

Worship and Action Update, September 11, 2003

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

As we stop to remember those lost two years ago on September 11, 2001, we are experiencing the emergence of a national and international day of shared reflection. While a few seek to use this moment for political advantage, we know that most, here and abroad, share continued grief at the terrible loss of life. People all over the world share a sense that we must find another way than violence to resolve differences, a way to live as a world community joined by universal aspirations, needs, concerns and fears.

We give this week's Worship & Action Update over to the message of September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows on this occasion of special reflection. (Their message may be found on the Peace Tomorrows website at: www.peacefultomorrow.org/voices/voices.php?id=P211.)

Statement on the Second Anniversary of 9/11

Two years ago today our loved ones were tragically murdered in an act of terror that shook the United States and the world. In the time since their deaths, as we continue our personal paths of grieving, we are comforted by the thoughtful and compassionate response of people all over the world who have offered sympathy and support to the victims of these terrible attacks. But much about the US government's approach to responding to our loved ones' deaths stands in stark contrast to the common sense words and comforting actions of ordinary people. On this two-year anniversary, we stop to reflect on the dangerous course of current policies and to call for a new approach to 9/11 that is focused on bringing about true security and justice.

Our loved ones' deaths prompted the US government to attack Afghanistan and overthrow the repressive Taliban government with the objective of catching Osama Bin Laden and other members of Al Qaeda thought to be responsible for the attack. While military efforts to overthrow the Taliban were initially successful, Bin Laden is still unaccounted for, and recent reports indicate that the Taliban and Al Qaeda are resurging in Afghanistan even as the central government pleads for more funds for stabilization and rebuilding. Our military campaign in Afghanistan did one thing for certain: it created more bereaved families just like ours. Ordinary Afghans were killed by US bombs, injured by cluster bombs, and displaced by fighting, adding to the suffering of 23 previous years of wars. On our travels to Afghanistan we have met some of these families and hold them in our hearts today as another set of victims created by the tragedy of 9/11.

Shortly after 9/11/01, the US congress passed the USA Patriot act, ostensibly to improve security in the United States, with little time for examination of its consequences. In this climate of fear and panic, the Patriot Act and other

measures have eroded basic American civil liberties and threatened our immigrant populations in particular. Today, unnamed people languish in unidentified locations on unknown charges under the guise of American justice. Yet there is no evidence that these measures have made us any safer. At the same time, the administration stalls on efforts to provide an open and honest investigation of the events of 9/11.

Last year at this time, President Bush used the occasion of the one year commemoration of our loved ones' deaths to begin a marketing campaign to sell the war against Iraq. Despite the lack of a link between Saddam Hussein and the events of 9/11, the Bush Administration's insinuations of a connection played upon the public's fears of 9/11 and led the country into an unnecessary war in Iraq, invoking our loved ones' deaths as justification. While the deceptions behind the stated reasons for going to war are coming to light, ordinary Iraqis and US soldiers in Iraq continue to suffer, with the death toll mounting every day. Today we pause to mourn the Iraqi dead and all the casualties of the war, and to call upon our leaders to bring our troops, who have put their lives on the line, safely home from this misguided mission and to turn control of Iraq's rebuilding to the authority of the United Nations.

One of our members wrote to the New York Times on Sept 14, 2001 "I pray that this country which has been so deeply hurt not unleash forces that it does not have the power to call back." Have we unleashed these terrible forces? After 9/11 America had the sympathy of the entire world. Since war with Iraq, international sympathy and support has turned to hatred and despair. Anti-American sentiment is on the rise all around the world - what better recruiting tool for terrorist can we provide?

As grieving family members, we know that feelings of fear and anger are a natural part of the healing process. But we have learned that it is not healthy or constructive to act on these emotions. The government's response to 9/11 has kept us stuck in the fear and panic that we all shared from the shocking events of 9/11. Rather than basing our policies on fear and anger, we call upon the government to act in the best interest of the American public by rejoining the community of nations to work together constructively in solving the issues of worldwide terrorism and war.

While September 11 stands as a unique tragedy in the American experience, the sad reality is that people in other countries have been experiencing their own September 11ths with much less fanfare all the time. Peaceful Tomorrows members have met with other victims of violence around the world who are a guiding light in our efforts to put our grief to work as action for peace. From Israeli and Palestinian parents who lost children to violence, to victims of the US Embassy bombing in Kenya to the mothers of the disappeared in Central and South America to the survivors of the ultimate violence - the atomic weapons dropped by the US on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Peaceful Tomorrows members

have found ourselves to be part of a worldwide family of those who have known terror and who have responded with peace. September 11 taught us that human beings have the capacity to commit terrible violence against each other. But it also taught us that the human heart is capable of overcoming fear and hatred to build a world in which there are no more September 11ths anywhere in the world. It is this hope is that we must build upon as individuals and as nations.

On February 15, 2003 a great worldwide shift was made apparent - so obvious in fact that the *New York Times* reported it on the front page. The millions of people in the streets around the world marching against war in Iraq demonstrated that there are now two superpowers in the world: the Bush Administration and global public opinion. We are honored to stand with our brothers and sisters around the world who know that we the people must find another way to live together on this planet.

So today as we mourn, reflect and remember, we ask that you join with us in pursuit of true peace, security, and justice. We owe it to the dead, we need it for the living and we must do it for the generations to follow. Let us move forward together to build a future of peaceful tomorrows.

Sep 09, 2003
September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows

In care,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer
NYYM Worship and Action working group

Man was born into barbarism when killing his fellow man was a normal condition of existence. He became endowed with a conscience. And he has now reached the day when violence toward another human being must become as abhorrent as eating another's flesh.

Martin Luther King Jr., Why We Can't Wait, 1963

The strength to kill is not essential for self-defence; one ought to have the strength to die. When a man is fully ready to die, he will not even desire to offer violence. Indeed, I may put it down as a self-evident proposition that the desire to kill is in inverse proportion to the desire to die. And history is replete with instances of men who, by dying with courage and compassion on their lips, converted the hearts of their violent opponents.

Mahatma Gandhi

Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

*Martin Luther King Jr., Nobel Prize acceptance speech
Stockholm, Sweden, December 11, 1964*

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.... Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Luke 6:27-28, 37-38 (NIV)