

September 21, 2001

The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister of Canada,
House of Commons,
Ottawa, Canada,
K1A 0A6

c.c. The Hon. John Manley, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
The Hon. Arthur Eggleton, Minister of Defence

Dear Prime Minister,

First of all we join you, as do all our fellow citizens, in expressing profound sorrow and compassion for all those who died and those who now suffer as a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. As representatives of a very broad Christian ecumenical community we join with Muslims, Jews, Hindus and many other faith communities who have condemned these acts of terror, confident in the knowledge that the God who cares for all peoples of the world now calls us all to recommit to the pursuit of justice and peace.

We write also to offer our prayerful support to you and your Government as you search for the path of wisdom and compassion in these extraordinary circumstances. We especially appreciate what we understand to be your search for a careful, balanced response. We identify with your statement to the House of Commons when you pledge that Canada's actions will

“...be guided by a spirit of wisdom and perseverance, by our values and our way of life. As we press the struggle, let us never, ever, forget who we are and what we stand for.”

In the face of the grief and rage that tempt many to yield to vengeful retaliation, the appeal to enduring values and principles helps to steer us toward more measured and, in the end, more effective action. We fear that the widespread use of the language of “war” is undermining efforts to understand the true nature of the challenges that terrorist attacks present to the world.

We understand the struggle against terrorism to involve two distinct, and operationally very different, objectives: accountability and prevention. Accountability requires that the perpetrators of terrorism be brought to justice, and prevention requires a two-fold effort -- to enhance security measures in the interests of reliable public protection and safety, and to address the social, political and economic conditions that promote or are conducive to terrorism.

We are grateful that an advanced public debate has already identified many of the key values and approaches that should guide Canada's, and the international community's, response, and with this letter we wish to offer for your consideration six specific action guidelines.

1. Accountability

The perpetrators of these heinous crimes must be brought to justice. This imperative is unambiguous and it is not rooted in revenge but in the principle of accountability. It is those responsible for the acts of September 11 who are now properly the focus of public attention, but it is also appropriate to remind those now promoting a new priority struggle against terrorism that the obligation to bring terrorists to justice is a broad obligation to bring to justice all those who commit terror and other crimes against humanity, regardless of where the victims are.

2. Due Process

In bringing those accused of terrorism to justice, the obligation to respect due process is also unambiguous -- for reasons of justice as well as political and moral legitimacy. We acknowledge that in international relations due process is not always clear, but we remind you that the United Nations and its Security Council are the essential custodians of international due process, and along with the affected national governments are central to ensuring that those being pursued, and the societies in which they are pursued, have the protection of law and just practice.

We also encourage you and your Government to give consideration to the importance of introducing an international element to the legal proceedings against those accused of the criminal acts of September 11. An exclusively American trial is unlikely to have the confidence of many states which nevertheless are committed to a broad equitable campaign to prevent acts of terror and to hold those guilty of terror accountable. The introduction of an international dimension to such a trial could help to legitimize the results and thus strengthen the resolve to combat terrorism internationally.

3. Interdependence

The September 11 events tragically demonstrate what Canadians know to be the case: that the world is interdependent. We know that if the world itself is an unsafe, hostile place, there is no reliable means by which to build islands of enduring, fortified safety within it.

The security and safety of the people of the United States are no less dependent on international cooperation. The heightened solidarity with the US being expressed world-wide in the aftermath of the horrific events of September 11 is potentially a powerful factor in a dynamic that could, if respectfully nurtured, enhance world peace. We also know, however, that long-term international support for a sustained effort to reduce and prevent terrorism, will require an unambiguous commitment to cooperative interdependence. Canada, with its clear commitment to multilateralism, can help the United States understand the need for it to re-engage with the world in support of collective security measures such as the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto environmental protocol, the Comprehensive (nuclear) Test-Ban Treaty, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, small arms controls and other similar measures.

4. Justice and grievance

In the context of intensified efforts to reduce and prevent terrorism, it is important for Canada to assert that it is possible to hear and address the grievances that are linked to acts of terror without thereby in any way condoning such terrorism. Just as any serious crime reduction effort cannot be confined to more intensified police work and must also address the economic and social conditions that tend to produce increased rates of crime, a serious campaign against terrorism needs to address the social, economic and political conditions that tend to nurture the emergence of terrorism.

Canada has led the international community in the understanding that there are human security and peacebuilding dimensions to national, regional and international security problems. Such measures, especially the promotion of democracy, good governance, participatory public institutions, and a civil society actively engaged in shaping public priorities and values, are an essential element of reducing the risks and incidence of terrorism and of persuading states not to knowingly harbour terrorists. Indeed, there are vital connections between this issue and the whole range of international economic behaviour, including the handling of international debt and the development of fair, transparent and considerate arrangements for trade.

5. Resort to force

The surviving individuals charged with responsibility for the September 11 attacks on the United States are now fugitives from justice -- fugitives who must be pursued and apprehended if they are to be held to account and brought to justice. The international community faces an extraordinary challenge to bring to justice those accused that are harboured by sovereign states unwilling to cooperate with efforts to bring the accused to trial. And the early characterization of the response to the terrorist attacks on the United States as “war” misrepresents the nature of that challenge. The pursuit of fugitives across international borders without the consent of states involved requires authorization from a responsible body, which we understand to be the Security Council; but it does not require, and must not include, broad military attacks.

We fear that the current mobilization of a broad spectrum of US military force, from strategic bombers, to cruise and ballistic missiles, to special forces for possible assassination missions, is likely to lead to a resort to military force well beyond police or police-support actions and, sadly, well beyond the limits of international and humanitarian law. Canada cannot be a party to such actions. All police action, including any military support for such action, must be lawful. Justice must be done and must be seen to be done.

6. Recovering perspective

A campaign against terrorism is required, but not at all costs. More than a decade ago the single-minded drive against communism in Afghanistan, for example, led to the unrestrained spread in the region of small arms which still fuel civil war and chaos and violence in Pakistan. The same zealous campaign made common cause with the now accused terrorist Osama bin Laden and helped to spawn the Taliban movement itself.

A similar, single-minded campaign against terrorism is likely to have similarly damaging consequences, if it is not guided by due process and actions that honour the laws, values and freedoms that terrorism threatens. We urge you to resist the growing pressures to permit increased invasion of privacy, reduced access to information, reduced immigration, reduced access to safe havens for refugees, increased military spending at the expense of social programs, and any number of other measures that would erode fundamental rights and freedoms, all in the name of combating terrorism. If Canada does not resist such measures we will have failed in true respect for the victims of the

September 11 attacks. Their death is a loss great enough to deserve, as a memorial, a new resolve to make the world they left behind a safer place.

The deep sadness felt in our churches at the events of September 11 is compounded by our knowledge, through our association with churches and partners in many parts of the world, that such horrific attacks

against civilians are not isolated events. Throughout the world innocent people are under attack. By most accounts the majority of victims of armed conflict are civilian non-combatants. In many instances they are killed with arms that have been delivered there from northern democratic states. In some instances, we regret to have to say, they are killed by military attacks carried out by northern democratic states.

There is an imperative in the aftermath of September 11 to act against attacks on innocent civilians. We agree that it will be a long and difficult journey to act effectively, and it is our hope that the emerging campaign against terrorism becomes a genuine effort to advance the safety and well being of people wherever they are threatened.

We wish to assure you that our thoughts and prayers will be with you as you travel to Washington next week and as you and your Government continue to plan for appropriate Canadian action.

Sincerely yours,

Most Rev. André Vallée
President,
Canadian Council of Churches

Rev. Dr. David Pfrimmer
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