

A Letter to the American People **On the Occasion of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday, 2002**

During our current season of national crisis we have seen the very best of the American spirit. We continue to pray for healing. We pray for hope. We pray for justice and peace.

Our President has also rightfully called us to remember refugees and others left cold and hungry as a result of the events in Afghanistan. And the American people have responded.

The acts visited upon our country on September 11 were barbaric and evil. As Christians, we, the undersigned, deplore all acts of violence and the utter disrespect shown for human life. How we respond to criminal acts says much about the depth of our values and the character of our nation. When we respond to unrestrained evil and disaster with a resilient spirit dedicated to mourning with those who grieve, assisting those who suffer, and seeking justice for those who commit crimes, we are responding with the best of the American spirit. But when our desire to seek justice is fueled by revenge and a self-righteous sense of cause, we risk becoming more like those whose actions we abhor.

We believe in the importance of collective self-examination. Many people in the world do not experience our nation as we see ourselves. When we practice democratic values and espouse human rights in our own country, but support oppressive regimes because doing so suits our national interest, they question our consistency. When we support economic boycotts and other strategies that negatively impact common people, they are upset. When we shun international conventions and conferences, we are resented. Indeed, a member of the U.S. Commission on National Security concluded that “We got a terrific sense of the resentment building against the United States as a bully.” (Cited in *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 2001, p. 12)

While some may distort their own religious beliefs to evil ends, we appeal to all people of faith to call our leaders to the highest ideals of their faith: love, peace and good will. We are mindful that Jesus asks his followers to love even their enemies.

In this spirit

- we encourage our leaders to pursue justice through international law and courts and to give priority to facilitating the delivery of food and supplies to those in greatest need in Afghanistan.
- we support the lifting of the economic embargo against Iraq and renewed efforts to build peace between the Palestinian people and Israel.
- we implore that the current war effort not be expanded to other nations.
- we desire that the energy, intelligence and commitment currently funneled into the war effort be focused on restorative justice, non-violent methods of resolving conflict, cross-cultural understanding and negotiation.

As the new year dawns, we invite all

- to join in praying for the families of those who died on September 11 and the families of those who have died in Afghanistan.
- to pray for our president and leaders of the world to find peaceful means to deal with terrorism and violence.
- to support the efforts of our government and humanitarian agencies to bring aid to the Afghan refugees.
- to practice love of country while rejecting the temptation to elevate our own country above all others.
- to reject expressions of hate and to extend love towards those different from themselves.

We invite all Americans to bring an end to terrorism, war and violence of all kinds and to pray and work for peace.

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