

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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This week's messages are—

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 - Tax Package on the Move in Congress
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Stop the U.S.-India Nuclear Deal

“To continue to have the “haves” and “have nots” is absolutely unsustainable. Either we continue to rely on nuclear weapons, and face the reality that in the next 10-20 years, 20 or 30 countries will have nuclear weapons, or each country must cease its nuclear program and destroy existing nuclear arsenals.” -- IAEA Director General Mohamed El-Baradei

The Administration is currently encouraging Congress to pass a U.S. - India nuclear cooperation deal that would provide India the technology to increase its production of nuclear weapons. This deal would severely undermine the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as well as global efforts to ban nuclear weapons.

At a time when efforts are being made to restrain Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, the U.S. is setting up a double standard. It is rewarding India, who has detonated nuclear devices and who did not sign on to the Non-Proliferation Treaty with nuclear technology, while pressuring and threatening Iran, who did sign on to the treaty, not to develop its nuclear capability. Many other aspiring nuclear powers will take note if this inconsistency and behave accordingly.

Because India's civilian and military nuclear programs are not separated, the U.S. could be supplying India technology that directly allows India to produce weapons grade material. This is particularly possible because India has only agreed to have a portion of its nuclear reactors inspected. In addition, it could create further tension between India and Pakistan and would offer nonnuclear states an incentive to withdraw from the nonproliferation treaty.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has always stood firmly behind the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Since 1946 Presbyterian Assemblies called for international disarmament and arms control measures as a path toward long-term security. In 2003, the General Assembly called on all nations to fulfill their commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and “move together with the other nuclear powers . . . to the abolition of nuclear weapons.” The Assembly called on the U.S. to renounce the first use of nuclear weapons, permanently end the development, testing, and production of nuclear warheads, and strengthen non-proliferation efforts by ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty... locating fissile material worldwide, and negotiating a ban on its production. The Assembly has called for Presbyterians to be conscious of and learn about nuclear disarmament issues so that “they may make extraordinary use of the ordinary means of citizen responsibility to assure the commitment of the United States government toward these ends.” (*Minutes*, 2003, p. 649-651)

Congress could vote this month on this dangerous deal with India that would undermine years of work by the global community to stop nuclear proliferation.

This is a critical time for the U.S. to take leadership in the international community for reducing nuclear arsenals – including our own. Nuclear weapons are a threat to our national security, and to global security. This dangerous deal with India would do the exact opposite: violating international agreements and increasing India's capacity to produce new nuclear weapons.

There are much better ways to build strong relations with India, such as encouraging economic and technological advancements, that do not involve damaging global security and rewarding poor nuclear behavior.

Please contact your Representative to today and ask him/her to oppose the U.S.-India Nuclear deal. Click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/> to send an email to your Representative.

Sample Email

Please oppose the proposed U.S.-India nuclear deal, which President Bush is asking you to consider.

This agreement undermines global efforts, such as the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to rid the world of nuclear weapons. It also undermines U.S. credibility in persuading other countries, such as Iran, to abandon nuclear weapons development.

Congress can improve relations with India without giving the Indian government the ability to increase its production of nuclear weapons by 500 percent.

Please let me know what you will do to oppose this deal.

What is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty?

The purpose of the Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty is to prevent more countries from obtaining nuclear weapons. The treaty sets up international safeguards (audits and inspections) through which non-nuclear states are ensured fair access to peaceful nuclear technology while gaining commitments that they will not develop nuclear weapons. The treaty:

- Forbids member states without nuclear weapons from developing them
- Forbids the five member states with nuclear weapons (the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and China) from transferring them to any other state
- Provides international safeguards so that peaceful nuclear programs in non nuclear weapons states will not be diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices
- Facilitates access to peaceful uses of nuclear energy
- Commits member states to pursue good faith negotiations toward ending the nuclear arms race and achieving nuclear disarmament

The treaty was opened for signatures in 1968 and came into effect in 1970. The five nuclear weapons states designated by the treaty were the states that had exploded a nuclear bomb before January 1967. Only three states have not signed the treaty - Israel, Pakistan, and India. North Korea was a signatory but withdrew from the treaty on April 10, 2003. Pakistan and India have detonated nuclear weapons. Israel is believed to have nuclear weapons. However, because they did not test a nuclear device before 1967, if they were to join they would have to disarm, submit to inspections, and join as non-nuclear states. South Africa did possess weapons from 1979 through 1991 but then disarmed and joined the treaty.

General Assembly Guidance:

In addition to the citation above, the 206th General Assembly (1994) spoke directly to the issue of security based on common interest, trust, and cooperation in the Asia Pacific region, calling on the United States government to: “strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), renew it in 1995, enhance safeguard provisions of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and encourage all Asia-Pacific countries, specifically India, Pakistan, North and South Korea, and Japan, to forego development of nuclear weapons, adhere to the NPT and abide by IAEA standards.” (*Minutes*, 1994, p. 308)

Tax Package on the Move in Congress

Last week, the U.S. Senate reached a deal on a tax package that, among other things, includes measures to help low-income families and to help expand the use of renewable energy and energy conservation. The Senate will consider the bill tomorrow and the House is expected to take up the bill soon.

First, the bill expands the Child Tax Credit (CTC), making it available to more low-income families. The expansion will provide new assistance to 2.9 million children and provide increased relief to 10.1 million children. The CTC is available to taxpayers who have a qualifying child (under 17), and it is designed to lessen the impact of income taxes for families raising children. Right now, many low-income families with children are left out of receiving this tax benefit because they earn too little to qualify, but this bill lowers the income threshold required to receive the Child Tax Credit from \$12,050 to \$8,500, thus benefitting millions more low-income families.

Second, the tax package also includes an extension of already existing tax credits for residential and commercial use and the development of renewable energy technologies such as energy conservation in buildings and electricity from wind and solar power. These tax credits were set to expire at the end of the year and had already been passed in the House; however, until last week the Senate could not come to agreement on how to pay for the continuation of these tax credits, which have helped to encourage broader use of new energy technologies. The expansion of these technologies is a critical component in transitioning our nation's energy infrastructure to sustainable systems that are clean and do not harm the environment.

Please take the time today to contact both of your Senators and your Representative to urge them to vote in favor of this sound tax policy. Click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/> to find your members of Congress and their contact information.

You could say something like this:

"My name is _____, and I'm a constituent - I live in town, state. As a person of faith I support using our tax code to protect future generations and God's creation. I urge Representative _____ to vote for expanding the child tax credit to include more low income American families and to renew tax credits for renewable energy and energy conservation. Both of these tax measures will help to protect our future. Please tell Representative _____ that I hope he/she will support the tax bill including these important credits.

General Assembly Policy:

On the Child Tax Credit:

The 218th General Assembly (2008) passed "From Homelessness to Hope: Constructing Just, Sustainable Communities for All God's People" in which it outlined several policy provisions that not only directly affect affordable housing and homelessness, but also affect the work supports and poverty issues that are contributing factors to families being at risk for homelessness. One policy provision that the General Assembly lifted

up as a hopeful step toward helping families reduce their risk for homelessness is expanding access to the child tax credit:

Increase tax benefits for those living at lower income levels, so as to achieve a more equitable distribution of tax benefits for the purpose of achieving greater economic stability for individuals and families at risk of homelessness such as: expansion of the refundable Child Tax Credit by making it available to more low-income workers. (<http://www.pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=1623&promID=25>)

On the Renewable Energy Tax Measures:

The 218th General Assembly (2008) urged legislative proposals that would “shift subsidies and financial incentives toward industries specializing in renewable energy and energy efficiency and away from the fossil fuel and nuclear power industries. One vital step would be to extend for ten years the federal tax credit for production of energy from wind, solar, geothermal, closed-loop and open-loop biomass, landfill gas, and small irrigation power facilities.” (<http://www.pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=1537&promID=10>)

Not on Our Watch Christian Companion: Biblical Reflections on the Movement to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond - Now Available

God will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.

— Micah 4:3

A new resource is available from the ENOUGH project on the genocide occurring in Darfur. The Not on Our Watch Christian Companion: Biblical Reflections on the Movement to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond connects churches, fellowships, and individual Christians to the global movement to end genocide in Darfur and other crimes against humanity in Africa.

The Companion expands on New York Times bestseller Not on Our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond by actor Don Cheadle (Hotel Rwanda) and Africa expert John Prendergast, co-founder of the ENOUGH Project.

Drawing from the rich Christian humanitarian tradition as well as from traditions of public political involvement, the Companion provides biblical reflections on ethical issues as well as practical guidance for action to create change in Darfur. Each chapter constitutes a weekly study session—eight in all—designed to guide group discussion and reflection about Darfur and the movement to end genocide. Each session includes a biblical passage for reflection, a lesson applying the passage to

Darfur, a weekly action step, and vignettes by refugees and people from many walks of life who have awakened to the problem of genocide and become active in the Darfur movement.

