

Dear Readers,

As you will see, this is a special issue of our newsletter. Although we work in a variety of regional and local contexts, we cannot be indifferent to global events, which have never seemed more inimical to conflict transformation and the values which it embodies. We feel we should not remain silent on the impact which the rhetoric, decisions and actions of the 'big powers' are having in different parts of the world. We are concerned that the viewpoints of people living in other countries should not be ignored.

We therefore wrote to friends and colleagues living and working in very different places and these are the responses we received. Our invitation was quite open and our contributors have written from their own perspectives and in their own style. The pieces collected here are also of very different lengths. We are grateful for them all and are happy with their variety.

We are not, however, happy with the situation about which they write with such eloquence and concern. We hope that this issue will strengthen our determination to exercise whatever influence we have, as citizens and professionals, to ensure that our world becomes a place less dominated by economic and military power and more attuned to the needs of its inhabitants.

Letter from Kenya

by Malesi E. K. Kinaro

What grieves my heart is the determination of the Bush administration to attack Iraq and cause SO MANY DEATHS!! It does not make sense to us, this determination to fight. From where we are, we see that Saddam Hussein has given quite a lot of ground. And we tremble because we know that when somebody is angry with the Americans we get bombed. We have had three bomb attacks in Kenya. In the 1998 one I lost close friends and relatives. I am still nurturing some of the children who lost a mother. So we tremble and wonder.

Couldn't the American administration listen to what so many are saying and use the diplomatic line? I wonder if America could allow the UN to inspect ALL their areas of weaponry.

I stand by those in the USA who are against this evil plan. We continue to pray that war can be avoided.

Peacebuilding in Mindanao, Philippines, after 9-11

by Carino Antiquisa

[The author explains the situation in which he works as follows: 'This is not a religious war between Christian and Muslim communities. It is an armed confrontation between the Philippine military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Both Christian and Muslim religious leaders recognize and respect the values for justice, peace and compassion in each others' religious traditions. We condemn the formation of any extremist vigilante groups, which will only polarize cultural communities.']

The events in September 11, 2001 have had both a positive and a negative impact on our peacebuilding work in Mindanao.

The positive effect of the event is that it made many individuals involved in peacebuilding realize the urgent need to explore more creative ways of addressing the root causes of conflict, rather than simply its visible manifestations, like war. It made many of us reflect how urgent is the need to address the psychological dimension of the conflict. We started to seriously address not just the psychological impact of the conflict on individuals but the collective consciousness of groups directly involved or affected by it.

Perhaps one proof of this realization is the greater effort put into grassroots peacebuilding, with special attention given to the young people. According to one of my Muslim friends, an Aleem [a Moslem religious leader] who has extensive experience abroad, 'there is a real and urgent need to redirect the energy of the young, especially the Moro Muslims, in Mindanao'. My friend told me that the action of the hijackers was not simply viewed as suicidal but as a form of sacrifice worthy of emulation.

At the same time, the events of September 11th also allowed the real issues behind the conflict here to be obscured. Instead of concentrating on how to resolve the centuries-old land problems, the government gives more attention to running after terrorists. Instead of pouring more resources into peacebuilding efforts, they are spending more money on defence against terrorist attacks. And at the community level, instead of more efforts being focussed on peace and development, resources are earmarked for law and order.

This attitude, which is prevalent among local people as well as in government circles, is based on the assumption that all those who rise up against the government are now to be regarded not only as rebels but as terrorists. No matter how legitimate are the issues raised by the armed groups, this is the label the government is quick to give them.

All in all, however hard we have tried to see the post 9.11 trends as new challenges, we cannot fail to acknowledge that these challenges are accompanied by more headaches. Indeed, the post 9.11 peacebuilding work in Mindanao demands more resources, energy, patience and creativity than ever.

A Paradigm Shift in the Sri Lankan Peace Process

from a paper by Jehan Perera, Media Director, National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

[This account is not so much a reaction to the so-called 'war on terror' as a description of how, in Sri Lanka, there has been some recognition of the futility of relying on military might to deal with conflict.

In his paper Jehan Perera also comments on the situation in Nepal. He says, 'In Nepal, where the government is confronted with a Maoist insurrection that has engulfed more than half of that country, the British government has given a substantial grant of money to peace organisations to engage in conflict resolution work. But it has also given ten times that amount to the Nepalese government to upgrade its military. Both the US attitude to Iraq and the British pattern of aid to Nepal suggest that the military option is the one preferred by governments world-wide.']

