

September 25, 2002

The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Chrétien:

In these past months and weeks, strong momentum has been built up in favour of a new invasion of Iraq. The pressure to resort to war continues in spite of the efforts of so many, including yourself. War-drums threaten to drown out both law and compassion, and people are tempted to conclude that another Gulf War is now inevitable.

We write, as leaders in many Christian communities in Canada, to cry NO to such a war. 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: the world needs wisdom from every region if we are to grasp the full consequences of the choices confronting us. Yes, the world is faced with a dangerous situation, in Iraq and in the Middle East region as a whole. But non-military, peace-building approaches to those grave problems are thinkable and possible—and they are infinitely preferable to war.

You have rightly insisted, Mr. Prime Minister, that evidence of Iraq's possession of and intent to use biological, chemical or nuclear weapons must be clear before a prudent international intervention can be shaped and carried out through the United Nations. In a situation of acute concern but also of uncertainty about the facts on the ground, international inspection of the arms situation in Iraq is the appropriate intervention on which to insist. A United Nations resolution detailing the means, the time-lines and the consequences of refusal could be helpful, as long as it does not set the bar so high as to make it virtually impossible for Iraq to comply with its demands. If it were to do so, a UN resolution would be a mere cover for an invasion that might be multinational but would still be unjust.

The Government of Iraq has formally invited a United Nations inspection team to return. There are those who respond that this invitation is a meaningless ploy, and that "we are not in the business of negotiating with Saddam Hussein." We do not understand how a cataclysm can be averted without genuine negotiation. Unless the parties to a conflict engage in dialogue, the paths to peace remain blocked. 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. We urge the Government of Canada to stay in dialogue with all relevant parties, and to insist on treating all as fellow human beings with human dignity and human rights.

Another Gulf War now would be wrong, first of all because of the suffering such a war would inflict on the population of Iraq—people who have already suffered so bitterly. Our Christian colleagues in that region have urged us to educate our own societies about how crushing the international sanctions have been for the health, education, livelihoods and hope of most Iraqi men, women and (especially) children. Recently, those same colleagues have been pleading with us to speak and act against the threat of another war.

“When one part of the body suffers, all suffer with it.” That maxim is biblical language, but on another level it is simple human experience. We in the West will be judged, by future generations and by the Creator of all, for the damage we have been willing to inflict in the name of security. The past eleven years of sanctions is a case in point. Those sanctions did not in fact weaken the oppressive grip of the Saddam Hussein regime. In their impact on civilian life, they hurt the wrong people—ordinary and innocent Iraqis. The international community has already delayed far too long in acting against the harm being done in its name.

Yes, the suffering of Iraqis lies also at the feet of President Saddam Hussein and his government. That regime’s bellicose and ruthless policies began draining the life-blood of Iraqis long before international sanctions were in place. There is no doubt that many residents of Iraq long and pray for a “regime change”. All the more striking, then, is the strength with which voices from that country and region urge us not to bring about a new regime by means of a violent invasion from outside.

We urge the Government of Canada not to lose confidence that a peace-building approach to the problem of Iraq, consistent with international law and taking the common good of Iraq’s people as its starting point, can be developed, can be fruitful, and can prevail over war-fatalism in international negotiations.

Such an approach should press all countries for compliance with international law and United Nations Security Council resolutions. Iraq is not the only country that stands in violation of them. Also, it should aim at ridding the whole region, ultimately, of weapons of mass destruction. It should provide for control of conventional armaments as well, stanching the flood of arms to neighbouring countries. A new approach should also reconsider the compensation obligations imposed on Iraq after the Gulf War, and take into account Iraq’s debt

load. 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. The world should not repeat the errors of the settlement imposed on Germany after World War I.

It is more than evident that peace in Iraq and in the Middle East region is a spectacularly difficult goal to reach. Many are tempted to give in to despair; but many, too, are those who persist as peacemakers. It is the peacemakers especially who are called children of God. The world was created for peace, not for war. That is an affirmation of faith. To live by it—to act politically on the truth of it—is fruitful beyond all calculation.

The psalm (72) from which Canada took its national motto (A mari usque ad mare) recognizes the reality of struggle and conflict in a world where “the weak and the needy” must be delivered “from oppression and violence”. The psalm calls for a leader who brings peace, In his days justice shall flourish, and peace, till the moon fails...

May you and your colleagues, Mr. Chrétien, bear fruit in the noble work of peace building, and taste the blessings that are reserved for peacemakers.

The following church leaders have chosen to sign this letter:

Archdeacon Jim Boyles
General Secretary, The Anglican Church of Canada

Archbishop Hovnan. Derderian
Primate, Armenian Orthodox Church, Canadian Diocese

Rev. Dr. Kenneth Bellous
Executive Minister, Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

Bishop Jacques Berthelet, C.S.V., Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil
President, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

John Calder, Clerk
Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Rev. F. Tom Rutherford
Regional Minister, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada

The Rev. Messale Engeda, Presiding Priest
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Western Hemisphere

Rev. Raymond Schultz
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Dan Nighswander
General Secretary, Mennonite Church Canada

The Right Rev. Seraphim
Bishop of Ottawa and Canada, Orthodox Church in America

The Very Rev. Anthony Nikolic
Polish National Catholic Church of Canada

The Rev. J. Mark Lewis
Moderator, 128th General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Rev. Siebrand Wilts
Stated Clerk, Regional Synod of Canada, Reformed Church in America

Metropolitan Archbishop Sotirios
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto (Canada)

Metropolitan Archbishop Wasyl (Fedak)
Primate, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

The Right Rev. Dr. Marion Pardy
Moderator, United Church of Canada

Ecumenical agencies:

Jane Orion Smith, Chair, Board of Directors
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Dr. Walter Pitman, O. Ont., O.C.
Chair, Board of Directors, Project Ploughshares