

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

1. Response to attacks on church in Bahawalpur, Pakistan

The attack on St Dominic’s Church in Bahawalpur, Pakistan, on October 28 led churches in many countries to express their support and continuing concerns for Christian minorities in many parts of the world. Pope John Paul II issued a statement condemning the massacre and expressing condolences to the families of the victims. Catholic Bishop Francis of Multan diocese immediately visited the church after the massacre; an interview with him is available, as is a report of Pope John Paul II’s remarks at: <http://www.zenit.org/english/>

The World Council of Churches’ acting general secretary Georges Lemopoulos wrote to General Pervaiz Musharaf, president of the Republic of Pakistan, expressing deep concern over the attack in Bahawalpur which resulted in the deaths of 17 Christians, and about the "safety and security of the Christian minority in the present highly charged environment of religious intolerance". (<http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/01/37pu.html>).

Condolences were sent by many churches and organizations, including the National Council of Churches in India which affirms its solidarity with the National Council of

Churches in Pakistan in this hour of crisis. (<http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us121.html>).

M. Abdus Sabur, secretary general of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN), expressed AMAN's shock and sadness of the attack in Bahawalpur. "We condemn this heinous crime and call upon the government of Pakistan to bring those responsible to justice. We pray for the victims and our heartfelt condolence goes to the aggrieved families. We call upon the faith-based communities in Pakistan to work together in this difficult time and sustain the spirit to promote the culture of peace."

The Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) has published a detailed account of the attack in St Dominic's church in Bahawalpur, Pakistan (<http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us123.html>). More information is available on CLAAS at <http://www.angelfire.com/id/claas>.

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

a) Representatives of World Council of Churches' member churches will travel to the United States 8-14 November as a "living letter" of compassion to the churches and people of the USA. The purpose of the visit, which begins in New York, is "to express the solidarity and compassion of the worldwide ecumenical fellowship" to US churches and to "discern together what 11 September and subsequent events mean for the witness of the churches" in the US and elsewhere. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/01/41pre.html>

b) On October 23, His Holiness Aram I, Armenian Apostolic Church (Cilicia) appealed to all nations, religions and civil society actors to come together to overcome the global forces of terror and death. He further stated that "while military strikes may contain terrorism, they cannot eradicate terrorism", and that leaders should therefore pursue a preventive approach. See "The role of religion is crucial in combating terrorism" at <http://www.cathcil.org/v04/index.htm>

c) Rev. Prof. James Haire, president of the United Church of Australia, issued a pastoral letter on 22 October at the time of the deployment of members of the Australian Defence Forces in Afghanistan. The text of his letter can be found at: <http://nat.uca.org.au/President/Presidentletter221001.pdf>

d) The Religious Society of Friends in Australia has written two letters to Australian prime minister John Howard, expressing concerns about the military action and particular concerns about the deployment of Australian troops. Friends at the local and state levels have also written letters to political leaders and organized various events. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us131.html> and <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us120.html>

e) Church leaders in Aotearoa/New Zealand issued a joint statement on terrorist attacks in the US which calls on New Zealanders to put their faith in God and turn away from hatred. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us118.html>

f) The Anglican Church of Australia's National Diocesan Social Issues Network has produced a background document on the aftermath of 11 September and encouraged

the dioceses to use it in preparing their own media releases and statements. Visit the Church's website at <http://www.anglican.org.au>

g) The general board of the Church of the Brethren adopted a Resolution on the Events and Aftermath of September 11, 2001, which calls for the immediate cessation of military action against Afghanistan, expresses concern about the mixing of humanitarian aid with military action, and calls on the US government and on their churches to give greater attention to global inequalities in quality of life. <http://www.brethren.org/genbd/GBResolutions/9-11-2001.htm>.

h) The board of directors of Justice and Witness Ministries, a covenanted ministry of the United Church of Christ, released a statement on the current situation on October 28. "We are called to offer a word of peace in a time of war and we are called to express our patriotism through our faithfulness and to what we know about biblical justice," the board writes. <http://www.ucc.org/jwm/911board.htm>

i) Peter Widerud, international director of the Church of Sweden, called for an end to the bombing of Afghanistan. He also emphasized the need to bring those responsible for the terrorist acts to justice, in order to uphold the principle of individual responsibility as well as avoiding the risk of demonizing whole groups, peoples or cultures. Speaking at a rally for peace on 24 October, UN Day, Mr Weiderud put the issue of terrorism in the broader context of the on-going struggle for peace and justice, saying that we can no longer accept an economic world order where, for example, the three richest individuals are wealthier than the 48 poorest nations. He emphasized that humanitarian assistance must stay free and neutral in relation to the conduct of the war so that it can best meet the needs of the most vulnerable people. Available in Swedish at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us119.html>