Until the until the present administration took office in Sri Lanka following the elections of December 2001, the preferred option of successive governments to the internal conflict had been a military one. The reason that governments in Sri Lanka, and in many part of the world, show a preference to relying on military force rather than negotiations is not difficult to fathom. A military solution is one that is imposed on the opponent without the need to compromise. Negotiations, by contrast, imply a willingness to settle for something less than 100 per cent of one's demands. However, imposing a military solution requires overwhelming military superiority. This is what the US has in relation to Iraq, and what the Sri Lankan government does not have in relation to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

There are many factors underlying the present success of the Sri Lankan peace process. On the one hand, the highly military nature of the LTTE, the fragmented Sinhalese polity and economic vested interests put roadblocks on the path to political reform and compromise. On the other hand, war weariness among the general population, economic debilitation, and the threat of the US-led war against terrorism put pressure on the conflicting parties to compromise and resolve their disputes through negotiations. In February 2002, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE signed a ceasefire agreement, under the Norwegian Government's auspices which appears to offer the prospect of a final end to violence.

The general election in December 2001 pitted the People's Alliance (PA) government and its Marxist ally, the People's Liberation Front (JVP), against the United National Front (UNF). Ostensibly, the general election in Sri Lanka was about the role of the separatist LTTE in a future peace process to end the eighteen year ethnic war. The powerful government-controlled media, however, made the centrepiece of the election campaign the secret deal between the main opposition party and the LTTE. But underlying the rhetoric was the grim reality of an economy that had registered close to zero percent growth in 2001.

Ironically, the PA's nationalist propaganda contributed to its defeat. Over the past seven years, President Chandrika Kumaratunga was in the vanguard of those propounding the notion that the ethnic conflict in the country required a political solution. However, her government was unable to deliver on its pledges. The repeated failure of the government either to proceed with constitutional reforms or to make peace with the LTTE resulted in virtually every Tamil party contesting the December elections in the north-east speaking the language of Tamil nationalism. The most successful party, the Tamil National Alliance, even went so far as to suggest that the LTTE should be the sole Tamil representative at peace talks with the government.

The PA government, following the failure of the peace talks with the LTTE at the very beginning of its term of office in April 1995, declared a full scale 'war for peace'. It had a two-pronged military and political strategy aimed at weakening and sidelining the LTTE. But this policy of confrontation failed at both levels.

Initially, the retaking of Jaffna by the Sri Lanka Army through Operation Riviresa in November 1995 seemed to indicate that the military strategy of full scale confrontation would succeed. But thereafter poorly executed campaigns, such as the two and a half year Operation Jayasikuru to retake the A9 main road to Jaffna, failed at a high cost. Instead of being militarily weakened, the LTTE emerged strengthened from these campaigns.

The political prong of the PA government's strategy to undermine the LTTE took the form of a devolution package. This offered considerable hope when it was first put forward in August 1995, but again failed to deliver the hoped-for results. The government fiercely confronted all political opponents of its package, even incurring the wrath of religious prelates. Ultimately the government's bid to translate the devolution package into constitutional law proved unsuccessful. In a replay of the partisan politics that have dogged all political efforts down the

decades to end the ethnic conflict through negotiations, the opposition led by Ranil Wickremesinghe simply refused to cooperate.

Important Lessons

It seems that the new government under Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has learned two important lessons from the former government's failure. The first is that head-on confrontation will not bring a solution to the ethnic conflict. Accordingly, political and structural reforms might have to be instituted *de facto* rather than *de jure*, and acquiesced in by the general population on the basis of minimal information. The alternative of explaining everything in detail to the people in order to get them to vote in favour of the settlement would be likely to result in the process getting bogged down in controversy.

The second lesson evidently learnt by the new government is that all outstanding problems cannot be resolved in one go, but require a stage by stage approach. The two-pronged approach of the former government was aimed at achieving knock-out victories, militarily with the Jaffna campaign, politically with the devolution package. But even when the immediate objective was achieved, as with the retaking and successful holding of Jaffna, the resilience of the LTTE ensured that the victory was incomplete. As regards the political aspect, it is likely that even if the devolution package had been passed with the support of the opposition its implementation would have been impossible due to resistance by the LTTE. Having witnessed, and contributed to, the failure of the former government's confrontational strategy, the new government appears to have opted, for the time being at least, for a non-confrontational approach.

The attitude to the peace process of the opposition parties – which prior to the December 2001 elections had formed the government – is in line with the general approach of governments world-wide, namely to try to impose solutions upon their opponents. The former government's position was premised upon the notion of an unequal status between the two parties; it saw itself as representing a sovereign state, and the LTTE as an internationally banned terrorist organisation. The LTTE consistently rejected this view as a basis for negotiation. The implication therefore of the opposition's stance is a return to war.

The failure of the former government to impose a solution upon the LTTE may seem, from a Sinhalese nationalist point of view, to be a catastrophe. However, to the extent that the LTTE succeeds in representing the interests of the Tamil people at the negotiating table, an outcome more favourable to justice is possible. For the first time since Sri Lanka obtained independence in 1948 there will be an opportunity for a negotiated political solution to the ethnic conflict in which the interests of all the communities are met, rather than the interests of only the majority community. But this will require the LTTE, too, to renounce its own self interest in monopolising power, and to put the interests of the Tamil people foremost at the negotiating table.

Main Breakthroughs

One of the breakthroughs in the peace process has been the agreement to explore a framework of federal governance for the country. However, this is not the only breakthrough that occurred in the course of the year long peace process. Earlier ones were the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement in February 2002, the swift and equally unexpected removal of security barriers in Colombo, and the joint government-LTTE participation in the Oslo aid donor meeting in November last year. Few political analysts anticipated events of this nature.

The government leaders who have been in the forefront of the peace process use the term paradigm shift to describe the dramatic change in their approach to the problem. They realised that the old way of viewing the situation was not leading to conflict resolution but to conflict

escalation. Indeed, by the time of the general election of December 2001 the country was close to economic collapse. Many commercial establishments were being shut down. Even big corporate leaders began to publicly warn that their companies would collapse unless there was a change.

This was the context in which the paradigm shift occurred, leading the new government to deal with the LTTE in a hitherto unprecedented manner. The government recognised the fact that the military option was leading nowhere. It also recognised that the LTTE was in physical control of vast swathes of the north and east, and would not simply go away. It had to be accepted as a solidly entrenched reality and dealt with on that basis.

Once the government made the decision to consider the LTTE a partner in the peace process, rather than an enemy, the nature of its negotiations changed fundamentally. Previously negotiations were conducted in a spirit of rivalry and mistrust, with each side trying to extract the most it could. After the paradigm shift this changed, and both the government and LTTE showed sensitivity to the interests of the other party. One of LTTE's main concerns has been to be accepted as a legitimate actor and not as a terrorist one. The government acknowledged this by lifting its ban on the LTTE, and by referring to it as a partner and taking it to the Oslo donor meeting on that basis.

For its part, the LTTE has been prepared to state publicly its willingness to settle for a federal arrangement, a step which means accepting something less than a separate Tamil state. It could have demanded a confederation – a kind of half-way house to separation – and many analysts had expected it to press for this at the peace talks. But the LTTE did not do so, perhaps realising that it was a demand the government could not grant.

The willingness of both sides to compromise and take account in the negotiations of the interests of the other, offers the best chance to date of a lasting peace.

People of the World Should Unite for Peace and Human Dignity

by Gulnara Shahinian (Armenia)

Not so long has passed since the time when we all became one country, one world, shocked by the September 11 tragedy. We all 'became America', united by sorrow and by compassion for the people of America. Many of us were calling friends and colleagues in there and going to American Embassies in our countries to express our sincere wish to help. What happened and why it happened was our concern.

Not so long has passed since September 11, and what has been happening since that time is alarming. Recently I came across this:

[The] American Dialect Society selected 'weapons of mass destruction' as its annual choice at a meeting in Atlanta. "The term goes back 50 years, but you can't turn on the radio or television without hearing about 'weapons of mass destruction'", said an English professor at Georgia College & State University who is also chairman of the society's new words committee.'

Can one believe this? Weapons of mass destruction. Is this the linguistic and psychological environment that modern homosapiens has created for himself? There are even more popular words that are washing over us and our children as they pour from the TV and newspapers: 'war on terrorism', 'crusade on terrorism', 'war', 'evil', 'mock war' and 'suicide bombers'.

