co.uk/article/0,,9002-2001544397,00.html>

c) The *New York Times* reports that Bush seems to have broadened his definition of terrorism to include the development of weapons that would “terrorize nations”, a significant departure from the definition he used in an address to Congress in September about the purpose of the war.

<http://www.nytimes.com/auth/login?URI=http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/27/international/27PREX.html>

[free registration required]

d) *Christian Science Monitor* has two reports on the political and social situation in Afghanistan:

"Afghans wary of warlord rule": “To many Afghans here, America's anti-Taliban allies are not benevolent rulers, and the warlords' ability to secure a lasting peace is much in doubt.” <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1127/p6s1-wosc.html>

"Afghan women at the peace table": “Empowering Afghan women is not a matter of granting them any special or slightly patronizing ‘favors’. It is, rather, to give all Afghans -- male and female -- the best chance they have to shake off their lengthy legacy of civil strife, impoverishment, and despair.”

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1127/p11s1-coop.html>

e) A reflection by Waldensian theologian Paolo Ricca of Italy raises fundamental questions about war and suggests that war is not the right way to solve the problem of terrorism today. War is, in any event, a defeat in that it shows that men and women don't know how to live together without harming each other. It is particularly difficult for those who continue to believe in Jesus' words that the "meek" not the violent "will inherit the earth". www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/analysis124.html

f) The US Institute of Peace has issued a new report on Faith-based NGOs and International Peacebuilding which finds that faith-based organizations are increasingly active and increasingly effective in international peace-building. The report finds that peace can often be promoted most efficiently by introducing peace-building components into more traditional relief and development activities. <http://www.usip.org/oc/newsroom/sr76nb.html>.

g) In "This must be the end", Andrew Murray, chair of the Stop the War Coalition, urges the US and British governments to halt the "unjust war" in Afghanistan. Murray argues that the collapse of the Taliban cannot be seen as a victory against terrorism, since the return in Kabul of the Northern Alliance - known in the past for their terrorist actions - was accompanied by massacres, lynchings and other atrocities. The author also fears an extension of the conflict in Iraq as the next step of the "infinite justice" operation, but at the same time observes that the public opinion in the West is more and more in favour of an end to military operations. *The Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/waronterror/story/0,1361,595483,00.html>

h) The Social Science Research Council, an independent and not-for-profit international organization based in New York, has published in its web site a series of essays related to the current crisis. The ambition is to discuss, from the perspectives of the social sciences, the various implications of both the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the responses to them. <http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/>

i) For a detailed study on how war and conflict-prevention and resolution is thought today in the frame of international relations, consult the essay of the political scientist Susan Woodward, "On War and Peace-Building: Unfinished Legacy of the 1990s", in which the author reveals the theoretical background as well as the empirical lessons learned and missed by the United Nations and its specialized agencies. http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/woodward_text_only.htm

j) In the light of international law, what is the status of the US military commissions which are now officially entitled to try accused terrorists? What about the legitimacy and the symbolic significance of these courts? What could be their implications if they are going to be used as a long-term mechanism? In an instructive comment published in *The New York Times*, "Al Qaeda Should Be Tried Before the World", Anne-Marie Slaughter, professor of international law at Harvard Law School, deconstructs the concept of military court and its justification in the context of the "war against terrorism". In the name of law and democratic values, the author affirms that only an international tribunal has the adequate legitimacy to judge and condemn convicted terrorists, especially in the case of Bin Laden and the members of Al Qaeda, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/17/opinion/17SLAU.html?ex=1007190193&ei=1&en=1270c8f5a3158a93>

k) What should be the role of an efficient humanitarian action in the context of wars dominated by communications strategy and propaganda? What have we learned, during the last decade, from the humanitarian crises in Kurdistan, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, or more recently in Kosovo? In her article "Le temps du dévoiement published" in *Le Monde*, Sylvie Brunel, president of Action contre la Faim (Action against Hunger) and specialist of development issues, defends humanitarian principles which cannot be aligned, by any means, behind the march of militaries, businessmen and diplomats. Sylvie Brunel advocates for true independent humanitarian actions which must be accompanied by long-term developmental projects.

In French at: http://www.lemonde.fr/imprimer_article/0,6063,246546,00.html

l) One of the side effects of the war and its encouragement to undertake exceptional measures to fight terrorists is the reinforcement of the authoritative political regime of the Arab world. In a "Chance for a clampdown", *The Economist* reported a month ago how the political regimes of Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia among others are now taking liberties with civic and civil liberties thanks to the unexpected global mobilization against the Islamist activists. If the anti-terrorism campaign is going to be fully exploited by these regimes, more young people might be attracted by the messianic views of some extremist Islamists.

http://www.economist.com/printedition/PrinterFriendly.cfm?Story_ID=836058

http://www.lemonde.fr/imprimer_article/0,6063,246546,00.html

m) In the same manner and with strong arguments, Rony Brauman, former president of Médecins sans frontières (MSF), condemns the notion of "military-humanitarian coalition". In his article published in *Le Monde*, he recapitulates the major failures and risks inherent to "humanitarian wars" and reiterates the guiding principle of any humanitarian mission: the preservation of life is the first and ultimate goal.

In French at: http://www.lemonde.fr/imprimer_article/0,6063,246543,00.html

http://www.lemonde.fr/imprimer_article/0,6063,246543,00.ht

7. Resources

a) The editors of *Sojourners* magazine have put together a study guide, "A Moral Response to Terrorism: Conscience in a Time of War" designed for use in classrooms, Sunday school sessions, small groups, and study circles. For a table of contents and to order your copy, go to:

http://www.sojo.net/feedtheAfghanpeople/index.cfm/action/study_guide.html

b) The November 2001 issue of *Messenger* from the Church of the Brethren contains articles and reflections from pastors and members of the denomination responding to the events of September 11.

<http://www.brethren.org/genbd/messenger/TheWayOfPeace/index.htm>

c) "Healing the Wounds" offers resources and materials to help communities come to grips with the events of September 11 and its aftermath in Afghanistan. This initiative is being co-ordinated out of Toronto, Canada as a civil society idea, based on the premise that the best way to engage public perceptions on Islam and Muslims is to dynamically engage the stereotypes <http://www.healingthewounds.com/>

d) Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) documents the changes wrought in the lives of people around the world by the events of September 11.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/indepth/targetterrorism/people/>

e) Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian poet has written “First Writing Since” which expresses her emotions on hearing of the 11 September attacks. Hammad is the author of *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, published by Harlem River Press, 1996. www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/resource4.html.

f) Documentation for Action Groups in Asia provides news and resources from the region. The 23 November issue (no. 126) features an article on “Strategy in Afghanistan by Ali Gohar and Ron Kraybill which looks at lessons from peace-building efforts in the wars in Africa and the former Yugoslavia, and traditions in Afghanistan, to propose resources for a stable political environment in the country. <http://www.daga.org/home.html>

g) The Mennonite Central Committee gives short worship resources for each Sunday at <http://www.mcc.org/peace/worship.html>

8. Calls for action

a) *Sojourners* reports that their invitation to Christians, Jews and people of faith and good will to act in solidarity with Muslims by fasting for Ramadan has received an international groundswell of response. People in England, Australia and throughout the United States are respecting Ramadan any way they can and donating the money that would be spent on food to humanitarian agencies providing direct relief in Afghanistan. For more information on the fast, see: http://www.sojo.net/get_connected/index.cfm/mode/display/forum_id/21/action/forums.html. *Sojourners* also offers suggestions on fasting, daily prayers and daily prayer readings. Available at: http://www.sojonet/feedtheAFghanpeople/index.cfm/action/ramadan_readings#2.html

b) A number of organizations are promoting the Declaration on Women’s Rights in Afghanistan which calls on any post-Taliban government to recognize the following minimum rights:

1. An end to Islamic rule and the establishment of a secular government.
2. Complete and immediate abolishment of sexual apartheid.
3. The immediate abolishment of compulsory veiling. The recognition of freedom of dress.
4. Prohibition of torture, execution, lashing, retribution and other Islamic punishments.
5. Equality of men and women.
6. Recognition of women’s civil liberties including the right to work, education, travel and divorce.
7. Recognition of the freedom of activity of women’s rights organizations in Afghanistan.

For suggested actions, see <http://www.hambastegi.org>.

b) In the United States, groups are organizing to support the “Access for Afghan Women Act” presently under discussion in the US Congress. This bill is intended to ensure that women are a part of all US-funded programmes in Afghanistan, that women will have equal access to emergency relief and that women are at the peace-negotiating table. For more information, see <http://www.womensedge.org>.

Behind the news: Visions for Peace – Voices of Faith is a joint initiative of:

World Council of Churches (WCC) - a fellowship of 342 churches, in more than 100 countries in all continents from virtually all Christian traditions. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member church but works cooperatively with the WCC. The highest governing body is the Assembly, which meets approximately every seven years. The WCC was formally inaugurated in 1948 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance - a global action network of 62 churches and church-related organizations who have pledged themselves to change unjust policies and practices related to global trade and HIV/AIDS, and to take up as a special concern work on peace and conflict resolution by forging strategic partnership. Alliance participants come from every corner of the globe and varied traditions within the ecumenical family – Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican, as well as church-related organizations who themselves represent and serve many Christian faith traditions. Alliance participants are committed to speak out with one voice against injustice and structures which deprive human beings of dignity, and for alternative visions based on the Gospel.

Action by Churches Together (ACT) - an international alliance of churches and relief agencies assisting thousands of people recovering from emergencies in more than 50 countries worldwide.

This bulletin/website is intended to provide an ecumenical space for visions for peace and voices of faith; these materials do not necessarily reflect official policy of WCC, ACT, or EAA.

Please circulate the Bulletin to friends, colleagues and people who are looking for alternative perspectives on the current situation.

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