g) The WCC Latin American Regional Group (FOCER) met in Santo Domingo from 18-20 October and issued a statement on the present situation. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us115.html>

h) Before praying the midday Angelus with the thousands of pilgrims gathered in St Peter's Square, Pope John Paul II entrusted the people of Afghanistan to "the maternal protection of the Most Holy Virgin". "May innocent lives be spared, and may the international community give timely and effective help to so many refugees, exposed to privations of all kinds as the inclement season approaches," the Pope implored. John Paul II also remembered "those who continue to suffer violence and death in the Holy Land, particularly in the Holy Places, so dear to the Christian faith". "May Mary, Queen of Peace, help all to lay down their arms and finally begin resolutely on the path toward a just and lasting peace," the Pope concluded.

i) The Vatican news service reports that Renato Martino, Holy See permanent observer to the United Nations, spoke before the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on Item 87, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine. He linked the tragedy of 11 September in New York to the on-going tragedy in the Middle East. He appealed "for greater international solidarity and the political will to meet the challenge of the seemingly unending violence in the region. The arms manufacturers of the world have the region awash in weapons. These weapons help to fuel the fire of violence throughout the entire area. Further, my delegation appeals to the international community to assist in bringing a just

resolution to the differences between the peoples of the Holy Land, who are all cousins in the Abrahamic faith."

j) The Church World Service Interfaith Trauma Response Team organized the first in a series of trainings for New York-area clergy and caregivers seeking to meet the long- and short-term challenges posed by the 11 September attacks. The training was led by a team of three Oklahoma City professionals in both theology and counselling psychology. The report of the training, available at <http://www.nccusa.org>, includes concrete suggestions for working with people traumatized by the events.

3. Responses from other faith communities

a) The executive committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace held an International Symposium of Leaders of the World's Religions on "Religions Working Together Against Terror and Violence and For Peace with Justice", 23-24 October 2001 in New York. A statement from the symposium expressed grave concern that international actions against terrorism "may fuel a perception that somehow these events are part of a clash between civilizations or religions". The statement rejects such notions as "terror and violence infect all human societies and are not the burden of only one culture, people or religion", and that "in our over 30 years of experience in multi-religious cooperation, we have discovered that our various religions and cultures share much in common - certainly more than what divides us".
<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us129.html>

b) The International Islamic Forum for Dialogue, based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with the World Muslim Congress held an international symposium for dialogue in Cairo from 18-29 October. High-level delegations representing the Pontifical Council at the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, worldwide cultural organizations as well as an elite group of Muslim scholars and thinkers participated in the symposium, which released a statement available at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/us126.html>

c) An article by Salman Rushdie entitled "Yes, it is about Islam" challenges much of the current discussion that seeks to minimize the religious dimensions of the current conflict.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/02/opinion/02RUSH.html?ex=1005794867&ei=1&en=9b51be6da32eb584>

d) The following website is an excellent Islamic resource:
<http://islamonline.net/english/index.shtml>

5. Humanitarian concerns

a) An update on the situation inside Afghanistan issued on 6 November by Action by Churches Together (ACT) after contact with local Afghan partners in Pakistan :

"Winter is fast approaching in Afghanistan. The first snow has already fallen in Chegcheran, in the central province of Ghor. Eyewitness reports from within the Afghan capital Kabul say that about 70 % of the population - those who have no relatives elsewhere - are still in town. People afraid of the bombing are however

moving from one part of the city to the other, trying to find a safe place. It is said that the food situation in Kabul has deteriorated.

Many of the people who have left the city have gone to rural areas and are now living in the villages. People have taken in the internally displaced (IDPs). It is expected that the temperatures all over Afghanistan will soon drop below zero. People are remaining in their homes as it is extremely difficult to find shelter in the freezing conditions. ACT International's local Afghan partners are encouraging people to stay in their houses and are trying to provide them with enough food to get through the winter.

It is estimated that the majority of people only have food left to last them another 15 or 20 days. ACT's local Afghan partners say that food supplies coming into Afghanistan are not sufficient.

Prices for diesel and petrol are skyrocketing. Afghans depend on a supply of diesel as most people use it for their stoves.

