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IT IS TIME TO END THE TRAIL OF RESENTMENT AND HATRED



**A Pax Christi USA
Sign-On Statement
on Afghanistan**

*To be published in
Catholic and secular sources,
summer 2009*

*Photograph courtesy of Linda Panetta,
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IT IS TIME TO END THE TRAIL OF RESENTMENT AND HATRED: A PAX CHRISTI USA SIGN-ON STATEMENT ON AFGHANISTAN

As our country teeters on the brink of a deepening military quagmire in Afghanistan, Pax Christi USA lifts up the impassioned cry of Pope John Paul II:

“No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a solution to the very problems which provoked the war.”

The “trail of resentment and hatred” in Afghanistan has deep roots—a tragic history of foreign occupation, proxy wars and the support of extremist elements—the consequences of which contributed to the rise of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The U.S. “war on terror” has not proven to be an effective framework for ensuring security nor reducing terrorism. Instead, this reliance on military strategies has fueled the spiral of violence and further destabilized the region.

Now, our nation’s leaders are preparing to increase U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. We fear that such a “surge” will only inflame violence in the region, putting at greater risk U.S. and Afghan lives—without building the deeper foundations for a long-term peace.

The situation in Afghanistan is complex and dangerous. The Taliban have resurged and violence has increased. Poverty is endemic, with one-fourth of children dying before age five. Many of the reforms to recognize women’s rights have yet to be realized. In 2008, the UN Mission in Afghanistan reported an increase in civilian casualties of 40%. U.S. air strikes, resulting in horrific civilian deaths, fuel anti-U.S. sentiment and empower the war lords, drug lords and the Taliban. Government corruption is

rampant, and large parts of the country are not under government control. Human Rights Watch estimates that 60% of the Afghan Parliament is made up of warlords or those who have ties to warlords. A January 2009 public opinion poll showed that only 32% of Afghan citizens believe that the U.S. strategy has worked well, a drop from 68% in 2005; only 18% want more U.S. troops in their country.

A separate survey of Afghan civil society leaders warned that one result of a troop surge would be to create greater recruitment opportunities for the Taliban; the leaders stressed that the United States needs to shift its approach, emphasizing diplomacy and development. As opposed to the United States’ exclusive focus on attacking the Taliban and building the Afghan central government, these leaders emphasized that strengthening civil society is the key to holding government leaders accountable and ensuring long-term stability.

History has shown that there is no military solution in Afghanistan. A half-million Soviet troops could not stand up to the resistance. A RAND Corporation report found that since 1968, only 7% of all terrorists groups worldwide were taken down by military force, while 40% were dismantled through police and intelligence work and 43% gave up terrorism as they were integrated into the political process.

It is clear to us that reducing the U.S. military footprint would be one of the most effective measures to weaken the armed opposition. A shift in U.S. policy in support of a multilateral diplomatic and development surge has far greater potential for achieving long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his World Day of Peace 2009 message, stated: “One of the most important ways of building peace is through a form of globalization directed towards the interests of the whole human family.” Before risking even more lives, we call on our nation’s leaders to:

1. Immediately halt air strikes and the use of drones on targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as other aggressive tactics which harm civilians and fan anti-U.S. sentiment.
2. Lead with diplomacy, which includes: a) robust engagement with stakeholders in the region—especially Iran, Pakistan, India and Russia—toward a regional peace process backed by the UN; b) greater support internally for civil society and civilian rule of law in Afghanistan; c) reconciliation processes and negotiations with elements of the Taliban; d) ensuring the participation of women.
3. Employ multilateral approaches to protect the people and strengthen institutions, including support for local law enforcement, government and judicial reform, as well as non-U.S. peace-keeping forces if necessary.
4. Promote a surge in development aid. Afghanistan will not begin to stabilize until Afghan-identified needs rise to the top of the U.S. agenda there. Reform the delivery of humanitarian aid: a) prioritize Afghan organizations over foreign contractors; b) discontinue the use of the military-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams which have militarized the aid process; and c)

support long-term sustainable development.

5. Promote a robust public debate on our country’s approach toward Afghanistan. Conduct Congressional oversight hearings to re-examine our policies, including close scrutiny of the Pentagon’s plans, and engage experts on alternative strategies for counterterrorism and peace-building, including perspectives from political and civil society leaders in the region.

As a faith community, we call on our church leaders to:

1. Elevate a moral voice and reject a military escalation in Afghanistan as an untenable approach unlikely to succeed.
2. Ensure that U.S. tactics are in accordance with proscriptions against harming civilians, including the immediate harm caused by aerial bombardment and the lingering harm caused by the use of cluster munitions.
3. Deepen efforts at interreligious dialogue at both the international and local levels to build greater understanding and acceptance of differing traditions, challenges and aspirations.

The change in U.S. administrations opens the possibility for a new approach to overcoming terrorism and ensuring peace and security for all nations. To continue to rely upon failed military strategies will only lead us further down the “trail of resentment and hatred.” Let this be the moment when our nation experiences a “metanoia”—a conversion—when we turn around, change direction and chart a new course. As church, as people of faith and good will, we must raise our voices and create the public groundswell that makes real change possible—here, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Palestine/Israel and everywhere.