Yes, the vocabulary, beliefs, morality and trust are under pressure. In today's language they are under attack. Is it materialistic consumerism or modern techno-society's psychological framework that drive out our sense of poetry and beauty, love and dignity, continuity and stability? Or are people in one of the countries striving for world dominance feeling themselves endangered by the implications and consequences of that country's policy following the tragic events of September 11th? Is the stability and quiet continuum of life that people dreamt of being replaced by short term, day after day episodes of survival and fear – hoping for one more day in peace?

TV and newspapers have been successful in creating the impression that we live in a somewhat virtual life and we are pushed into being participants in a new technological invention – a computer game with moving targets – The Taliban, al-Qaeda, Iraq – with ghost 'enemies', Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein. And, as with other games, there are complex sets of rules to reach and kill the 'ghost' enemies. The games end. But back in real life one really cannot stop wondering how it happened that, knowing the price of wars in the modern world, a 'coalition of Governments for war against terror' has been formed. Why does that coalition see war as the only way to deal with terrorism? Does this war coalition have the absolute right to aggression? Do they sell us the idea of terrorism to have a war for greater dominance? Do the leaders of war coalitions know of the amount of human suffering and loss during wars? I am sure they do. They must know the figures, for example those presented by Olara Otunu, Under-Secretary General of the UN, on children in armed conflicts: during the last decade, two million children have been killed as the result of military conflicts, six million children have been seriously injured, one million orphaned. Twenty million have been displaced and three hundred thousand young children have been exploited as child soldiers and sex slaves in thirty areas of conflict. Do these 'coalition' leaders know that every day one hundred thousand people die because of hunger and diseases and natural disasters? And so on. So many more statistics of human misery could be presented.

At the same time, other data have been published. According to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the cost of a new war with Iraq could total as much as \$1.9 trillion over a ten year period.

Accepted concepts, such as democracy, the rule of law, sovereignty and human rights, have acquired new meanings since September 11. In the name of protecting the human rights of Afghan people against the Taliban and killing the target Osama, it was 'necessary' to bomb Afghanistan, killing thousands of innocent people. One can easily make the link with some similar scenarios before and after September 11th: bombing Belgrade to get rid of Milosevic, bombing Kabul to get rid of Osama, planning to bomb Baghdad to get rid of Saddam. Strangely enough, these 'ghost' targets easily escaped, but many innocent people have been killed in the name of saving them from dictators and punishing terrorists. This war against terror does not recognize or respect the sovereignty of other countries. In the rush to punish terrorists, the tried and tested principles of democracy and the rule of law have been forgotten. And, contrary to its principles, international law has been used asymmetrically, to favour only dominant countries. Is it acceptable that the very countries that are identified with the rule of law and democracy lower their standards outside their own borders? Can such concepts as human rights and democracy have different meanings in different countries? Disrespect for international law and human rights standards on the part of such traditional democracies as United States and Great Britain creates a chain of precedents which will lead to the multiplication of such violations by other countries. Many examples have been pointed to in the media by international organizations and journalists. The impact on countries in transition is especially dangerous.

Events and policy after September 11th have also introduced another new 'advancement' in human rights – the categorisation of countries according to the new Bush principle, 'who is not with us is against us'. Is this a new concept for a modern world with universal standards?

In the same vein, a frame of reference has been created for good and evil: 'suspect' citizens and 'unreliable' countries are seen as a threat and put through humiliating procedures. Another interesting invention is the classification of countries according to the concepts of 'terrorism', 'corruption' and 'trafficking'. Those which are seen to transgress against the norms determined by the USA are to be punished by different material sanctions. It is alarming.

We live in a world with well over thirty conflicts-war zones: 'frozen', 'active' or 'burning' conflicts with very different root causes and histories. These are the areas most sensitive to any political change: any violation of international law or human rights standards, any exercise of double standards in policy, immediately finds its reflection there, giving new energy and the semblance of justification to their own malpractice.

I can speak of the conflict over Nagorno Karabach, and the changes in environment there that I can observe daily. Suspicions of terrorism and the search for terrorists have given rise to new accusations against the people of Nagorno Karabach: articles in newspapers alleging that terrorists found refuge in Nagorno Karabach; that the country is involved in terror, in trafficking in humans, in burying nuclear waste in uncontrolled territories, and many more such things. All these speculations put the population of these countries in a very vulnerable situation. The expectation of new geopolitical changes in the event of military action activates nationalist groups and threatens the very fragile cease-fire that has been kept in place with such difficulty. They evoke new waves of hostility in areas of conflict. Many years' work by civil society and peace making organizations is put under threat.

