



THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

October 25, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Our prayers are with you as you struggle to come to a decision about whether or not to send thousands of additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan. Realizing that this is a difficult decision and you are receiving conflicting opinions from advisors, members of Congress, and the American public, we nevertheless urge you not to continue a military resolution to a very complex situation. We believe that escalating war only provides greater motivation to the insurgency and increases anti-U.S. sentiment, resulting in increased violence. We see evidence of this every day in the media.

In March, 2009, we signed onto a statement of Pax Christi USA which called for a shift in U.S. policy in support of a multilateral diplomatic and development surge. The statement quoted the strong cry of Pope John Paul II: *“No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches us how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a solution to the very problems which provoked the war.”*

The “trail of resentment” has deep roots and a long history in Afghanistan which contributed to the rise of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as you well know. “Reliance on military strategies has only fueled the violence and further destabilized the region.” (Pax Christi USA statement)

Today we urge you to implement a policy that corresponds to the principles for which you were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize which you accepted as a “call to action.” Specifically, we endorse steps outlined by the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) which are in agreement with Pax Christi proposals.

- Implement a systematic de-escalation of military operations leading to a ceasefire.
- Begin a withdrawal of U.S. troops.
- Concentrate on improving living standards in areas not under Taliban control.
- Support negotiation and reconciliation among all Afghan groups, including the Taliban.

- Move forward with regional diplomacy that recognizes the critical importance of gaining Pakistani, Indian, and Iranian cooperation.
- Increase and focus development aid on building the rule of law and supporting Afghan civil society.

These steps are tremendously challenging and will take all the wisdom and commitment you and other leaders can bring to the table. Escalation of troops is a simpler, easier (and costly) way to respond to a very complex situation—but it is not working and will not work in the future. In the meantime, thousands of people are suffering and dying, including our own military personnel.

Mr. President, we share your sincere desire for peace throughout our world. We continue to pray for you as you try to find creative and peaceful ways to deal with Afghanistan. As Ghandi said, “We must be the change we wish to see.” You have the opportunity to help bring that change to the world, change that leads to peace. “Yes, you/we can!”

Sincerely,

Sister Esther Anderson, OSF

Sister Esther Anderson, OSF and Congregational Leadership
Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

Sister Marijane Hresko, OSF
Sister Anne Amati, OSF
Sister Donna Desien, OSF
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