

# **An Open Letter to the American People**

**(To be printed as an ad in the Fresno Bee)**

*The initial organizational sponsor and author of this appeal is Peace Fresno. The Visalia Friends Meeting agreed at the March 10, 2002 Meeting for Business to become a signatory of this letter. The contact person at Peace Fresno is Ingrid Carmean P.O. Box 5036 Fresno, California 93755.*

It is a time for collective self-examination. The events of September 11 compel us to face the very nature of evil. How we respond to criminal acts says much about the depth of our values and character as a nation. There are many evils in the world; what manner of justice shall guide our actions?

Many nations and people in the world do not experience our country as we see ourselves. For more than ten years, we supplied money and weapons to Indonesia's Suharto to carry on a war of genocide against the people of East Timor. In the course of that support, a third of the population was killed and that country was destroyed. In El Salvador, the US-backed regime used death squads to kill as many as 75,000; in Nicaragua, the US-sponsored Contra war led to the deaths of 30,000 of its citizens. The initial bombing of Iraq left over 200,000 dead, and the bombings have continued for the last ten years. UNICEF estimates that over one million Iraqis have died, and that 5,000 more die every month as a result of indiscriminate sanctions enforced by our military. We claim that any weapons of mass destruction Iraq may still have must be destroyed. Yet, we refuse to end the sanctions - a weapon of mass destruction that has killed more than a million people, most of them children.

We recognize that the acts of September 11 were barbaric and evil. We mourn the terrible loss of life; we extend our sympathy and prayers to all families who have been affected. We abhor those actions and all actions that show utter disregard for human life and dignity. Yet, when we, as a nation, support oppressive regimes, economic embargos, and sustained warfare against civilian populations in the name of justice, shunning international conventions, at the same time we espouse democratic values and human rights in our own country, we plant the seeds of hate for future conflict. When our attempts at justice are fueled by a self-righteous sense of cause and a desire for revenge, we risk becoming the very evil we deplore.

In the past months, we have seen the very best in the American spirit revealed in a resolute courage and generosity to those in need. Our President has called on us to remember the refugees of this war, seven million of whom, according to UN accounts, are facing starvation. If we were to declare war on disease in poor countries, it would cost about \$25 per rich-country citizen each year. The world recognizes the primacy of law, not war. In South Africa, after years of unbearable oppression and terrorism, trials and truth and reconciliation proceedings were held. The four terrorists of the previous

Trade Center bombing have just been sentenced in a US court. Bosnian war criminals and the accused Lockerbie terrorists have also been tried in a world court. In like manner Rwandans are being tried in court and sentenced for genocide.

In the aftermath of our own national tragedy, let the American people respond with a compassion and dignity that is consistent with our principles and which will be recognized as such by all nations and peoples of the world. Let us respond by seeking justice for those who commit crimes against humanity and by assisting all the innocent victims of evil.

In this spirit, we encourage -

- Immediate attention to the delivery of food and medical supplies to Afghan refugees;
- Renewed efforts to bring peace to the Palestinian people and Israel;
- Efforts at negotiated settlements to international disputes;
- International police cooperation rather than military action to combat terrorism;
- Expansion of health, education, and humanitarian aid for third world nations;
- Lifting of trade embargos that unfairly penalize the poor in many nations;
- Support for international law and courts;
- Adherence by all nations to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As Americans, we believe the events of September 11, compel us to reconsider our relationship to the other peoples of the world. We cannot support policies that cause suffering in other parts of the world and expect no consequences to befall us. We must come to realize we are one country in a large world and recognize that our human interest must exceed a narrow national interest.

We implore that the current war effort not be expanded to other nations.