

Behind the news: Visions for peace – Voices of faith

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Providing church, ecumenical and interfaith information, resources, and analysis on issues of current global concern

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1. Background

In response to the threatening global situation in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States, Action by Churches Together (ACT), the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), have set up a short-term response mechanism to offer a selection of statements, useful information, thought-provoking reflections, and worship resources which might aid churches in responding to the unfolding situation. This weekly bulletin contains summaries and references to selected resources that can be found through our web site at <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews>. There is additional information on the web site than may not necessarily be referred to in the bulletin.

Please feel free to share this bulletin widely by e-mail and in hard copy. We apologize if you are receiving duplicate copies of this bulletin due to the multiple distribution lists we are using. We appreciate feedback on what you find helpful and what other information you may need. Please contact us at: bulletins@wcc-coe.org

2. Statements and actions of the global church and ecumenical family

a) The Statement of Metropolitan Theodosius and the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America immediately following the 11 September attacks is available at: <http://www.oca.org/pages/news/news.asp?ID=46>

b) The sermon preached by Archpriest Michael Fortounatto of the Russian Orthodox Church in London on 16 September 2001 is available at: <http://www.sourozh.org/sermons/MFsermon.htm>

c) An article by Jim Forest of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship is available at: <http://www.incommunion.org/resources/sept11.htm>

d) In a press release on Human Rights Day, 10 December, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) expressed concern that human rights should be upheld in difficult political situations. The EKD stated that human rights should be the basis for all international laws coping with the challenges of the attacks from September 11. Keeping in mind there are still a huge number of states where discrimination, racism and torture are everyday events, the EKD is alarmed that voices are calling to cut

human rights in order to defeat terrorism. But there also signs of hope. The work of human rights groups world-wide deserves respect, and shows a way for the process in Afghanistan. The EKD expresses trust in the government agreement of the Bonn conference, and emphasizes the importance of respecting human rights for all groups while rebuilding Afghanistan. For more information on the EKD, see:

<http://www.ekd.de/>

3. Responses from other faith communities

a) In a Chanukah message sent on 9 December, Rabbi Michael Lerner highlights a text chosen for the Haftorah for Shabbat of Chanukah: "Not by might, and not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord who has ultimate power." He reflects on the current situation in Afghanistan and the attacks of September 11, and on the current situation between Israelis and Palestinians. "What a different world it would be if we were to act with dedication to saving human life... But we have not learned that the anger which brought the attacks of Sept 11th had everything to do with our insensitivity to the pain of people around the world. We have not yet learned that it is the spirit of economic and political justice combined with love and open-hearted generosity that will provide us with the best chance of security." <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us125.html>

4. Humanitarian concerns

a) There is growing concern that Afghan refugees in Afghanistan and Iran will be encouraged – or forced – to return to Afghanistan soon, although conditions remain difficult. Hiram Ruiz of the US Committee for Refugees, assesses the political pressures on the refugees to return and the possible negative consequences of a repatriation scheme carried out too hastily.

<http://www.merip.org/pins/pin78.html>

b) There is also concern that Afghan refugees in Pakistan being moved to camps closer to the Afghanistan border are not necessarily going voluntarily. More than 3,000 refugees have been moved so far.

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/12/Afreloc1205.htm>

Human Rights Watch has collected the testimonies from some of these refugees which are available at:

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/12/afghtestimony1205.htm>

c) Afghan refugees make up the world's largest refugee population and constitute 3.6 million or 30 percent of the total 12 million of global refugee population. (This figure does not include internally displaced persons.) In her article, "A Journey for Survival", Eileen Kiran Laldin of the Disaster Response Program of Church World Service, Pakistan/Afghanistan narrates and illustrates the daily suffering being experienced by the millions of people in Afghanistan.

http://www.faithandvalues.com/text_viewer.asp?PageName=tx/00/00/03/37/3708/index.html

d) A report from Church World Service representatives in Pakistan and Afghanistan documents the reasons for displacement of the Hazara ethnic minority in the Central Highlands (Hazarajat) in Afghanistan. The forced displacement is a part of the Taliban scorched-earth tactics and counter-insurgency operations. A new wave has

come from Kabul after the September 11th tragedy and many are returnees from Iran. Most of the IDPs are still sleeping in the open despite the freezing temperatures at night and few have any sense of where they should could go.