For more information and to order copies of the companion please go to www.darfurchristianaction.org.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 217th General Assembly (2006) encouraged “all Presbyterians to pray for a just peace for all the people of Sudan; to raise awareness of genocide in Sudan, planned and paid for by the government of Sudan, which continues to the present against the southern and marginalized people of Sudan, including Darfur and eastern Sudan; and to make their voices heard by the leaders of our government, including the president of the United States, secretary of state, members of Congress, and the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, on behalf of continued sanctions against the government of Sudan until a just and lasting peace exists for all people of Sudan.”

Invitation to Church-wide Fast

At the behest of the 218th General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is inviting its congregations to engage in a monthly church-wide fast to discern faithful responses to the global food crisis, in a world where more than 845 million people go hungry. As many as 100 million more may be driven into extreme poverty due to the food crisis, while others live with plenty to spare.

Beginning in October, Presbyterians are encouraged to fast monthly, beginning on Friday evening, and breaking the fast with communion on Sunday morning. Those who are physically unable to fast may eat simple meals. The year-long cycle will end on Oct. 16, 2009, on World Food Day, with new materials available each month. The first fast begins on the evening of Friday October 3, and ends with communion on Sunday October 5 - World Communion Sunday.

Congregations may commit to the fast as a body; individuals and smaller groups may also participate.

The website and fast materials will launch on Sept. 18 at www.pcusa.org/foodcrisis. Prayers for communal or individual use will be provided for the 40-hour fasts and will be written by fast participants, church partners and theologians from the United States and overseas.

Each month, the site will offer fresh analysis on an aspect of the food crisis, such as global warming, flawed trade agreements, lack of access to food or loss of inherited seeds to grow indigenous crops.

Other new material each month includes:

- A biblical study by a respected scholar and/or pastor
- Liturgy for corporate worship
- Reflections on spiritual practice by a recognized author and/or teacher

Church partners from heavily-hit nations like Congo, Sudan, Haiti and India will join us by telling their stories and by providing us data about the food crisis from their particular context. In fact, partners have asked that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) engage with them in study and worship. That request was honored by the General Assembly last June when it voted to initiate a church-wide fast to seek God's presence, purpose and power in the midst of such devastating tragedy.

Food shortages and famines are not new. The difference now is that food, water and climate crises are converging to create what has been called a "perfect storm" with unprecedented suffering that calls us all to respond.

Please circulate this invitation to others who are seeking a faith-based response to the global food crisis and who are willing to engage it through a sacrificial practice. Let's fast, pray, repent and act, following the example set by Jesus in the sacrament of eucharist, to divide the gifts of the earth fairly, sharing them with the weak, the poor and the hungry.

If you have questions, don't hesitate to contact Ruth Farrell, coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program at (888)-728-7228, ext. 5816, or Ruth.Farrell@pcusa.org. Find out what others are thinking, saying, and doing around the fast and the food crisis on the Facebook group "Presbyterians Respond to Global Food Crisis." And share your own reflections.

2008 General Assembly Action:

On Mobilizing Presbyterians for a Significant Response to the Global Food Crisis

That the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) urgently take the following steps in response to the global food crisis:

1. Launch a general appeal to all Presbyterians to donate to a special fund set up by the General Assembly Council to enable the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to provide better support to and accompaniment of our overseas partners trying to step up their response to the global food crisis.
2. Step up and speed up mission personnel deployment, in response to overseas partners who so request, to advise and accompany them as to the kinds of actions that could be undertaken to alleviate hunger in the short term without creating new dependencies and/or compromising their countries' sovereignty and economy.
3. Invite all Presbyterians to join in the church-wide practice of spiritual disciplines, such as monthly fasting for repentance and reflection, which may

lead to meaningful coordinated actions to accompany those who are poor and hungry around the world.

4. Produce relevant resources, using all available communications means, to raise the awareness of Presbyterians about the current food crisis, including the dangers for the U.S. government, the European Union, and other international entities who want to use the current food crisis as an opportunity to offer more direct food aid exports and genetically modified (GMO) seeds to affected countries, instead of offering economic and financial assistance to enable them to increase the production and marketing of their own traditional food commodities.
5. Call on the Stated Clerk and on appropriate entities of the General Assembly Council (GAC) to contact the U.S. government, the World Bank, and other relevant institutions, to call for the continued pursuit of debt relief as well as an immediate increase in their financial assistance for food aid and agricultural development in developing countries.

Luke 3:2b-6 - The Proclamation of John the Baptist

The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” ’

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Thank You.

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