

September 25, 2002

The Right Honourable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500-0001
U.S.A.

Mr President:

We write from Canada to plead with you, as fellow Christians and as neighbours in North America, not to choose the terrible path of war to solve the challenges presented to the world by the government of Iraq.

I write with the concurrence of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Council of Churches. We met together this September 11 and found, after praying for the peace of the world on that painful anniversary day, that the issue of peace for Iraq was burning on the mind of each church representative who was present. Hence this letter.

Mr President, the values you praised when you spoke on television on the evening of September 11, 2002, are of compelling importance within a Christian understanding of life. As such, they are in no way nationally bounded. The One who gave life to your fellow citizens who perished one year ago is the very One who has also given life and human dignity to every child, every woman, every man. The Iraqis, too, are the neighbours whom we must love even as we love ourselves. Their lives are as sacred, as our own. Indeed, the people of Iraq cannot bear another invasion. They have suffered too much already.

The Gulf War of twelve years ago was terrible in the blood it spilled. In the years of internationally imposed sanctions since the war, it is the children and the ordinary women and men of Iraq who suffered the worst consequences of those sanctions. According to the United Nations' own estimates, one million of them have died of causes related to the sanctions. The leaders of the governing regime have not been the ones to suffer hunger, sickness without adequate health care, the destruction of livelihoods, and the loss of hope for a whole generation of young people. The people of Iraq, in their millions, have borne the deadly burden and have suffered enough.

We agree with the convictions expressed by the spokesperson for the General Board of Church and Society, General Secretary Jim Winkler of your own denomination, the United Methodist Church. We agree with his statement of August 30 when it affirms that the question of weapons inspection non-compliance by Iraq "should be a matter for the United Nations." We agree that "a pre-emptive war represents a major and dangerous change in US foreign policy, setting a terrible precedent for other nations." Although the regime of Saddam Hussein has indeed "been a highly negative influence in international and regional affairs", there are credible options other than another military invasion for dealing with the threats it presents. Therefore we affirm with your own Church the conclusion that "the path on which the President seeks to embark is counter to the teaching of Jesus...and is one that threatens the rule of law as a fundamental principle of democracy."

For the sake of the people of Iraq who have already suffered so much, for the sake of your own people who would be targeted even more ruthlessly by extremists if your government were violently to invade Iraq, for the sake of the stability of the Middle East region and of the whole world, we beg you, Mr. President, to seek peace by means of peace.

Yours truly,

+André Vallée, Bishop
President, Canadian Council of Churches