http://www.faithandvalues.com/text_viewer.asp?Pagename=tx/00/00/03/37/3709/index.html. See also: <http://www.churchworldservice.org/index.html>

e) Action by Churches Together (ACT) international information officer Paul Jeffrey writes that Afghans must be in the driver's seat of reconstruction efforts. As the Afghan delegation at the United Nations- (UN) sponsored conference in Germany agreed on an interim plan for governing their violence-torn homeland, members of ACT International geared up for an expanded role in rebuilding the Central Asian nation. Staff of Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Christian Aid (CA), both members of ACT, participated in a November 27-29 "Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction," held in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Sponsored by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and the Asian Development Bank, the meeting was a preliminary discussion of long-term plans to aid Afghanistan's long-term reconstruction, a task that World Bank officials privately estimated could cost as high as \$25 billion.

http://act-intl.org/news/dt_nr_2001/dtafghan2101.html

f) For an overview of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, visit ACT International's website at: <http://www.act-intl.org/>

ACT's response in Afghanistan and Pakistan is also well documented with photographs that can be found at: <http://www.photookoumene.org/act-news/actnews.html>

g) The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) regularly submits updated situation reports on Afghanistan to the Reliefweb site. The latest report can be found at:

<http://navigation.helper.realnames.com/framer/1/262/default.asp?realname=ReliefWeb&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.notes%2Ereliefweb%2Eint%2F&frameid=1&providerid=262&uid=30009267>

h) In its most recent humanitarian update (No. 44), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) includes information on the return of people from Iran back to Afghanistan and fresh aid being delivered to the displaced people of Herat. You can find this information at the following site:

<http://navigation.helper.realnames.com/framer/1/262/default.asp?realname=ReliefWeb&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.notes%2Ereliefweb%2Eint%2F&frameid=1&providerid=262&uid=30009267>

i) The Norwegian Refugee Council is a voluntary organization involved in international refugee work. <http://www.nrc.no/engindex.htm>

j) The Global IDP project, an information management service on internally displaced persons worldwide, offers links and information on Afghanistan, which include profile summaries, causes and background of displacement, patterns of displacement, humanitarian access and an extensive collection of maps:

<http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wCountries/Afghanistan>

k) As Afghan leaders meet in Bonn to discuss their country's future, Christian Aid's emergencies manager, Nick Guttman, reports on the agency's Afghan partners' views about what should happen next. All Christian Aid's Afghan partners say that the most important issue for them is the progress towards a multi-ethnic, broad-based government in Kabul that has the support of all communities within Afghanistan. Without this, they say, the security needed for the effective distribution of vital humanitarian aid will not be possible.

<http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/news/features/0111afgh.htm>

5. Contributions to the current debate

a) Janet Jai writes in the *Christian Science Monitor* about the largest gathering of Nobel Peace Prize laureates ever, which was held in Oslo, Norway this past week, and recounts the views of Nobel laureates on what lies beyond September 11.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1210/p7s1-wogi.html>

b) Shlomo Avineri writes in *The Jerusalem Post* (14 November) of the need for an Arab Marshall Plan: “What is it - not in Islam, but in the realities of the Arab world - that drives so many young, relatively well-educated people, to such acts of criminality? Since September 11, pundits and scholars have pointed to poverty as one of the causes of terrorism. Yes, poverty is among the causes for Islamic fundamentalist terrorism: but it is not the gap between the West and the Third World which is crucial here, but the internal Arab gap. After all, the Arab region is home to some of the richest countries of the world, living next door to some of the poorest Arab societies. In the 1950s and 1960s, such gaps would turn young people to communism or Nasserism. These options are not relevant anymore - so they turn to extremist Islam.”

<http://www.jpost.com/Editions/2001/11/14/Opinion/Opinion.38072.html>

c) A nationwide survey of 1,500 adults in the United States by the Pew Research Center, in collaboration with the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, finds broad agreement among all demographic and religious groups that religion now occupies a more important place in American life. Yet this dramatic shift has not been matched by an increase in attendance at religious services - nor is there much evidence that religion is playing a larger role in Americans' *personal* lives at this time. The September 11 attacks have increased the prominence of religion in the United States to an extraordinary degree, but not at the expense of acceptance of religious minorities. Fully 78% now say religion's influence in American life is growing - up from 37% eight months ago and the highest mark on this measure in surveys dating back four decades. At the same time, the public has a better opinion of Muslim-Americans than it did before the attacks. Favorable views of Muslim-Americans have risen from 45% in March to 59% today, even though 40% of the public think the terrorists were motivated at least in part by religion when they carried out the attacks.

<http://www.people-press.org/120601rpt.htm>

d) The Pluralism Project at Harvard University was founded to study and document the growing religious diversity of the United States, with a special view to its new immigrant religious communities. How Americans of all faiths begin to engage with one another in shaping a positive pluralism is one of the most important questions American society faces in the years ahead. The Project's website includes a news report relevant to the consequences of September 11. See “In the News: In the Wake

of September 11 – Religious Dimensions” at <http://www.pluralism.org/news/index.php?xref=In+the+Wake+of+September+11> or <http://www.pluralism.org>

e) In *America* (8 October), a magazine founded by Jesuits of the United States, prominent Roman Catholic ethicist J. Bryan Hehir reflects on "What Can Be Done? What Should Be Done?" and concludes, "Finally, a measured response to transnational terrorism cannot be primarily a military response. Deeper issues than the use of force lie beneath terrorist actions. Those deeper issues involve politics, religion, economics and culture. They raise questions of justice and injustice, global integration and the determination of whole cultures to preserve their identity, customs and convictions. They are about what people are willing to live for and what they are willing to die for. They do involve fanaticism and convictions not contained in standard discourse about interests and ends. Addressing those issues is the long-term dimension of understanding and defeating terrorism. No single state can do this; a transnational threat requires an international response. We can and should be part of this; we cannot be simply in charge, telling others what to do. As a nation we have some learning to do." <http://www.americapress.org/articles/hehir-terror.htm>
America also provides a collection of articles on the consequences of 11 September on their website at:

<http://www.americapress.org/terror.htm>

f) In "Deported... Disappeared?" Amy Bach relates in *The Nation* the tragic story of Ghassan Dahduli, a Palestinian with a Jordanian passport and leader of the Islamic Association for Palestine, an Illinois-based nonprofit with an office in Texas known by the FBI for its alleged ties to Hamas. Ghassan Dahduli is one of the many persons who has been detained after the attacks of September 11. His wife has lived 23 years in the US and his five children are all US citizens. All left the United States for Jordan to follow Ghassan who has preferred to be deported since he refused to be an informant for the FBI. Ghassan Dahduli is now in Jordan where none of his family has the possibility to meet him. Several human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, do not exclude that he could be tortured.

<http://www.thenation.com/docPrint.mhtml?i=20011224&s=bach>

g) Robert Fisk reports another tragic story, which happened to himself last week in Kila Abdullah near the Afghan-Pakistan border on his way back from his coverage of Mazar-i-Sharif massacres. In "My beating by refugees is a symbol of the hatred and fury of this filthy war", the Middle East correspondent of *The Independent* describes how he was beaten and severely injured by a furious crowd of refugees. After this traumatic event, where dozens of angry men were near to lynching him with stones, Robert Fisk still tries to understand the resentment of his assailants who had in memory recent television images of war crimes committed in Mazar-i-Sharif during the - holy - month of Ramadan. "I couldn't blame them for what they were doing. In fact, if I were the Afghan refugees of Kila Abdullah, close to the Afghan-Pakistan border, I would have done just the same to Robert Fisk. Or any other Westerner I could find."

http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia_china/story.jsp?dir=71&story=109257&host=3&printable=1

h) Michael T. Klare's comment, Wars Without End, published in *The Nation* anticipates the next US punitive military actions which will follow the war in Afghanistan. After an easy victory in Afghanistan and despite the fact that the war

objective No.1 - the killing or the capture Bin Laden - has still not been achieved, the general feeling is that massive bombings work and can be the panacea for future US military actions. The Pentagon, which has the support of an overwhelming majority of the American public, is eager to look for new adversaries. An expanded war against terrorism, with so many options and fronts envisaged (Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Philippines, Lebanon, West Bank, Syria, Iran and Northern Korea), argues Klare, will lead the United States to be involved in "one uncontrollable conflagration after another". The author denounces a military campaign which would go beyond the destruction of Al Qaeda. He also fears a growing resistance from local populations affected in a way or another by future US military operations. A wider war against terrorism, as it is currently promoted by some strategists and politicians, could expose the United States, its soldiers and its citizens, to more deadly violence and more irreducible enemies all around the world.

<http://www.thenation.com/docPrint.mhtml?i=20011224&s=klare>

i) The recent fortune of the Arabic word 'Jihad' is stunning many Muslims intellectuals. One of them, Farish A. Noor, a political scientist and a human rights activist, member of the Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) in Malaysia, explores the different meanings of this word in "The Evolution of 'Jihad' in Islamist Political Discourse: How a Plastic Concept Became Harder". Published on the web site of the Social Science Research Council (New York), this article seeks to track the original semantic context and the precise theological justification of this concept. The author reminds readers that 'Jihad' means 'to struggle', 'to expand effort' and the term is not linked to political or military violence. Noor reports that the Prophet Muhammad himself described the 'greater Jihad' as a personal, internal, existential struggle with one's self and the 'lesser Jihad' as a struggle for self-defence. It is the latter which has been popularized and its meaning has been distorted, due to its political interpretation by Islamist leaders and the international media hype which has contributed to propagate an erroneous comprehension of the 'Jihad'. Farish A. Noor calls for a 'Jihad' which will overcome ignorance, poverty and injustice within the Muslim world.

