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Chicago Center for Cultural Connections

Community Renewal Society



November 19, 2009

Dear President Obama,

The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, as leaders of very diverse religious traditions, works to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation for the common good. We believe it is important that our country, as a component of its foreign policy, foster such interchange and collaboration among religions as a means of advancing justice, peace, and shared prosperity. We contend that this emphasis is particularly important in the region which is now commanding your careful attention, namely Afghanistan.

At this critical moment in your painstaking deliberations, with media and public discourse so focused on the issues of troop buildup and military strength, we propose that both the strength of our nation and the well-being of the Afghan people can best be insured by finding alternative paths to peace. These paths have been outlined and advocated by respected national leaders, both diplomatic and military. They include the systematic de-escalation of military operations, especially the cessation of military actions which place civilians in peril; directing our military to concentrate on the defense and safety of the Afghan people, especially women and children; escalating diplomatic efforts which would create the necessary conditions for dialogue and consensus-building; and committing the United States and its partners to immediate and long-term civilian led humanitarian assistance and policies which show promise of addressing some of the root causes of Afghanistan's turmoil – poverty, graft, injustice, tribal conflict and unchecked regional violence.

We share the concerns of many that the history of foreign military involvement in Afghanistan usually leads to prolonged warfare and unresolved conflict that takes human lives, endangers and destroys communities, and wastes resources that could be directed to human betterment. We also have taken serious note of the evidence that the very presence of foreign military involvement increases the resolve and number of those opposing that foreign presence. These factors lead us to believe that a different path be taken in order to achieve security for our own country and the rest of the world. We recognize that your decision will have longstanding consequences, not only for the people of Afghanistan and countries in the region but for our country and its allies. We pray that your choices will be made on the recognition that our own national interests depend on collaboration with the wider community of nations whenever possible.

In the midst of this perilous and burdensome time, be assured that you will remain in our prayers as we and the rest of the world look to you for the leadership that may achieve peace with justice for all.

Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, President

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