



CANADIAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

A COMMITTEE OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS) IN CANADA

Jean Chrétien
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON

February 8, 2002

Dear Jean Chrétien,

We, the Canadian Friends Service Committee, wish to express our grave concerns regarding the Canadian Government's policy direction since the events of September 11, 2001.

When the criminal atrocities of September 11th were committed, international and national legal structures already existed, and more could be created, to pursue the perpetrators and bring them to justice. Instead, retaliation was chosen. The violent and overwhelming assault on an already impoverished and war-damaged country, the inevitable killing of innocent bystanders, and the bypassing of tenets of international law were, in our opinion, avoidable and immoral choices. We regret that the Canadian government has supported those choices and, in the process, weakened the human institution of law, either through the passing of legislation that infringes on rights entrenched in our Constitution (C-36) or supporting manipulative interpretations of international law (the US government's approach to the Geneva Conventions).

If we have any respect for the institution of law, we must find that actions which would be widely condemned as illegal were they committed by a small, weak country do not miraculously become lawful when committed by the world's major power. We wish that Canada had upheld its traditional adherence to lawful measures, and the diplomatic resolution of contentious issues. Instead, by aiding and abetting brutal retaliation, we have shamed ourselves and diminished the prospects for lasting peace in the world.

It is an additional source of sorrow and dismay that Canadian troops have been sent to Afghanistan, not as part of a legally constituted United Nations undertaking, but under the command and control of the United States military. This is a troubling policy direction, one that is fraught with difficulties. It has made Canadian troops impotent to avoid complicity in further lawless acts, such as the breaking of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1949). This convention requires a public judicial hearing to determine whether or not captives taken in the course of fighting should be accorded the status of prisoners of war. Further, Canadian troops now risk being placed in a compromising situation with regards to land mines use in the region. The US, under whose command Canadian soldiers are operating, is not a signatory to the international treaty on land mines and, indeed, has been using land mines in this conflict.

Though you have heard this from us many times before, let us reiterate the view of the Religious Society of Friends: peace is not to be found through instilling fear, destroying lives and livelihood, suppressing dissent, or committing any other sort of violence. Reliance on war and militarism will not achieve lasting and genuine peace. It fails to address the root causes of conflict and pre-empts constructive approaches to just solutions. Each episode of violence sows the seeds for further violence.

We can create a lasting peace only by recognizing each other's God-given humanity (whether American, Afghani, Israeli, Palestinian, Iraqi, or whatever), and then acting with the loving justice that follows such recognition. We in the Canadian Friends Service Committee shall continue our work toward that end, to (in the words of William Penn) "see what love will do" in situations of conflict.

We ask that our government withdraw its present support of a violent, and ultimately dangerous, illegality, and turn its resources instead to the creation of a more just world, one in which the incentives to terrorism would be steadily reduced. This course does not promise a mythical and unattainable absolute security for the Developed World, but it would vastly increase the genuine safety of all the world's inhabitants.

While we realize that our pacifist tradition is the path less taken, we are disturbed by our government's lack of interest in it, or consideration of alternative non-violent means to resolve conflict. There are many NGOs and peace organizations offering an array of alternatives. We feel that, by so quickly attaching itself to US militarism, Canada exhibits a closed mind to other and more creative approaches.

Without exploring these other options, however are we to break out of the spiral of violence in which we are now caught? We ask, therefore, that with an open mind, and with concern for the well-being of those now on earth and those to come, our government move away from the doomed culture of violence and explore more independent, creative and non-violent approaches to foreign and defence policy.

We hold you in the Light as you struggle with these difficult issues on our behalf.

In Friendship,

Carol Dixon
Clerk of CFSC

Margaret Clare Ford
Associate Clerk of CFSC

Cc: John Reynolds, Interim Leader of the Canadian Alliance
Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Quebecois
Joe Clark, Leader of the Progressive Conservatives
Alexa McDonough, Leader of the NDP

Janet Somerville, Canadian Council of Churches
Ernie Regher, Project Ploughshares