

# Churches speak out against war in Iraq

Iraqi Archbishop, Gabriel Kassab, visiting the World Council of Churches (WCC). Communicating for peace, Church leaders have issued a strong message against the planned military attack on Iraq.



Meeting in Berlin on 5 February to forge a common and consistent approach by Churches to the threat of military action against Iraq, Church leaders issued the following statement.

“1. As European church leaders, in consultation with councils of churches in the USA and the Middle East, we remain extremely concerned with the continued calls for military action against Iraq by the US and some European governments. As people of faith, our love of neighbour compels us to oppose war and to

seek peaceful resolution of conflicts. As churches we pray for peace and freedom, justice and safety for the people of Iraq and in the Middle East as a whole. Such prayer obliges us to be instruments of peace.

2. We deplore the fact that the most powerful nations of this world again regard war as an acceptable instrument of foreign policy. This creates an international culture of fear, threat and insecurity.

3. We cannot accept the stated objectives of a war against Iraq, as laid out by these governments, in particular the US. Pre-emptive military strike and war as a means to change the regime of a sovereign state are immoral and in violation of the UN Charter. We appeal to the Security Council to uphold the principles of the UN Charter which strictly limit the legitimate use of military force and to refrain from creating negative precedence and lowering the threshold for using violent means to solve international conflicts.

4. We believe that military force is an inappropriate means to achieve disarmament of any Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. We insist that the carefully designed mechanisms of the UN weapons inspections be given the time needed to complete their work.

5. All UN member states have to comply with binding UN resolutions and resolve conflicts by peaceful means. Iraq can be no exception. We call on the Government of Iraq to destroy any weapons of mass destruction and related research and production facilities. Iraq must cooperate fully with UN weapons inspectors, and guarantee full respect of the civil and political, economic, social and cultural human rights for all its citizens. The people in Iraq must be given hope that there are alternatives to both dictatorship and war.

6. A war would have unacceptable humanitarian consequences, including large-scale displacement of people, the breakdown of state functions, the possibility of civil war and major unrest in the whole region. The plight of Iraqi children and the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis over the past 12 years of sanctions regime weighs heavily on our hearts. In the present situation, we strongly affirm long-standing humanitarian principles of unconditional access to people in need.

7. We further caution against the potential social, cultural, and religious as well as diplomatic long-term consequences of such a war. Further fueling the fires of violence that are already consuming the region will only exacerbate intense hatred strengthening extremist ideologies and breeding further global instability and insecurity. As church leaders in Europe we have a moral and pastoral responsibility to challenge xenophobia in our own countries as well as allay the fears of many in

the Muslim world, that the so called Western Christianity is against their culture, religion and values. We should seek co-operation for peace, justice and human dignity.

8. All governments, in particular the members of the Security Council have the responsibility to consider the whole complexity of this issue. All peaceful and diplomatic means to compel Iraq to comply with UN Security Council resolutions have not been exhausted.

9. For us it is a spiritual obligation, grounded in God's love for all humanity, to speak out against war in Iraq. Through this message we send a strong sign of solidarity and support, to churches in Iraq, the Middle East and in the USA. We pray that God will guide those responsible to take decisions based on careful reflections, moral principles and high legal standards. We invite all churches to join us in this act of witness and to pray for and encourage participation of all people in the struggle for a peaceful resolution of this conflict."

#### List of participants

The meeting was convened by the WCC in consultation with the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCCUSA) and the Middle East Council of Churches, hosted by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

Participating were: Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the World Council of Churches; Rev. Dr Keith Clements, general secretary of the Council of European Churches; Präses Manfred Kock, president of the Council of the Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD); Bishop Dr. Walter Klaiber, head of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland (ACK) and Evangelical-Methodist Church (Germany); Rev. Dr Jean-Arnold de Clermont, president of the Protestant Federation of France; Bishop Mag. Herwig Sturm, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions in Austria ; Rev. Thomas Wipf, president of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches ; Bishop Jonas Jonson, Bishop of the Church of Sweden and Rev. Kjell Jonasson, Church of Sweden ; Rev. Canon Dr Trond Bakkevig, Church of Norway; Archbishop Jukka Parma, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland; Bischof Karsten Nissen, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark; Dr. Alison Elliot, Church of Scotland and Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS); Rev Arie W. van der Plas, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and Uniting Protestant Churches in the Netherlands; Archbishop Feofan, Russian Orthodox Church, archbishop of Berlin and Germany; Bishop Athanasius of Achaja, Church of Greece; Rev. Dr. Nuhad Daoud Tomeh, representing the General Secretariat of the Middle East Council of Churches; Dr. Bob Edgar, general secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA; James Winkler, general secretary, General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, USA; Rev. Dr Rebecca Larson, executive director, Division for Church and Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, USA; Mr. Thor-Arne Pröis, director of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, Geneva; WCC staff; Mr Peter Weiderud, director WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs; EKD Secretariat; Bishop Dr Rolf Koppe; Rev. Dr Christa Grengel; Rev. Dr Dagmar Heller

[www.wcc-coe.org](http://www.wcc-coe.org)

Voices of faith  
Saying no to war

Many statements and actions of the global church and ecumenical family are compiled in the latest edition of Behind the News: Visions for peace - Voices of faith.

A short selection of links to documents is presented here. The original and interactive version can be found on the WCC website at:

[www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews)

WCC past statements and actions regarding Iraq are now posted at:  
[www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/iraq.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/iraq.html)

A Catholic news report on December 11 notes that the Vatican is reasserting its opposition to a war on Iraq:  
[www.cathnews.com/news/210/27.php](http://www.cathnews.com/news/210/27.php)

In an interview on 14 January, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad of the Russian Orthodox Church shared his conviction that "we can and should overcome the danger of the proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction only by peaceful diplomatic means in compliance with the international law and resolutions of the UN Security Council."  
[www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ne301143.htm](http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ne301143.htm)

Orthodox church leader Petros VII, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, wrote a letter to the President of the USA, George Bush on 2 January 2002, calling on him to find a peaceful solution rather than that of war:  
[www.orthodoxeurope.org/europaica/000006.php#4](http://www.orthodoxeurope.org/europaica/000006.php#4)

The General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches issued a plea to US churches during a meeting of the board of directors of Church World Service, on which he serves, asking them to press for a peaceful, diplomatic resolution to the Iraq crisis and to "speak to your government to stop any military offensive".  
[www.nccusa.org/news/02news90.html](http://www.nccusa.org/news/02news90.html)

The Conference of International Catholic Organizations issued a press release on the Iraqi-American conflict on 19 January. [www.oic-ico.org/eng/c3.htm](http://www.oic-ico.org/eng/c3.htm)  
Pax Christi International sent a letter to the United Nations Security Council on January 27.  
[www.paxchristi.net/body\\_index.html](http://www.paxchristi.net/body_index.html)

Caritas Internationalis issued a statement on 21 January on Iraq, urging the international community to give absolute priority to finding a diplomatic and political solution to the Iraqi crisis to avoid a major humanitarian disaster.  
[click here](#)

Inspired by the spirit of peace and justice that prevailed at the Global Social Forum in Porto Alegre, the ecumenical network, "Red por la Cultura de Paz, el Desarrollo y la Seguridad Humana" (Net for a Culture of Peace, Development and Human Security – CHILE), is launching a campaign to stop the threat of war on Iraq by boycotting goods and services produced or provided by American companies SHOULD the American Government attack Iraq without clearance from the UN Security Council.  
[www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/boycott.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/boycott.html)

In a letter of support dated 19 December, 2002 to the National Council of Churches in the USA for their visit to Iraq, the Christian Conference of Asia writes that it is important for the rest of the world to know that there are also alternative voices (voices of protest against injustice and war, and voices for peace and transformation) in the United States.  
[www.cca.org.hk/ccanews/press/cca21219.htm](http://www.cca.org.hk/ccanews/press/cca21219.htm)