

September 12, 2002

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We, like all Americans, kneel in prayer and remembrance for the tragedy and violence that obliterated the lives of so many people one year ago. As American religious leaders, we have sought during this year to listen, to learn, and to grow in our faith and compassion both for persons in our congregations and also for those many outside of our churches. We applaud your leadership in bringing peoples of disparate faiths together to worship, to mourn, and to move on boldly with our lives – in a more caring fashion and with appreciation for the precious gifts of God given to all humankind. Today, however, we write out of concern that those same precious gifts may be damaged by actions being contemplated by our nation.

We, leaders of American churches and church-related organizations, are alarmed by recent statements by yourself and others in the Administration about pre-emptive military action against Iraq for the expressed purpose of toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein. Understanding that Mr. Hussein poses a threat to his neighbors and to his own people, we nevertheless believe it is wrong, as well as detrimental to U.S. interests, to take such action.

We oppose on moral grounds the United States taking further military action against Iraq now. The Iraqi people have already suffered enough through more than two decades of war and severe economic sanctions. Military action against the government of Saddam Hussein and its aftermath could result in a large number of civilians being killed or wounded, as well as increasing the suffering of multitudes of innocent people.

It is detrimental to U.S. interests to take unilateral military action when there continues to be strong multilateral support for a new weapons inspection regime and when most governments in Europe and the Middle East resist supporting military action. It is important for the U.S. to cooperate with international efforts to control Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, if possible, through a regional weapons-of-mass-destruction control initiative.

The pre-emptive use of military force by the United States to deal with proliferation problems, as serious as they may be, establishes a dangerous precedent, particularly for other nations that feel threatened by the weapons capabilities of their neighbors. Furthermore, unilaterally overthrowing enemy governments heightens concern in other countries about American respect for their integrity as nations, as well as for international law.

U.S. military action at this time has great potential to further destabilize the region. It is likely that international support for the war on terrorism will erode if the United States attacks Iraq without a United Nations mandate. Militants in Arab and Islamic majority countries would seize the opportunity to incite people against not only the United States but also against governments that cooperate with the U.S. An invasion of, or intensified military action against, Iraq will divert attention from the need to seek ways to reduce international terrorism and will retard efforts to restore stability in Afghanistan.

Rather than attacking Iraq, we urge that your priority in the Middle East be an Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire and peace settlement. As do many in the world, we look to the United States government to set an example for the international community. As Christian religious leaders responsible for millions of U.S. citizens we expect our government to reflect the morals and values we hold dear – pursuing peace, not war; working with the community of nations, not overthrowing governments by force; respecting international law and treaties while holding in high regard all human life.

Sincerely,

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