

Peace Action Update 10/11/02

The report below was written yesterday, before Congress voted on the Iraq war resolution. My heart, like the hearts of many others, is heavy as I read today's news, listen to radio commentary, contemplate the days ahead.

I write the present words from my prayer room, and in prayer I am released from any thought that would tend toward cynicism, that might see an act of peacemaking, no matter how small, unworthy of our efforts or without intrinsic merit.

Friends, let us reaffirm the many words and acts of witness over these past months, and draw strength from the prayer and corporate worship that will ground and sustain us in the days and weeks to come.

Report on Peace Delegation Meeting with Senator Hillary Clinton

On Tuesday, October 8, members from the New York State Community of Churches (NYSCC), along with Elizabeth Enloe, executive director of American Friends Service Committee/New York Metropolitan Regional Office, and Jack Patterson, Quaker representative to the United Nations, traveled to Washington for a meeting with Senator Hillary Clinton. The purpose of the meeting was to speak our concern about the administration's plans for war with Iraq. Just prior to the scheduled meeting, Elizabeth, Jack, and I stopped at the offices of Friends Committee on National Legislation, where we were briefed.

The meeting with Senator Clinton was scheduled by the NYSCC, building upon the initial efforts of New York Peace Friends. We met in a small conference room, seated around a table. Senator Clinton's foreign-policy aide greeted us and escorted us into the conference room, where we were then joined by Senator Clinton. There were ten of us in the delegation, thus twelve around the table.

We began with introductions, and then a member of our group explained why we had requested this meeting, noting that as individuals we represented a continuum of churches whose theologies ranged from pacifism to just war.

After introductions I was asked to begin our time with a period of centering silence, which I did, inviting us to let go of our usual ways of speaking and go deeper in order that we might listen more attentively and truly hear one another. Although we would be speaking on matters political, we hoped to both touch and speak from the spiritual basis of our concerns. The tone, which was already cordial and open,

deepened immediately as we sat together in the silence. Then out of this silence each member of the delegation spoke their concern.

We expressed concern that preemptive action by the United States would open up the likelihood of similar action by other countries; would further destabilize the Middle East. We raised questions of cost in terms of lives and money; the diversion of money and energy from pressing national needs; the cost of rebuilding following the war; evidence supporting Iraq's biological, chemical, nuclear build-up capacity; the absence of allies who support the United States in the intended war. We affirmed the need to work with the United Nations and through international law.

Senator Clinton listened attentively until all had spoken, and then responded. She spoke of her concerns and the reasons for her inclinations and opinion at this time. She shared that she was in the process of drafting her statement regarding Resolution 35 and her struggles writing it. There followed more "Give and take" with respect to the issues raised, all in keeping with the tone and depth of the meeting that had been established.

Were we able to change her mind with respect to how she will vote on the Resolution? Probably not. Did we sense a real meeting with engagement of the issues? Yes. Did we wish there were more time to pursue, question, dialogue, suggest alternatives, persuade? Yes. Was it time well spent? Absolutely. I feel we were faithful and trust that what we did will be well used. And I am certain we will be called upon to do more.

As we were ending the meeting, Senator Clinton asked that we keep her in our prayers, and we concluded by joining hands while a member of the group offered vocal prayer for her and others in decisionmaking positions in these grave times.

Senator Clinton's aide stayed on with us a while longer, continuing the conversation and giving us his thoughts on the meeting. The next day those who had traveled to Washington for the meeting received an e-mail from Mary Lu Bowen, executive director of the Community of Churches. She wrote that Senator Clinton's chief of staff in the Albany office had received an e-mail from the foreign-policy staff aide in Washington who had met with us. It was reported that the aide described the meeting in almost "reverential" terms (the chief of staff's word) and reported that this meeting was remarkable for its length, mutual respect, and opportunity for the senator to articulate her thoughts. He also shared that Senator Clinton had very recently expressed a wish that she could hear mainstream religious thinking in New York State.

Friends, this most recent experience with the Community of Churches has brought home to me once again the importance of ecumenical and interfaith work, especially

in these precarious times. As Quakers, we are needed and we are fed by others around the table. May we, and people the world over, join together in earnest prayer this week and in the weeks to come.

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