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MESSAGE OF CHURCH LEADERS ON THE SITUATION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Together with Christians around the world, the churches brought together in the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. pray daily "for the peace of the whole world," asking, "Lord, have mercy." As we observe the horrendous slaughter taking place in the former Yugoslavia, the contrast between our hope for peace and the actual evil of war weighs heavily upon us, just as it does on many Muslim believers who share our deep longing for a just peace.

Over the past two years, the churches have spoken about the gathering dangers of the situation of the former Yugoslavia, and how this conflict assails its peoples and threatens their neighbors and the world as a whole. We have supported efforts of the World Council of Churches, which in concert with the Conference of European Churches, has sought to bring together religious Orthodox Christian, Roman Catholic, and Muslim leaders, seeking to stem the conflict, provide succor to its victims, and mediate its resolution. We have supported the efforts of the Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, Muslim relief organizations and other bodies to provide humanitarian assistance to all victims without distinction.

Today our nation and its leaders are struggling with decisions regarding our collective responsibility in the face of this continuing tragedy and the intransigence of the parties to the conflict. As church leaders, we know how wrenching are the alternatives for many people. After consulting together, we offer these reflections, which we hope will assist our congregations and the civil authorities we have elected to lead us through such difficult times as they decide on an appropriate course of action.

We wish to reiterate our appreciation for the efforts of Mr. Cyrus Vance and Lord David Owen, on behalf of the United Nations and the European Community, to obtain a negotiated solution. The framework they have elaborated remains the best present hope for a temporary end to the fighting and for a gradual resolution of the manifold conflicts which give rise to it.

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1This statement on Bosnia-Herzegovina was facilitated through the National Council of the Churches in the U.S.A. and is issued by the Church Leaders who signed below. It was transmitted to President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher on May 14, 1993.
We also appreciate the careful, deliberate process of consultation undertaken by our President, his Secretary of State and other advisors with regard to further steps incumbent on our nation. We support the Administration's effort to set clear, defined and achievable goals and limits for direct United States involvement, and its insistence on working within the framework of the United Nations and together with the European governments closest to the conflict. Prayers are lifted daily for our President and all in authority who wrestle with these decisions.

PRINCIPLES GUIDING OUR RESPONSE

In our work together as Church Leaders certain basic principles have evolved which we believe should guide the United States' response to situations like these. They include:
- peace-keeping and peace-making missions must remain at all times faithful to the humanitarian aims of ending the suffering of people on all sides of the conflict;
- peace-keeping forces deployed to situations of conflict should be under United Nations command;
- any deployment of such forces must be in support of efforts to help the victims and to intensify diplomatic and economic pressures to achieve a cease-fire and a negotiated settlement;
- U.N. forces deployed to a conflict situation must avoid becoming or appearing to be party to the conflict;
- the burden of providing such forces should be shared as equitably as possible by all nations, with primary responsibility lying with the governments of the region concerned.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

There is legitimate hesitation in the United States to enter a conflict far from our own shores and one in which no end can be predicted in the near future. Nevertheless, we believe that there are compelling reasons now for our nation to assume a greater share of the burden now being assumed by nations participating in the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR). We can no longer stand by as human rights are violated in a wholesale manner, justice is flouted and peace in this part of the world hangs in the balance.

We believe that the commitment by the United States of a significant contingent of peace-keeping forces to the UNPROFOR effort would greatly strengthen the hand of the negotiators, and signal to all parties the resolve of the major powers together to bring an end to the pointless and endless suffering being inflicted on virtually all peoples in the former Yugoslavia and which threatens the entire region.
We encourage the Administration to press the United Nations Security Council for a broad interpretation of the UNPROFOR mandate to include:

- the strict enforcement of the Security Council's economic and arms embargo;
- the containment of the conflict;
- the policing of borders in close proximity to the present conflict;
- the protection of threatened civilian populations;
- the protection of UN personnel charged with the delivery of humanitarian assistance and safeguarding of refugees;
- the deployment and protection of UN human rights monitors and the implementation of the decision to establish a war crimes tribunal.

Out of concern to limit further suffering by non-combatant populations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we believe the use of air strikes is inappropriate as an alternative to the deployment of a significant U.S. contingent to UNPROFOR.

We would oppose the lifting of the arms embargo in Bosnia-Herzegovina. To do so would almost certainly escalate further the fighting. However the world community cannot in good conscience deny a besieged populations' access to the means of self-defense if their needs for safety and survival are not otherwise assured.

We recognize that consideration of military response to any situation of conflict raises excruciating moral, ethical, as well as strategic, tactical and political questions. We offer these reflections in the hope that they well assist our nation's leaders and our citizenry as they face difficult choices.

We issue this statement praying for a miracle: that love will overcome hate, and a spirit of reconciliation will overcome violence. We ourselves will continue to pursue dialogue with communities of faith in the former Yugoslavia, exhorting them to act as agents of reconciliation, and supporting them in these efforts to the very best of our ability.

Above all, we pray "for the peace of the whole world. Lord, have mercy."

The following Church Leaders join in this statement:

The Rev. Dr. Joan B Campbell, General Secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The Rev. Dr. Syngman Rhee, President, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The Rev. Dr. James E. Andrews, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate, Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

The Rt. Rev. Edmond L. Browning, Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church
Bishop Vernon R. Byrd, African Methodist Episcopal Church

The Rev. Edwin Capon, The Swedenborgian Church

The Rev. Nicholas C. Chun, Korean Presbyterian Church in America

Bishop Caesar D. Coleman, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

The Rev. Dr. E. Edward Jones, President, National Baptist Convention of America

Ms. Mary Love, Secretary, NCCC/USA

Dr. Belle Miller McMaster, Director, Social Justice & Peacemaking Ministry Unit, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); Vice-President, NCCC/USA

The Rev. Dr. C. William Nichols, General Minister and President, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Newhall, Executive Director, International Council of Community Churches

The Rev. Dr. Paul H. Sherry, President, United Church of Christ

The Rev. Dr. Gordon L. Sommers, President, Moravian Church in North America; President-Elect, NCCC/USA

The Rt. Rev. Ruben L. Speaks, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Edwin E. Staudt III, General Secretary, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting/Religious Society of Friends

Bishop Melvin G. Talbert, Secretary of the Council of Bishops, the United Methodist Church

The Rev. Dr. Daniel E. Weiss, General Secretary, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.