



## Church of the Brethren General Board

# Statement on the Conflict with Iraq

March 10, 1998

Because the confrontation between the United States and Iraq has become increasingly volatile and the threat of military conflict is ever present, the Church of the Brethren General Board is compelled to speak out. We are representatives of a church that has been called to devote itself to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and who hope ultimately that our identity will transcend citizenship in any one nation.

We ask that the government and people of the United States cultivate a deeper humility and accept more responsibility for the current conflict with Iraq. We remind the government and all Americans: during the 1980's the United States supported materially and diplomatically the government of Iraq in its brutal war against Iran; that the 1991 Gulf War did not resolve our conflict with the government of Iraq; that the people of Iraq continue to suffer from economic sanctions imposed by the United States and other countries, with as many as one million Iraqi citizens having died of sanctions-related causes; that these sanctions are unjust, and furthermore now have little effective impact on the government of Iraq; that the United States has evidenced a degree of unevenness in pressing and desiring enforcement of UN Security Council Resolutions pertaining to the Middle East region, which now contributes to resentment both in Iraq and among its neighbors.

With respect to the government of Iraq, as Christians we cannot support any dictatorial regime installed by force and enforced by fear. The government of Iraq has made war against its neighbors and has shown little compassion toward its own citizens as they have suffered years of economic deprivation. It has placed a higher value on the fortunes of a small clique of leaders than upon the large and diverse body of Iraqi people. We call upon the government of Iraq to amend these patterns of behavior.

Furthermore, the General Board objects to the manufacturing and stockpiling of weapons, be they nuclear, chemical/biological, or conventional, that can only be used for mass destruction. We object to the building of these weapons anywhere, for any reasons. While it is the lot of nations to be insecure and fearful of others, this insecurity and fear is not relieved, but only multiplied, by these kinds of weapons.

Therefore, the Church of the Brethren General Board, meeting in Elgin, Illinois on March 10, 1998, affirms again our faith in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Because of the conflict between the United States and the government of Iraq, we have struggled to know how to respond out of this faith. We have not forgotten that the hardest step of faith is the love of enemies. Still, we are advocates of this faith. To propose this may appear idealistic to governments and national populations. As human beings, we are accustomed to protecting our interests and defining as enemies any who would threaten such interests. None of us are always free of this selfishness; nations are particularly prone to objectify and hate those they distrust. Our conviction is that this path ultimately leads to unending conflict. As the church of Christ, we have been called to see things differently: we strain to see beyond the appearance of an enemy to find the face of God.

We believe God's face is present here, in this country, and in Iraq among the people there. Thus we strive for peace between our peoples in these ways: we will proclaim this faith to our neighbors and friends; we will join with international organizations and ecumenical colleagues to search for ways to provide for the health and well-being of the Iraqi people and to seek reconciliation between our peoples; we will peacefully resist all efforts to resolve this conflict by military force.