

October 12, 2001

Canada's Response to Terrorism: An Ecumenical Appeal to Parliament

Dear Member of Parliament,

We are writing with regard to the forthcoming Parliamentary debate concerning appropriate Canadian and international responses to the heinous September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. You and your colleagues in the House of Commons bear the formidable responsibility of guiding our country's actions in these critical days. We write to support you in those responsibilities and to ask you to consider the following concerns.

We believe that a sustained and effective campaign against terrorism is fundamental to the safety and well-being of all people, and that Canada can and must make a vital contribution to that campaign. We fear, however, that the military attacks on Afghanistan which began on October 7 could seriously undermine the international community's efforts, both to bring those responsible for the September 11 attacks to justice and to reduce the incidence of terrorism in the future. Nevertheless, we believe that the international community acting through the United Nations can still recover a lawful, principled and effective approach to the struggle against terrorism.

That struggle against terrorism must include three essential elements:

- immediate actions and measures to prevent additional attacks in the near term;
- the pursuit, capture and trial of those who participated in or share responsibility for the September 11 attacks; and
- long-term measures towards the reduction and eradication of terrorism.

Near-term prevention

The essential goal of preventing further terrorist attacks on the United States, Canada or any other potential target states in the near term will not be accomplished through military attacks on Afghanistan or any other state identified as a sponsor of terrorism. That goal must be pursued through increased care and vigilance at home and in all states vulnerable to terrorist attacks. We welcome and encourage continued attention to the broad range of security measures that is required, emphasizing due regard for a constructive balance between prudent care and the preservation of the rights and freedoms that define our society.

Bringing the accused to trial

Justice requires that those who participated in or share responsibility for the September 11 attacks be brought to trial as quickly as possible. Moral and political legitimacy, as well as justice, require also that the international community be meticulous and uncompromising in its attention to due process. We are encouraged by apparent high levels of international cooperation among law enforcement and investigative agencies, and also urge international involvement and cooperation in the trial process.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has reminded the international community that “United Nations conventions already provide a legal framework for many of the steps that must be taken to eradicate terrorism – including the extradition and prosecution of offenders and the suppression of money laundering. These conventions,” he said, “must be implemented in full.”

We endorse the international call on Afghanistan to deliver for trial those accused who now find refuge in that country, and we encourage the United States and the international community to provide the Government of Afghanistan with the evidence gathered and to encourage direct discussions toward the early delivery for trial of the accused. For such appeals to have any prospect for success, they must have the active support of the broad international community, especially states within the region. In the face of the continued and persistent refusal of the Government of Afghanistan to live up to its obligations under international law, the United States and its partners should now go to the Security Council to seek assistance and authority for all international direct interventions needed to apprehend the accused.

We fear that relying on military attacks, some of which are already resulting in the displacement and deaths of civilians, will erode essential regional support and cooperation for the pursuit of the accused, and that a predictable result will be the infliction of widespread damage on an already mutilated Afghanistan, without the successful apprehension of the accused.

Long-term prevention

American, British, and Canadian political leadership, among many others, have emphasized that efforts toward the reduction and eradication of terrorism must be long-term and multi-dimensional. It is highly regrettable, therefore, that states have allowed attention to shift prominently to military measures. The essential non-military character of the struggle against terrorism must be restored.

Addressing the roots of terrorism

The concept of human security which Canada has emphasized in recent years is key to addressing the roots of terrorism. This concept means that the safety and well-being of people must be rooted in political, social and economic conditions and institutions that are sustainable and that have the confidence of the people they are intended to serve. Now, in the face of the menacing threat of terrorism, is not the time to ignore that fundamental reality.

Further, as Foreign Affairs Minister John Manley has recognized, Canada will have to provide increased resources for human development in troubled societies if we are to be effective in helping to build conditions inimical to terrorism. The peacebuilding tools that Canada and others have been developing in the post-Cold War era have much to offer, both for the general campaign against terrorism and for discouraging support for terrorism in particular states such as Afghanistan.

The need for a multilateral approach

The September 11 events demonstrate with extraordinary horror that the world is irreversibly interdependent. Safety for any people or nation is inseparable from the collective safety of the international community itself. Security is mutual. It is the product of cooperation and requires multilateral work. Fortunately, as Secretary-General Annan has noted, the United Nations “provides the forum necessary for building a universal coalition and can ensure global legitimacy for the long-term response to terrorism.”

We call on the United States, and by association Canada, the United Kingdom and others, to make a full, unambiguous commitment to multilateralism by seeking explicit Security Council authorization for multinational intervention in Afghanistan. Without that authority, and without defining the specific, limited objectives that such an authorization should set out, military action will increasingly tend toward the kind of open-ended assault on a vulnerable people that the September 11 terrorists were trying to provoke to advance their own perverse interests.

Our commitments and values

All the elements of the struggle against terrorism -- near term measures to prevent additional attacks, the pursuit, capture and trial of those accused of participating in or sharing responsibility for the September 11 attacks, and long term measures towards the reduction and eradication of terrorism -- must be guided by methods and processes that honour the laws, values and freedoms that terrorism threatens. Canada must work to demilitarise the international struggle against terrorism, and we must resist pressures to curtail immigration, to reduce access to safe havens for refugees, and to change national priorities to increase military spending at the expense of social programs and development assistance.

A fundamental commitment to seek the safety and well-being of all people, from America to Afghanistan and beyond, must be at the core of the campaign against terrorism – a commitment that must now be pursued with new energy and diligence.

Sincerely,

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Chair, Commission on Justice and Peace
Canadian Council of Churches

Dr. Walter Pitman, OC
Chair, Project Ploughshares

Jocelyne Fallu, FDLS
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The Canadian
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Le Conseil canadien
des Églises

founded in 1944

fondé en 1944

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