ACT members Church World Service (CWS), Christian Aid (CA) and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) are distributing food, shelter and clothes to the needy people in Afghanistan concentrating on the mountainous areas which might soon be cut soon off once winter starts in earnest.”

b) The Pentagon says it is changing the color of the food aid packages being dropped over Afghanistan because of fears they could be confused with unexploded cluster bombs. However, with thousands of packages already in the pipeline, it would be some time before the new ration packs were available to be airdropped.

<http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/11/01/ret.afghan.fooddrops/index.html>

c) The World Bank has set up a new website for resources on Afghanistan, including reports of economic conditions, “data-at-a-glance”, education, and warnings of famine:

<http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/sar/sa.nsf/All/C027AE7ABE4005DA8525695B0064AF5C?OpenDocument>

d) "Life is more precious than property", says Abdul Zabaar, a 35-year old artist in Afghanistan who has become a street vendor in Pakistan to help support his family. Abdul Zabaar was interviewed in Peshawar by Aloysius Milon Khan, a staff member of Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) in Bangladesh, for an ACT Dateline published on November 5. http://act-intl.org/news/dt_nr_2001/dtafghan1301.html

e) "Christian communities continue humanitarian aid and development programmes in Pakistan despite attacks". ACT Dateline, November 2, by Rainer Lang, ACT press officer. http://act-intl.org/news/dt_nr_2001/dtpakistan0101.html

f) The following report and update from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) focuses on aid and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and South West Asia. http://www.ausaid.gov.au/hottopics/swasia/af_update10.cfm

g) For an emergency overview on the current situation and humanitarian action in Afghanistan, visit ReliefWeb's site for UNICEF's most recent report Update, November 2:

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3c12564f6004c8ad5/fb52218201e2368385256af80075c6b8?OpenDocument>

For an update on UNICEF's activities in Central Asia (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), see:

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3c12564f6004c8ad5/80de7cdb88523e0185256af8007a8603?OpenDocument>

h) An updated profile summary from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) focuses on the internal displacement of people, protection issues, international responses and humanitarian access.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3c12564f6004c8ad5/c412c7c7816390f1c1256af8003c3e63?OpenDocument#top>

i) The United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) publishes regular reports on its activities world wide, starting with Funding and Central Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan). Report No. 44:

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3c12564f6004c8ad5/9e5cc642f6b7fc3485256af8005f9f5d?OpenDocument#top>

j) For a more detailed report focusing on North-East Afghanistan and the Maslakh internally displaced people's (IDP's) camp, Western Afghanistan, see:

<http://www.wfp.org/newsroom/frontpage/index.htm#>

k) In a report on AlertNet, Sue Wixley writes that Afghanistan, already the most heavily mined country in the world, has seen its death toll rising. "Let's hope that the governments that rushed to support US military action in Afghanistan will be as quick to help with the clean-up and rehabilitation afterwards, since mopping up the mess may take much longer than even a protracted military campaign," she concludes.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/319320>

l) In an interview with press officer Linda Tenbohlen (CARITAS Germany) by Lauren Pollock on November 5, the work of the Catholic aid agency, CARITAS, in Afghanistan is highlighted. CARITAS Internationalis is an observer member in the Action by Churches Together (ACT) emergency committee.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/320630>

m) Amnesty International is highly concerned about the condition of refugees at Chaman staging camp in Pakistan, saying the camp is too close to conflict areas.

<http://navigation.helper.realnames.com/framer/1/262/default.asp?realname=Amnesty+International&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Eamnesty%2Eorg%2F&frameid=1&providerid=262&uid=30003491>

7. Contributions to the current debate

a) From the French paper *Le Monde*

In "L'esprit du terrorisme", the well-known French philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard reflects the symbolic violence of modernity behind the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers of New York. Baudrillard sees in the collapse of these towers a symbolic clash which does not really reflect a confrontation between modernity and archaism nor a war of civilizations, but a resistance from the world itself to the movement of globalization.

http://www.lemonde.fr/imprimer_article_ref/0,9187,3232--239354,00.html

In an interview, the French philosopher René Girard, professor at Stanford university, develops his own interpretation of the symbolic dimension of the current world crisis. Girard is a Christian philosopher who has written major books on the notions of

violence and sacrifice in Christianity. His views on contemporary Islam are profound and instructive. "Ce qui se joue aujourd'hui est une rivalité mimétique à l'échelle planétaire," he observes. http://www.lemonde.fr/imprimer_article_ref/0,9187,3230--239636,00.html

“Une modernité malade”: In this text translated from Arabic, the Syrian poet Adonis expresses his concern about the pathological transformation of our modernity. He hopes that one day new creative thought on humanity and its cultures could emerge locally (in the Muslim world) as well as globally. http://www.lemonde.fr/imprimer_article_ref/0,9187,3232--239090,00.html

b) To find out more about the Muslim world's most sacred religious month, Ramadan, click on the following link on the website of the British newspaper, *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/flash/0,5860,584091,00.html>

c) The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has established a “Journal of Lutheran Ethics” site which includes a wealth of materials related to 11 September from Lutherans around the world. See http://www.elca.org/jle/articles/contemporary_issues/september_11th/article.september_11th.html

d) An article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, “Stop bombing, and start thinking 'hearts and minds’”, says that the current policy of bombing, while helpful to President Bush domestically, is politically counterproductive internationally. The challenges in fighting terrorism are political, not military. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1101/p11s1-coop.html>

e) Bishop Stephen Bouman of the New York Metropolitan Synod has written a series of personal reflections, focusing on the day-to-day impact of the 11 September attacks on the life of pastors and churches in the New York area. http://www.metronsynod.com/from_bishop_bouman.htm.

f) Noted US author Wendell Berry has written “thoughts in the presence of fear”, raising concerns about the long-term shift in thinking about technology, the environment, the economy, and national self-righteousness as a result of the 11 September attacks and their consequences. <http://oriononline.org/pages/oo/sidebar/America/Berry.html>

g) Human Rights Watch has issued a background paper on legal issues arising from the 11 September attacks, the war in Afghanistan and related anti-terrorism efforts. In everyday language, the paper discusses some of the principal issues of humanitarian and human rights law. <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/september11/ihlqna.htm>

h) Keston News Service, which regularly reports on issues of religious liberty in the former Soviet Union, has released a new report, entitled “Radical Islam in Northern Alliance Territory” which compares religious beliefs and practices with those practiced in regions under Taliban control. <http://www.keston.org/knsframe.htm>

i) Rev. Canon Patrick P. Augustine of Virginia, USA, has written an open letter to followers of the Islamic faith in which he points out similarities in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions of peace and justice. He notes that Christians and Muslims have lived together for 1400 years and calls on Muslim leaders to denounce

proclamations calling for violence against Christians. “If we as faith communities fail to speak against crimes against humanity, against injustice and bigotry, then we fail to live according to the precepts of our living faiths. We cannot continue to be spectators of these brutal and dastardly acts of vengeance and violence.”

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/analysis12.html>

j) “Insight from the past? Two famous brothers debate just and unjust war”: In 1933, the pages of the *Christian Century*, theologians H. Richard Niebuhr and Reinhold Niebuhr debated whether US military intervention in the Sino-Japanese war would be moral or immoral. The United Church of Christ notes that their conversation may be relevant to continued reflection on the international crisis.

<http://www.ucc.org/theology>

k) A Barcelona-based website posts articles and reflections in Spanish on current issues from a Christian perspective. The website currently includes articles on “Pakistan: fundamentalists attack NGOs, not only churches,” as well as reports of church statements and actions concerning the present crisis. Available at

<http://www.e-christians.net>

l) The UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention established a UN Terrorism Prevention Branch in 1999. Their website includes a listing of the 12 international instruments developed to combat terrorism, a summary of UN actions, and links to other websites on terrorism and counter-terrorism.

<http://www.undcp.org/terrorism.html>

m) The UN Office for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has developed a new website on chemical weapons in light of recent terrorist activity which includes basic information about use and detection of chemical weapons, treatment and preventive measures. <http://www.opcw.nl/resp/index.html>

n) The International Campaign to Ban Landmines has an informative fact sheet about landmines in Afghanistan at <http://www.icbl.org/lm>

8. Calls for action

a) Women in Black in Australia has organized a silent vigil of women in black to protest against the ongoing attacks by the United States and its allies on the people of Afghanistan. The organizers call on the Australian government to step back from vengeance and instead pursue justice through the channels of international law. The silent vigil is held on the steps of Sydney Town Hall from 17.30-18.30.

b) No more landmines in Afghanistan: In a call to action, Church World Service has urged people to push for a moratorium on the use of landmines.

<http://www.capwiz.com/churchworld/issues/alerts/?alertid=44629&type=PR&azip=>

c) A diverse interfaith group has been formed in Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand and organized its first peace vigil in Cathedral Square on 21 September. The coalition organizes weekly peace rallies on Friday evenings, circulates petitions to the prime minister and is working to build deeper relations among participants.

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 churches and church-related organizations who have pledged themselves to change unjust policies and practices related to global trade and HIV/AIDS. Participants 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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Web: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews>