

April 5, 2002

The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien,
Prime Minister of Canada,
House of Commons,
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G4

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches have often communicated with the Government of Canada on questions of nuclear policy. As you may recall, a representative group of church leaders had the pleasure of meeting with you in March 1999, when NATO was reviewing its nuclear policy. We have consistently expressed our conviction that governments and citizens should work as expeditiously as possible towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

A very different conviction seems to be reflected in the U.S. Department of Defense Nuclear Posture Review, leaked in January to media in the United States. If press reports of its recommendations are accurate, the government of the United States is being encouraged to develop a range of new tactical nuclear weapons, adapted for use in a variety of circumstances.

These recommendations are being floated at a time when the prospect of half a century of “war against terrorism”, including military intervention in various countries, is being described in presidential speeches as a duty for “all civilized nations.”

No. The nations of the world do not need another nuclear arms race. Canada should adhere to and courageously promote its long-held goal of global nuclear disarmament. Canada is a small nation, but over the past several generations it has acquired significant international influence. We need to say very clearly to our neighbours that Canada opposes any widening of the role of nuclear weapons, in any country or in any alliance.

In April 1999 your government stated to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade that “Canada will continue to resist any movement to validate nuclear weapons as acceptable currency in international politics.” The Executive of the Canadian Council of Churches, faithful to a consensus about nuclear weapons that has been steady among our member churches for many years, wishes at this time to strengthen your government in exactly that resistance.

For us in the churches, opposition to nuclear armaments has its roots in a vision of the world that grows from the Gospel. As church leaders, we have in these months been asking ourselves urgently: how can our churches now “seek peace and follow after it”? How can we counter a resurgent tendency to glorify war? War is a horror. It is a sign of moral failure. How can we learn and speak the truth about war and about weaponry in these dangerous times? In this season of the year, Christians encounter again Jesus’ rebuke of his disciple Peter: “Enough of this! Put your sword back in its sheath!” What must we learn from those words in today’s circumstances?

We pray for you and for your government, Mr. Prime Minister, as it faces the challenge of translating into workable policy options the ancient command to seek peace. With much labour, during the last quarter of the twentieth century, the nations of the world took real steps towards multilateral nuclear disarmament. It is our hope that in this difficult new century, Canada will work even more tenaciously towards the noble goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons by mutual agreement among all nations.

Yours sincerely,

Most Rev. André Vallée,

President, The Canadian Council of Churches
on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Council

cc. The Hon. Bill Graham, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

cc. The Hon. Arthur Eggleton, Minister of Defence