

Witness to the Human Cost of the Iraq War

Lift the Prophetic Voice in Congressional Offices

November 1, 2005

An Interfaith Public Witness

Detailed Action Plan

Who: **The Fellowship of Reconciliation** (see www.forusa.org) and **Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice**, a network of religious leaders and people of faith in CT committed to nonviolent alternatives to war, along with allies all across the country

For more information, send e-mail to: PropheticVoiceNov1@yahoo.com
or call: John Humphries at 860/236-5175

What: **An Interfaith Public Witness at Local Congressional Offices**

- Making visible the human cost of the war by reading the names of US soldiers and Iraqi civilians who have died in Iraq since March 2003.
- Demanding a full, independent congressional investigation into the abuse and torture of detainees.
- Demanding that members of Congress speak up and exercise leadership to end the war, to hold senior officials accountable for torture and other war crimes, to ensure that the US leaves no permanent bases in Iraq, and to halt the diversion of resources away from urgent domestic needs, including hurricane relief, by putting a halt to war funding.
- We encourage local organizers to plan at least part of their witness for inside the office (with additional supporters holding a vigil outside), and to consider having some participants willing to risk arrest if they are asked to leave before all the names have been read.

Where: District offices of members of Congress in every state

When: Tuesday, November 1, 2005

Why: The illegal and immoral war in Iraq (launched preemptively, on the basis of faulty and fabricated evidence) and the use of torture against prisoners reflect a moral, spiritual crisis in this country. **As religious leaders and people of faith, we are called to respond to this crisis by lifting a moral and spiritual voice in the public arena, demanding that our members of Congress fulfill their responsibility to take action to halt this illegal war and to hold senior officials accountable for torture and other war crimes.** As the first Tuesday of the month, November 1 marks one year before the mid-term Congressional elections of 2006. It is also All Saints Day, a Christian Holy Day used to honor saints, martyrs and others who have died. **We will use this occasion to honor those who have died in Iraq and to give prophetic witness to the immorality of the ongoing war and its growing impact on our struggling communities.**

Action Plan:

FOR and RTPV encourage local organizers to design actions that have a religious/spiritual tone and message, led by clergy of different faiths and denominations. We want to create an opportunity for religious leaders and people of faith to lift their voices in a day of coordinated action that allows our voices to be magnified. By standing together in visible public witness, we want to nourish a growing movement among religious leaders and faith communities that is beginning to speak more boldly about the immorality of this war and the systematic use of torture against detainees.

A number of faith-based organizations have initiated campaigns to stop the torture of U.S. detainees. We will seek to collaborate with them in organizing this nationwide action.

We envision local groups of clergy and people of faith gathering at the local office of a member of Congress, beginning with an interfaith liturgy that draws upon the Christian observance of All Saints Day and includes a recitation of the Jewish Mourner's Kaddish and readings from the Koran. The liturgy will be followed by a public reading of the names of soldiers and civilians who have died in Iraq, with the tolling of a Buddhist bell to mark the reading of each name. A delegation will also enter the congressional office to read some of the names (perhaps all the soldiers from that state or all the soldiers who died during the previous year, along with an equal number of names of Iraqi civilians). The delegation will invite congressional staff to participate and/or make a statement on behalf of the member of Congress. Some offices may ask those involved in the public witness to leave before they have completed their reading of the names, and local groups will have to decide whether some participants are willing to risk arrest by continuing the witness inside the office.

When the delegation moves back outside to join the vigil, a pause in the reading of the names will allow them to make a public statement about any response from the congressional staff. A 10-minute period of silence, broken by the tolling of the bell every minute, will honor the estimated 100,000 Iraqi civilians who have died since March 2003. When all the names have been read, the public witness will end with an interfaith prayer and call to continued action.

Resources

The FOR website will provide a variety of organizing tools, including downloadable lists of names to be read, suggestions for conducting outreach to other religious leaders and faith communities in your congressional district, a petition that can be circulated among faith communities prior to the action, sample media releases and media tips, a sample liturgy, training materials and other resources for those prepared to risk arrest, and links to a variety of faith-based statements against the war and against torture. We will also coordinate national media to achieve maximum coverage of the events happening on this day.

Background Information

Since 1915, **The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR)** has carried on programs and educational projects concerned with domestic and international peace and justice, nonviolent alternatives to conflict, and the rights of conscience. A Nonviolent, Interfaith, tax exempt organization, The FOR promotes nonviolence and has members from many religious and ethnic traditions. It is a part of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), which has affiliates in over 40 countries.

FOR seeks to replace violence, war, racism, and economic injustice with nonviolence, peace, and justice. We are an interfaith organization committed to active nonviolence as a transforming way of life and as a means of radical change. We educate, train, build coalitions, and engage in nonviolent and compassionate actions locally, nationally, and globally.

Established in 2002, **Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice (RTPV)** is a statewide interfaith gathering of religious leaders and people of faith in Connecticut, joined by a belief in the God of justice and love, who calls us "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God." In this time of crisis and war, we believe that walking humbly with God requires us to advocate and practice nonviolent love, in the tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. As religious leaders and people of faith, we gather to share our anguish at the violence in which our country is enmeshed, and to discern how to be prophetic and act to promote an alternative to this culture of violence.

In January 2005, RTPV issued *A Call to Resist the War in Iraq* (www.forusa.org/media/IraqCalltoResist.html) based on the international law principle of individual responsibility derived from the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Tribunals. On Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday (1/15), RTPV organized a public witness that involved a public signing of the *Call to Resist* and a reading of the names of all US soldiers killed in Iraq and an equal number of Iraqi civilians killed in the conflict. In March, FOR endorsed the *Call to Resist*, and in May the two organizations began collecting signatures on a Petition to Investigate Torture (http://petitions.forusa.org/petition.php?petition_id=5), demanding that Congress carry out a thorough and independent investigation of torture and other war crimes and hold officials accountable for their actions, under the provisions of the U.S. War Crimes Act of 1996 and the U.S. Torture Act of 2000.

RTPV will organize the November 1st witness at congressional offices in CT, develop resource materials, and provide some support to local organizers across the country. FOR will help coordinate with other national organizations, use its national network of volunteers to promote the event, and help recruit local organizers.