



*"and they shall beat their
swords into ploughshares,
and spears into pruning
hooks; nation shall not lift
up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war
any more." (Isaiah 2:4)*

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Canadian churches cry NO to Iraq war, urge PM to pursue “genuine” negotiation, and resist pressures for “a new invasion”

(TORONTO) Fifteen prominent church leaders — representing a broad spectrum of Canadian church denominations — as well as the ecumenical peace organization Project Ploughshares and the inter-church justice coalition KAIROS joined together to send an urgent message to Jean Chrétien today, imploring the Prime Minister to resist growing “pressure” in favour of “a new invasion of Iraq”.

“This is a time for intense diplomacy and face-to-face negotiations, not for missiles and high-altitude bombing. This is especially a time for multilateralism,” states a joint letter signed by Bishop Jacques Berthelet, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; Archdeacon Jim Boyles, General Secretary of the Anglican Church of Canada and the Right Rev. Dr. Marion Pardy, Moderator of the United Church of Canada, along with leaders of fourteen other churches and church coalitions.

The churches warn against supporting any United Nations resolution that makes it virtually impossible for Iraq to comply with demands. Such a UN resolution “would be a mere cover for an invasion that might be multinational but would still be unjust”, states the letter.

The Canadian church leaders explain that their decision to send a joint letter to the Prime Minister was prompted by pleas from colleagues in the Middle East to “speak and act against the threat of another war”.

Canadian churches have a long and close relationship with the Middle East Council of Churches, which includes churches in Iraq. Together they have been vocal in denouncing the devastating impact of eleven years of international sanctions against Iraq, sanctions they say have not weakened the oppressive grip of the Saddam Hussein regime but instead hurt ordinary and innocent Iraqi civilians. Canadian church personnel are also engaged in humanitarian relief efforts in Iraq.

Acknowledging that many in Iraq “long and pray for a regime change”, the church leaders emphasize it is “all the more striking” that “voices from that country and region urge us not to bring about a new regime by means of a violent invasion from outside”.

Instead the church leaders call on Prime Minister Chrétien to ensure the Canadian government supports a negotiated, peace-building approach “consistent with international law and taking the common good of Iraq’s people as its starting point”.

“We do not understand how a cataclysm can be averted without genuine negotiation,” continue the church leaders. “Furthermore, negotiations cannot open minds and possibilities if the universe is divided beforehand into two camps, the good and the evil, with ‘our’ side being only good. Such an approach, besides running counter to a Christian sense of sin and grace, reveals an arrogance which can only deepen anger and hostility.”

The church leaders conclude by urging the Prime Minister to press all countries to comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions — since “Iraq is not the only country that stands in violation of them” — and to reconsider onerous compensation obligations imposed on Iraq after the Gulf War.

“There must be economic hope for Iraqi society, for without it Iraqis will not recover the energy they will need to rebuild their country—nor to change their government,” counsel the church leaders. “The world should not repeat the errors of the settlement imposed on Germany after World War I.”

The churches’ letter to Prime Minister Chrétien is signed by:

CHURCH LEADERS:

Bishop Jacques Berthelet, C.S.V., President, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; Right Rev. Dr. Marion Pardy, Moderator, United Church of Canada; Archdeacon Jim Boyles, General Secretary, Anglican Church of Canada; Rev. J. Mark Lewis, Moderator, 128th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada; Rev. Raymond Schultz, National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Dan Nighswander, General Secretary, Mennonite Church Canada; Right Rev. Seraphim, Bishop of Ottawa and Canada, Orthodox Church in America; John Calder, Clerk of the Canadian Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); Rev. F. Tom Rutherford, Regional Minister, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada; Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate, Armenian Orthodox Church, Canadian Diocese; Rev. Dr. Kenneth Bellous, Executive Minister, Baptist Convention of Ontario & Quebec; Rev. Messale Engeda, Presiding Priest, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Western Hemisphere; Very Rev. Anthony Nikolic, Polish National Catholic Church of Canada; Rev. Siebrand Wilts, Stated Clerk, Regional Synod of Canada, Reformed Church in America; Metropolitan Archbishop Wasyly (Fedak), Primate, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada;

ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Dr. Walter Pitman, O.Ont, O.C., Chair, Project Ploughshares; and Jane Orion Smith, Chair, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives.