



## *Committee on International Justice and Peace*

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December 18, 2009

General James L. Jones, USMC (Ret.)  
National Security Advisor  
National Security Council  
Washington, DC

Dear General Jones:

The Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops met on December 2, the day after the President's address at West Point, to discuss the Administration's revised strategy for Afghanistan. The Committee affirmed and extended the message of my letter to you of October 6, 2009. In the face of terrorist threats, our nation must respond to indiscriminate attacks against innocent civilians in ways that combine a resolve to do what is necessary, the restraint to ensure that we act justly, and the vision to focus on broader issues of poverty and injustice that are unscrupulously exploited by terrorists in gaining recruits.

The Committee affirmed the need for a "responsible transition" that acknowledges the reality of eight years of armed conflict and allows the withdrawal of U.S. military forces at the earliest opportunity consistent with the objectives of denying safe havens for terrorist organizations, minimizing further loss of human life, assisting refugees and internally displaced persons, and helping set the country on a path to recovery from its decades of war and violence. As pastors we offer Catholic teaching and experience to help inform what must be an ongoing evaluation of our nation's actions in Afghanistan.

In a pastoral message, "Living with Faith and Hope after September 11," we bishops offered moral criteria for subsequent military action in Afghanistan. We noted, "Probability of success is particularly difficult to measure in dealing with an amorphous, global terrorist network. Therefore, special attention must be given to developing criteria for when it is appropriate to end military action in Afghanistan." We put forth principles to help guide U.S. actions: restrain use of military force and ensure that civilians are not targeted; address the root causes of terrorism rather than relying solely on military means to solve conflict; and encourage international collaboration to provide humanitarian assistance and rebuild Afghanistan.

The Administration's strategy calls for the U.S. to coordinate closely with allies and international organizations in Afghanistan. The bishops support a multilateral approach to create effective national and local governments and foster economic development. We also affirm the Administration's emphasis on a more effective civilian strategy, particularly the focus on agricultural assistance and combating corruption and improving accountability. Whenever possible, development assistance should be delivered through civilian/NGO channels, rather than through the military. Catholic Relief Services, and other civilian agencies that engage local communities in the often slow process of helping them to determine their own needs and priorities, build the local ownership necessary for long-term sustainable development. Given the decentralized nature of Afghan society and the needs of the poor there, significant portions of aid should go to local community projects.

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The dramatic increase in U.S. troops on deployment in Afghanistan focuses our attention on those who risk their lives in the service of our nation. U.S. policy must take into account the growing costs and consequences of continued deployments on military personnel, their families and our nation. There is a moral obligation to deal with the human, medical, mental health and social costs of military action. Our nation must also make provisions for those who exercise their right to conscientious objection or selective conscientious objection.

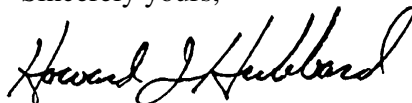
President Obama has indicated his intention to begin bringing some troops home by July 2011 after “building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.” The goal of a “responsible transition” should provide an overall ethical framework for U.S. actions in Afghanistan. Specific criteria must be developed for ending military action in Afghanistan and for withdrawing troops. In our view, building Afghan capacity means helping them secure an adequate basis for future political and economic stability.

Each course of action taken by the U.S. must be weighed in light of the traditional moral principle of “probability of success.” In other words, will this action contribute to a “responsible transition” and withdrawal as soon as appropriate and possible? Will it improve Afghan security and minimize loss of life? Will it provide an adequate foundation for long-term development?

We urge the Administration to continually review the use of military force—whether and when force is necessary to protect the innocent and resist terrorism—to insure that it is proportionate and discriminate, and to develop concrete criteria for when it is appropriate to end direct U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan. The goal of a “responsible transition” should be carefully defined and limited to permit a timely withdrawal. But having initiated military action in Afghanistan, our nation must be committed to fostering good governance, respect for human rights and religious freedom, and economic and agricultural development long after direct military engagement ends.

As bishops we do not have expertise on military strategies, but we have a moral tradition that can inform military decisions and on-the-ground experience in development through Catholic Relief Services. While neither our teaching nor our experience suggest easy answers, they raise key questions with which we must struggle as a nation as we work toward a “responsible transition” in Afghanistan. We hope these questions are helpful as the Administration implements its new policies in Afghanistan.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard

Bishop of Albany

Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace