



Church of the Brethren General Board

Statement on the Threat of War Between the United States and Iraq

October 14, 2002

The Church of the Brethren General Board is deeply concerned about the possibility of war between the United States and Iraq. We know that war causes death and displacement, and does not resolve deep-seated conflicts—thus it is contrary to God’s will for human life. We are also troubled by our own government’s attitudes toward the rest of the world as evidenced in a growing unilateralism, the use of war-making as a means of problem-solving, an increasingly threatening posture toward our global neighbors, and an eagerness to impose its political and economic will on others. We find these attitudes to be contrary to our own Christian values of servanthood and cooperation, and also believe that they will ultimately prove detrimental to the people of our nation as we relate to our global neighbors and eventually stand before our God.

In the midst of the current crisis, we ask that the government and people of the United States cultivate a deeper humility and accept more responsibility for the conflict with Iraq. We remind the government and all Americans of the following: during the 1980’s, the United States materially and diplomatically supported the government of Iraq in its brutal war against Iran; the 1991 Gulf War did not resolve our conflict with the government of Iraq; 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; these sanctions are unjust, and furthermore, now have little effective impact on the government of Iraq; the negative effects of the Gulf War still plague both US soldiers and Iraqi civilians; 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.

The Church of the Brethren recognizes that the government of Iraq, especially as personified in Saddam Hussein, has often disregarded the well being of its people. Iraq has also waged war on its neighbors. Indeed, much of the blame for a situation in which war has seemed either imminent or inevitable over the past twelve years must fall on Hussein and those who cooperate as members of his government. As Christians we cannot support any dictatorial regime installed by force and enforced by fear. We call upon the government of Iraq to change these patterns of behavior.

Despite the apparent lack of concern on the part of the Iraqi government for its own people, and the interest of our own government in keeping us from humanizing our “enemies,” it is our intent to continue to create relationships between Americans and Iraqis, recognizing and celebrating our differences as well as our shared humanity, our heritage as children of God. We invite the governments of the United States and Iraq to make decisions based on the assumption of our common heritage as people of God.

With regard to “weapons of mass destruction,” the General Board objects to the manufacturing and stockpiling of nuclear, chemical/biological, or conventional weapons by all nations. 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.

Rather than giving into an insecurity that leads to mistrust and massive build-up of weapons by both countries, we propose nonviolent alternatives that lead to a massive build-up of trust between peoples and their leaders. These actions might include: providing training to Iraqis in the study of nonviolent resistance for change rather than armed resistance; the United States and Iraq recognizing their commitments as member-nations of the United Nations by allowing United Nations weapons inspections to resume in Iraq; reallocation of the military expenditures by the United States (est. \$398 billion) and Iraq (est. \$1.4 billion) to life-affirming programs and relief; and changes in US energy policy and our own energy life-style choices, minimizing our need for oil—a major motivator in this conflict.

We also believe that peace among peoples will not come through foreign policy strategies such as mutually assured destruction, deterrence, or containment, but rather through cooperation between nations as global partners—in this case, renewed diplomatic and reconciliation efforts (perhaps mediated by the United Nations or other third party), and people-to-people exchanges that foster understanding and offer the opportunity to see and affirm the face of God in the other.

For Brethren the one imperative is to follow the way of Jesus. Jesus is the Lord of our lives, our example in all things. We believe that the good news of Jesus and his way of living is not an ideal that is intended for a few select individuals, but is a model for all Christians making difficult choices in a difficult world. Jesus renounced the opportunity of Lordship through power at the beginning of his ministry (Matthew 4:4-10). In his Sermon on the Mount he emphasized the place of peacemakers in God's world (Matthew 5:9). Despite the danger of physical harm, Jesus refused to use divine (Matthew 26:53) or human aid (Matthew 26:52) to protect himself. As followers of Jesus we believe in resisting evil in all its forms, and after the manner of Jesus refuse to use violence toward these ends.

Members of the Church of the Brethren as Christians ardently follow the way of Jesus. Because we as individuals and as a body have enjoyed strong relationships with those of the other major faiths, we recognize that our sisters and brothers in Judaism (Micah 4:1-4) and Islam share these same core values of peace through obedience to the revealed word of God. We do not advocate the way of peace because it is easy; it is hard. We advocate the way of peace because, as a people of faith, we take the Word of God seriously and as the rule of our lives.

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.

Church of the Brethren Policy Background:

Statement on the Conflict with Iraq, 1998 General Board

Nonviolence and Humanitarian Intervention, 1996 Annual Conference

Church and State, 1989 Annual Conference

A Quest for Order, 1987 Annual Conference

Justice and Nonviolence, 1977 Annual Conference

Position and Practices of the Church of the Brethren in Relation to War, 1948 Annual Conference, revised 1957, 1968, 1970