

An Open Letter to George W. Bush

February 8, 2002

Dear Mr. President,

My name is John Dear and I am a Jesuit priest, retreat leader and writer. I have spent the last twenty years working among the poor here and abroad, and speaking out against war and nuclear weapons. Recently, I served here in the Family Assistance Center in New York City as a chaplain to over 1,500 relatives who lost loved ones at the World Trade Center disaster, and to over 500 police officers, firefighters and rescue workers at Ground Zero. I also worked as a supervisor for the Red Cross "Spiritual Care" program, helping to coordinate over 500 chaplains of all religions.

I am writing to you to ask you to stop immediately the bombing of Afghanistan, to stop your preparations for other wars, to cut the Pentagon's budget drastically, not increase it; to lift the sanctions on Iraq, end military aid to Israel, stop U.S. support of the occupation of the Palestinians, lift the entire third world debt, dismantle every one of our nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, abandon your Star Wars Missile Shield plans, join the world court and international law, and close our own terrorist training camps, beginning with Fort Benning's "School of the Americas."

In the tradition of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothy Day, I believe that violence in response to violence only leads to further violence; that war can never solve our problems; that there is no such thing as a just war; that God does not bless war; and that we are condemned to suffer further terrorist attacks by our continued militarism and war making around the world.

The only solution to these international crises is to overcome evil with goodness, not further evil. That means we need to win the world over with nonviolent love. We need to change the direction of our country, feed every starving child and refugee on the planet, end poverty at home and abroad, stop all injustices and military aid, create a new nonviolent foreign policy that will serve humanity and support UN-based nonviolent international peacemaking teams.

Violence is not only immoral and illegal, it's just down right impractical. Your global violence is doomed to fail and lead to further suffering because it will only stir up further hostility around the world.

In the name of the God of peace and compassion, please reverse your destructive course, and start us in a new direction, toward a lasting peace with justice for all people on the planet.

I have read that you are a Christian. May I add that I believe that Jesus was nonviolent, and that he was serious when he commanded us not to bomb our enemies, but to love our enemies. Furthermore, I believe that means God is a God of peace and nonviolence. If you wish to follow the nonviolent Jesus and worship the God of peace, you must renounce this war and start the path of disarmament, justice for the poor, and healing for humanity. You cannot serve both the God of peace and the false gods of war.

I want you to know that millions of us around the country will continue to oppose your policies and wars; and that we will dedicate our lives to the practice of this loving, nonviolent resistance to U.S. warmaking. I travel around the country full time speaking to tens of thousands of students and churchgoers each year, and I find very little support for your war.

We will continue to pray for peace, march for peace, demonstrate for peace, speak out for peace, work for peace, propose peace, and resist your determined opposition to peace. You could save us all a lot of trouble and save further loss of life around the world by taking the high ground, adopting the vision of nonviolence, exercising true moral leadership and heading us in a new direction toward a world without war, starvation, poverty, oppression or injustice. That is the only way to guarantee that there will be no more terrorist attacks. In that way, you will help us offer future generations a life of peace.

May the God of peace bless us all.

Sincerely,

(Rev.) John Dear, S.J.