



ICUJP

c/o THE REGAS INSTITUTE
215 North Marengo Avenue, Third Floor

Pasadena, California 91101

626-683-9004 • icujp@pacbell.net • www.icujp.org

MISSION OF
INTERFAITH COMMUNITIES UNITED
FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

OUR REFLECTIONS ON JUSTICE AND PEACE
JANUARY 2002

Agape International Spiritual Center
All Saints Episcopal Church – Pasadena
American Friends Service Committee
*Baptist Peace Fellowship
of North America*
California Peace Action
Calvary CME Church
*Center for the
Advancement of Nonviolence*
City of Angels URI-LA
*Clergy and Laity United
for Economic Justice*
*Coalition for Justice
in Hawaiian Gardens and Jerusalem*
Coalition For World Peace
Coalition LA
*Environment Justice and Peace –
United Methodist/Interfaith*
*Fellowship of Reconciliation –
Los Angeles*
*Immaculate Heart Community –
Peace and Justice Commission*
Jovenes, Inc
Masjid Ibaabilla
Mobilization for the Human Family
Office of the Americas
One Light International Inc
Pax Christi – Los Angeles
*Physicians for Social Responsibility –
Los Angeles*
*Southern California
Ecumenical Council*
*Southern Christian Leadership
Conference of Los Angeles*
*St. Camillus Catholic Church
for Pastoral Care*
St. Phillips Episcopal Church
The Regas Institute
*United University Church –
Peace Centre, USC*
ZCLA Buddha Essence Temple

Guiding Principles and Purpose

Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace, in which most of the world's great religions are represented, seeks to be an alternative voice to the "war on terrorism." People whose lives are rooted in the sacred stories must be the first and foremost peace advocates, always protesting the misuse of military power to resolve political problems and challenging our blindness to the deeper causes of war and political and military aggression.

As we build a peace movement, with linkages with many faith communities, peace activists, and organizations across the county, our reflections on justice and peace will be a living document.

These reflections represent deep, core values concerning peace and justice. However, our reflections are constantly evolving as we confront new dimensions of this tragic war and seek to articulate an alternative voice with specific calls to action.

The enormity of the evil unleashed on America on September 11 demands a response; and the subsequent acts of biological terrorism have compounded the nation's justifiable need to act to defend her citizens. Unquestionably, we should bring every terrorist to justice. Nevertheless, Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace represents a broad spectrum of people of faith who are deeply troubled and profoundly saddened that the cries for retaliation have taken us into war, further widening the suffering and destruction.

One of the central lessons of September 11 has been to reinforce our obligation to be sober and pragmatic about the reality of evil in the world and our responsibility to eschew a romanticized worldview about human nature and motives. But simultaneously we must not hold naïve notions about the efficacy of military retaliation. In bringing to justice those who are instruments of evil, we should not become the evil we deplore. Neither compounding evil nor remaining passive in its presence.

*"May thy wisdom spread peace all through the world. May all things be a source of peace to all
and to me. Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti" (Hindu Peace Prayer)*



Right now the United States is answering the violence of September 11 with even more massive, calculated and incessant violence. In so doing, our nation is not only causing the death of many innocent people but also breeding more virulent terrorism.

Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace has built its response to the “war on terrorism” on four guiding principles that represent the core of our sacred traditions: (1) the power of love to overcome hatred; (2) the power of mercy to conquer vengeance; (3) the celebration of our common humanity and the sacredness of human life; and (4) our calling to build a just, equitable, and peaceful world.

These principles demand that we not bless war and that we not be silent in the face of an escalating spiral of violence and a voracious and self-perpetuating war-making system. We are compelled to be fierce advocates for peace and justice.

This imperative is at the essence of our self-definition as people of faith. As religious communities, we have the greatest potential for peacemaking of any institution. Our guiding principles demand that in the face of terrorism we mobilize to challenge military solutions – misguided and reactionary strategies that risk unleashing greater destruction globally. Religious communities must lead the peacemaking enterprise and must speak boldly against the glorification of war and military solutions and against policies that degrade our brothers and sisters in the human family and exacerbate suffering.

History has shown clearly that war does not offer the security we all seek. War squanders human talents, resources, and lives and diverts constructive uses of human will, energy, ingenuity, and intelligence to destructive purposes. As a solution to the problems of the 21st century, war is preposterous.

The War Has Not Been Successful

The war against Iraq was claimed successful even though it virtually destroyed that entire country, “the cradle of civilization.” Also we have imposed on Iraq devastating sanctions for the last decade. The results: more than one million people have died and 500,000 of these sacred human beings were children. Is that success?

“Be generous in prosperity and thankful in adversity.” (Bahai)

The big lie back of all killings – whether street gang murders, deaths among Israelis and Palestinians, death at the hands of terrorists on September 11 or deaths in Afghanistan, or the highly efficient and silent deaths from anthrax – the lie behind them all is that the victims deserved to die. Our consciences, shaped by the Divine Spirit, proclaim that when life is cheap and disposable anywhere, life becomes cheap and disposable everywhere. Every human being is of sacred worth – both friend and foe. They bear on themselves the image of the Divine. All are children of God.



This war on terrorism may well destroy the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. But without attending to the causes of war, tens of thousands of replacements will stand in their places. All-out war with Arab Muslims could lead straight to World War III, complete with biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction. At the very least, we can expect a world unsafe for Americans, even here in our own country. Civil liberties and human rights will be lost. If we win, we lose. Our lust for retaliation and the vindication of American triumphalism is proving the truth of the adage that violence can only lead to more virulent violence.

There are deep causes for this conflict. There are just reasons for our attempt to apprehend the terrorists who killed thousands on September 11. But most of these causes should have been dealt with years ago. Imposing deadly sanctions on Iraq, maintaining American troops in Saudi Arabia, not opposing settlements on the West Bank and not calling for a Palestinian state, and continuing our support of antidemocratic dictatorship in the region – all of these have created deep hostility toward America's foreign policy.

This does not excuse Osama bin Laden's vendetta against America. The motivations for terrorism are constantly shifting. The terrorists wanted to kill Americans. However, no pretext can ever excuse the slaughter of innocents, whether Americans in the Twin Towers or Afghan civilians in Central Asia.

Legitimate use of force to apprehend and punish terrorists who have attacked Americans is not the same as widespread violence with its intended and unintended (yet inevitable) lethal consequences. We could have used careful, "restrained," targeted force to seize Osama bin Laden and his co-conspirators and bring them to trial before an international war crimes tribunal.

But, we did not follow this course because America is enthralled by the war system. Racism, sexism, and addiction to greed are part of the American psyche. We are blinded to the ways of peacemaking. We refused to look for nonviolent, nonlethal ways to respond with integrity to the horrific tragedies of September 11 because a vast majority of Americans truly believe we can "win."

Modern war inevitably means the killing of innocent civilians – women and children. In war today innocent people are always mingled among combatants. We write them off as "collateral damage," as if real people were not involved

"Whoever kills a person for no other reason than punishment for murder or corruption on the earth would be as though he killed all mankind. And whoever saves one person, it would be as though he saved all mankind." (The Quran)

We watch as the full military resources of the world's greatest military power destroy one of the world's poorest nations, devastating an entire section of its population, and we are told that this war is very successful.

Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace does not regard the war as a success. We say it is immoral. We will devote our efforts to stopping the war, restoring the destroyed countries and bringing justice to an impoverished people.



Strategic Initiatives for Peace

Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace proposes seven strategic initiatives that we believe are constructive and effective, rather than destructive and exacerbating, steps toward peace over the long term in the face of organized terrorism and the current U.S. “war on terrorism.”

1. Stop the bombing

As became abundantly clear during the Persian Gulf War, “smart bombs” rarely hit their intended military targets. Seventy percent of all bombs dropped on Iraq missed their targets. This pattern is being repeated now in Afghanistan, devastating civilian targets and exacting the punishing toll on unwitting citizens.

Moreover, U.S. aerial bombardment in Afghanistan has exacerbated humanitarian problems. In addition to millions of Afghans facing famine before the war, more than half a million are now fleeing the bombing and seeking refuge in Pakistan. American cargo planes dropping food supplies cannot mitigate this problem and cannot guarantee that the poorest and most vulnerable will find safe havens and even the merest subsistence. It is shameful for America, the wealthiest country in the world, to be pummeling one of poorest nations, thereby precipitating a great human tragedy and aggravating human suffering.

Refusing to be part of an enterprise that contributes to more deaths and the deepening of human suffering, Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace proposes a cessation of all bombing in Afghanistan, and in the continued search for Osama bin Laden and other terrorists responsible for the September 11th tragedy.

We do so in order to advance humanitarian relief of an already devastated population, through, for instance, the United Nations’ organized food-relief efforts. We also urge the U.S. to substantially increase its contributions of food and medicine in this effort and to support with direct aid the efforts to accommodate Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

2. Support international peacekeepers and a world court

The heinous crimes of September 11 require the collective response of the nations of the world as together they seek to thwart terrorism without provoking a wider war and its counterproductive consequences. The United Nations is currently the only body prepared and empowered to act on behalf of the world community, and as such it should respond vigorously and strategically against terror with the full political, moral, and financial support of the United States but without the preemptive and unilateral control of the United States.

We support the creation of an effective peacekeeping police force under the control of the United Nations that will be defensive and capable of being quickly deployed to serve as a strong protective shield in strife-torn areas of the world.

We also support the use of the World Court as the appropriate judicial body to conduct inquiries and trials of those accused of international terrorism. Models already exist for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.



3. Rid the world of weapons of mass destruction

The terrorist attacks of September 11 have prompted the citizens of this nation and its leaders to contemplate the horrific possibility that the next time the weapon of terror could be nuclear. Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace is therefore committed to a comprehensive global effort to rid the world of all weapons of mass destruction.

Before September 11 the Bush Administration embraced an international strategy in which it acted unilaterally and without consideration of world opinion in regard to this nation's manufacture, proliferation, and deployment of weapons – nuclear, biological, and chemical.

We support adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, wherein the U.S. and other leading nuclear powers are enjoined to work toward general and complete disarmament.

Out of a deep concern for the health and well-being of citizens at home and members of the human family abroad, we support several other initiatives in U.S. foreign policy that would eliminate weapons of mass destruction, as described in Appendix A.

“Let the day come when we turn to the lord of peace, when all are a single family doing God’s will with a perfect heart.” (Jewish Shabbat Meditation)

4. Ensure economic justice for all citizens and all nations in the name of human solidarity

Creating a world safe from terrorists entails creating a world where the seedbeds of poverty, desperation, and powerlessness are eradicated. Dire political, economic, and social conditions breed terrorists and enable the easy recruitment of the desperate to undertake desperate measures against those who are deemed the cause of oppression.

We must become the world's leader in ensuring economic, political, and social justice for the world's people. Our sacred traditions demand that we treat our fellow human beings with dignity and generosity, mercy and love. Therefore, the defeat of terrorism requires that the United States be a champion of justice – helping to feed the world's hungry, house and educate the poor, and ensure equity to the workers of the world. As the heroes of September 11 demonstrated, we must build a new world based on generosity, caring, and selflessness.

Federal spending priorities militate against humane solutions to the difficult and complex problems of the world. Priority is given to programs that perpetuate and feed a seemingly insatiable war system. The hundreds of billions of dollars expended in the name of national security is a criminal waste of resources. President Eisenhower's words ring as true today as they did fifty years ago: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who are hungry and not fed, those who are cold and not clothed.”

Despite common perceptions to the contrary, the U.S. directs very little money to foreign aid – currently only one-tenth of 1 percent of our GNP, less than any other industrialized nation. By contrast, the United States outspends the rest of the world *combined* on its military budget. The prophetic traditions of our religious communities harshly condemn this dangerous and unjust imbalance in our priorities.



In this interconnected world, our prosperity and freedom increasingly depend on the successful development of countries like Afghanistan, where income per capita is less than \$1 per day and 20 percent of the people are illiterate.

“Lord, make us instruments of thy peace.” (Saint Francis of Assisi)

Winning the war on global poverty will require a more substantial commitment of resources from the developing nations over many years than the present war on terrorism. According to World Bank estimates, development assistance must more than double, to around \$100 billion per year, to achieve the U.N. goal of cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015.

This scale of assistance would be enough to eliminate many of the problems at the root of poverty in the developing world – lack of health care and nutrition and the lack of education so essential for freedom in the modern world.

In addition to this, assistance can take the form of the U.S. and other wealthy nations forgiving the debts owed to them by developing countries on the condition that they pursue sound economic policies.

If the U.S. commits itself to economic and social justice, we will do far more to ensure the safety of our children and ourselves than the bombing of nations we label terrorist ever would.

5. Ensure economic justice for all in the U.S., especially America’s children

On the domestic front, the U.S. has no better record for its spending priorities. Social expenditures on education, housing, health care, worker training and retraining – real matters that affect real people – are eclipsed by a grossly overblown military budget and the oft-shrouded subsidies and bailouts of wealthy corporations and the corporate-leader elite echelon at the expense of workers, and, now, the newly unemployed. The refusal of the U.S. Congress to provide unemployment and other benefits for those who have lost their jobs due to the terrorist acts of September 11 is a grotesque and cynical betrayal of this nation’s citizens.

a. Justice for children

The first priority of any civilization is the care of its children – to prevent needless suffering in the ranks of the vulnerable and blameless and give them wholeness of life. In a profound sense, the ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world it creates for its children.

What we have allowed to happen to children in America is scandalous to a moral people and violates all of our sacred stories. One-fifth of our children grow up poor, one-third grows up ignorant and millions are afflicted with poor health and without medical insurance.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be known as the children of God.” (Christian Beatitude)



America has enjoyed unprecedented growth in wealth over the last two decades, but poverty among children has also grown. Forty percent of those described as poor in this, the richest country in history, are children. Those who favor perpetuating the war economy must face the stark reality that the poorest citizens in America are our children. A society whose children are its poorest citizens loses every claim to greatness.

We will push relentlessly for public policies that give priority to the well-being of children.

b. Justice for workers

The so-called economic stimulus package that the House passed and that is now being considered by the Senate in conference, would have been scandalous in times of prosperity. But in this time of national crisis, it is, quite simply, grotesque.

Congress asserts that big corporate giveaway measures are the best ways to create jobs. Unfortunately, the facts don't bear this out. When Congress voted \$15 billion in aid and loan guarantees for airline companies, there was not a penny for the 140,000 airline workers who had lost their jobs.

It says something very clearly about the moral sensibilities of Congress when the House passes an economic stimulus bill that contains almost nothing for the unemployed, but includes \$25 billion in retroactive tax cuts to corporations, most of them already highly profitable.

Add to this the projected budget surplus for the next decade, which has declined by \$3 trillion. One half of this decline in the projected surplus over the next ten years is due to the June 2001 tax cut which disproportionately benefited the rich in this nation; and one-fourth of the decline is from proposed increases in military spending.

We call for the United States to be a moral superpower and create in this land the good society by ensuring universal health care, quality education for everyone, affordable housing for our people, guaranteed decent/livable wages, and a clean environment.

Then we can proclaim "United We Stand" with our destinies inseparably tied together, rich and poor.

"We are visitors on this planet. . . . If you contribute to other people's happiness, you will find the true goal, the true meaning of life." (The Dalai Lama)

6. Protect civil liberties

Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace believes that the protection of civil liberties at home and human rights throughout the world is a fundamental value that must not suffer from the great tragedy of September 11. We must keep freedom alive by repudiating and quelling the fears and the reactionary legislative and judicial measures that erode civil liberties.

It has been said that the first casualties of war are liberty and truth. History teaches us that in times of war and national crisis, public fears and the authoritarian instincts of governments fuel each other, leading to repressive measures against those who oppose or question authority. Already we have seen signs of the suppression of dissent and intensified incursions of the government into private communication.



Recently approved “anti-terrorism” legislation poses grave danger to civil liberties. The USA Patriot Act of 2001 creates a broadly defined new crime of domestic terrorism and sweeps in people who engage in acts of political protest if the government determines those acts are “dangerous to human life.” Under these new definitions of threat to U.S. security, activists in movements such as anti-globalization and environmental protection could be subject to persecution as terrorists. Broad latitude has now been granted for wiretapping, organizational infiltration, secret searches, personal record searches, and e-mail and computer surveillance. These incursions into the right of privacy threaten to undermine the ideals on which the United States was founded and operates – freedom of speech and of assembly, freedom from discrimination, freedom from secret courts based on secret evidence, and freedom from selective seizure of charitable assets without due process.

In the struggle against terrorism, we must not sacrifice the civil liberties that have distinguished this nation through the centuries. President Bush’s plan to use secret military tribunals to try terrorists is a travesty of justice.

7. Guard human rights

Already retaliation for the September 11 attacks has led the United States to betray principles of human rights – as witnessed, for instance, in the administration’s lifting of the prohibition on assassinations of foreign leaders.

We believe that allies in the fight against terrorism must not use the crimes of September 11 as an excuse to engage in domestic campaigns against political opponents. Neither the U.S. government nor international agencies should be allowed to take advantage of the current crisis to justify or intensify crackdowns on political opponents or religious groups or to advance unwarranted or punitive policies against refugees, asylum-seekers, and other foreigners.

In the effort to guard human rights, the U.S. must support countries’ international obligations to receive legitimate refugees and must provide financial assistance to help them cope with emergency survival needs and resettlements.

The U.S. must also denounce or refuse to assist any group or nation that violates fundamental human rights, even if they are considered allies. For instance, abuses by the Northern Alliance have included massacres in the province of Jowzjan, torture of civilians, especially women and children, and the recruitment of child soldiers. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia practice systematic violation of women’s rights, and implicitly and explicitly endorse sexual assault and brutality. The U.S. must not condone or aid these groups.

Likewise, we believe that the rights of immigrants must not be trampled in the current climate of xenophobia. The new anti-terrorism legislation permits the attorney general to incarcerate or detain noncitizens based on mere suspicion, and to deny re-entry to the U.S. of noncitizens (including green-card holders) for engaging in speech that is otherwise guaranteed by the First Amendment. Already the U.S. government has detained thousands with little legal or national-security justification. We cannot allow our fears to triumph over our ideals of liberty.

Conclusion

We call upon people of faith to join us in this challenging endeavor to build a new world in which terrorism finds no home and in which, as our sacred traditions demand, we treat our fellow human beings with dignity and generosity, mercy and love, and embrace our calling to be the world’s preeminent champions of peace and justice.



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Violence cannot yield peace. Peace is a result only of peaceableness. This is not passivity. Indeed, it is an active, courageous, rational, and intelligent response to violence, a response that explores and offers alternatives to the destructive and ultimately ineffectual means typically employed to resolve complex global problems. The Divine Spirit that, as members of religious communities, we serve, worship, and look to for guidance calls this nation to use its considerable gifts to answer violence, terrorism, and brutality without resorting to greater violence. We trust this Divine Spirit to strengthen, guide, and sustain us in this mission.

*"Peace on earth, peace on earth, shanti, salam, shalom. Peace on earth, peace on earth, shanti, salam, shalom."
(Alison Hubbard, words, Kim Oler, music, sung at many of our interfaith services)*

Appendix A

Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace support the following initiatives in foreign policy, aimed at the eradication of weapons of mass destruction:

Swiftly implement new inspection protocols and other reforms to the Biological Weapons Treaty

When amending the ABM treaty, the U.S. and Russia should paramountly consider China's security needs as well

Adhere to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; only then might Pakistan, India, and Israel (like South Africa before them) move to eliminate their nuclear arsenals

Support the Bush-Putin plan to enact deep cuts in strategically deployed nuclear weapons

Adhere to the nuclear testing moratorium; and ratify in the Senate the previously negotiated Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Forsake development of new nuclear weapons

Increase American investment in the Nunn-Lugar program, which uses American resources and technology to deactivate Russian nuclear activities

De-alert nuclear arms – remove warheads from delivery vehicles, allowing a cool-down period to prevent the accidental launch of weapons.

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