<http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/noor.htm>

6. Resources for study and worship

a) The report and background papers of the World Council of Churches meeting, "Beyond September 11: Assessing Global Implications" held 29 November-1 December are now available at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/11sep-mtg.html>

b) Faith in the Face of Terror brought leaders of Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith groups together to address some of the troubling questions that have vexed people of faith since the morning of September 11. Where was God in that moment of darkness? Now that battle is joined, whose side is God on? How does faith respond in the face of terror? Faith in the Face of Terror took place in Washington D.C. October 22. For more information on this resource, click on <http://www.faithandvalues.com/tx/00/00/03/35/3555/index.html>

c) Words have great power and often are used without full reflection on their meanings. Each week the Presbyterian Church of the USA introduces some words for discussion and reflection at their site:

http://www.faithandvalues.com/text_viewer.asp?PageName=tx/00/00/03/36/3665/index.html

d) Prayer ideas and useful quotations about prayer, for worship leaders - Praying with Christian Aid: <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/worship/reflect/pray1.htm>

e) US Lutheran bishop Stephen Bowman has written a reflection on “Espere la Luz” – wait for the light - which ties together Advent reflections with the current suffering still going on in New York. He notes that “We are just so sad right now. We can still smell our brothers and sisters in the rubble.” “How lonely sits the city that once was full of people; she weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks” (Lamentations 1: 1a, 2a) He closes with the entreaty, “Even so, Lord quickly come. Come, Lord Jesus. Espere la luz.” http://www.metronysynod.com/from_bishop_bouman.htm

f) Dr Janice Love’s sermon “Jesus is coming: are we ready?”, from 2 December, asks “What would it mean to love our enemies at a time of war this Advent?” She notes that “in their deep desire to provide pastoral responses to a wounded and grieving public, groups like the United Methodist Council of Bishops and the governing board of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA argue that now is not the time to call for justice with peace, for an end to this war.” But she asserts that “It is *exactly* the deeply personal character of our national experience since September 11 that invites us to reach into the depths of our faith tradition to say: *no more violence.*” <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/analysis25.html>

7. Calls for action

a) The *International Herald Tribune* on-line has published the statement of an extensive group of Nobel prize winners. The statement itself was "some time in the making" and was written before September 11. The laureates note that the "terrorization of civilian populations has, for too long, been a horrifying aspect of the global scene. The time has come to end it. This will require a reshaping of relations within the human family. Our statement, addressed to the long term, is a plea for just such a reassessment of our obligations to one another." <http://www.ihf.com/articles/41437.html>

b) Seventeen Nobel Peace Laureates also made an appeal on December 10 in Oslo that calls for the "prompt establishment of the International Criminal Court and full implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including economic, social, and cultural as well as civil and political rights", and pledges support for the "unrelenting, patient, and non-violent pursuit of peace wherever conflicts may rage today or tomorrow, such as the Middle East, Colombia, or the Great Lakes of Africa". The appeal concludes: "We call on the human family to address the root causes of violence and build a culture of peace and hope. We know that another world is possible, a world of justice and peace. Together we can make it a reality." http://www.ipb.org/nobel_peace_laureates_centennial.htm

Behind the news: Visions for Peace – Voices of Faith is a joint initiative of:

World Council of Churches (WCC) - a fellowship of 342 churches, in more than 100 countries in all continents from virtually all Christian traditions. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member church but works cooperatively with the WCC. The highest governing body is the Assembly, which meets approximately every seven years. The WCC was formally inaugurated in 1948 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance - a global action network of 62 churches and church-related organizations who have pledged themselves to change unjust policies and practices related to global trade and HIV/AIDS, and to take up as a special concern work on peace and conflict resolution by forging strategic partnership. Alliance participants come from every corner of the globe and varied traditions within the ecumenical family – Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican, as well as church-related organizations who themselves represent and serve many Christian faith traditions. Alliance participants are committed to speak out with one voice against injustice and structures which deprive human beings of dignity, and for alternative visions based on the Gospel.

Action by Churches Together (ACT) - an international alliance of churches and relief agencies assisting thousands of people recovering from emergencies in more than 50 countries worldwide.

This bulletin/website is intended to provide an ecumenical space for visions for peace and voices of faith; these materials do not necessarily reflect official policy of WCC, ACT, or EAA.

Please circulate the Bulletin to friends, colleagues and people who are looking for alternative perspectives on the current situation.

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