We live in a time when governments and intergovernmental organizations at last started to recognize the important role of civil society in building democracy and peace, in preventing conflicts and protecting human rights, and good collaboration has been established between them. But since September 11 the Democratic Powers do not seem willing to co-operate with civic organizations; their opinion and advice is ignored. One can only be surprised that the extremely rich potential which these organizations have built up, through years of work to make peace and reconciliation possible in many areas of the world, is not asked for.

Peace is the basic right of human beings and the basis for the development of human community. Coalitions of war must recognize that there are millions and millions of people around the globe who are united by values of peace, equity and human dignity, and feel responsible for it.

'The War on Terror' and the Balkans

by Goran Bozicevic (Croatia)

The War on Terrorism is having an almost schizophrenic effect on the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Governments and populations in the region display no coherent attitude towards the topic and often make contradictory moves.

If asked directly, everyone would give the same response: 'Yes, it is a very relevant and crucial issue. Of course we are worried about it. Very much so.' After that there would be silence. Apart from following the news in the rest of the world, there is a little or no public debate or concrete activity on the topic of 'What does it have to do with us?'

The Croatian government was recently asked, 'What fuel reserves does Croatia have?' in case there were a sudden cessation of oil imports due to war in Iraq. The question received the unusually quick answer of 'three months.' That was the end of the debate.

People are overwhelmed with their daily struggle for survival. The wars in the region are over and people are focused on trying to get their lives back to normal. Waves of strikes in Croatia reflect the reality that we now live in a capitalist society. People are waking up from the illusion that the ruling Social Democrats (SDP) would look after 'workers'. The real issue is: 'Who (politically) is left and who is right?'

A couple of weeks ago Croatia – proudly – sent a unit of 44 Military Police to join the Peace Mission in Afghanistan. The Social Democrats (on the left of the political spectrum) say: 'How are we going to join NATO and the EU (the ultimate goal for Croatia, viewed as Paradise!) if we are not prepared to co-operate in joint actions such as these?' The Croatian Party of Right, the HSP, says: 'Why do we send our guys to Afghanistan? To do what? To defend whose interests?'

The governments in the Balkans increasingly find themselves squeezed between protecting their own interests and falling in with the over-influential US – and to a certain extent EU – presence in the region. The governments are all, of course, 'supporting the War on Terrorism, fully and without doubt.'

But in practice this approach brings problems. Whilst we are developing our own democracies, strengthening the rule of law (often at the behest of the USA), learning the importance of civil society and developing instruments for human rights protection, we are at the same time witnessing the fact that the War on Terrorism neglects all these standards.

It is a tough task to explain to the public in the Balkans the inevitability of co-operation with the Hague Tribunal (ICTY), when they see the US administration obstructing the establishment of the new International Criminal Court (ICC) and pressure being put on governments in the region to sign bilateral agreements to prevent the extradition of US soldiers to the ICC. (This is particularly relevant here, since we have SFOR and KFOR stationed in the region).

How can we promote human rights in our countries when we see Guantanamo Bay prison, the treatment of Arabic and Asian citizens in the USA, and the pressure that the Pentagon places on the media?

As a leading human rights activist in Croatia says, 'It is difficult and perhaps impossible to build society based upon justice and rule of law when one of the biggest sponsors of the project is not respecting it.'

There are sympathetic voices to be heard about the War on Terrorism as well. In Croatia, it is seen as validating the Homeland war of 1991-1995, which some now justify in terms of fighting Serbian terrorism. Similar euphoric statements can be heard in some circles in Serbia, where the attitude is: 'Now they (the USA and the EU) see what its like to deal with terrorists – only pure force and repression works. We were saying this all the time we were fighting Croatian and Bosniak terrorists, and particularly the Albanian terrorists in Kosovo. But then the USA and the EU did not want to listen.'

People comfort themselves cynically here, thinking that the War on Terrorism will hit countries far away from home. They recognize that this is sad for the innocent victims but do not feel that they can help. They see it as something to be expected that terrorists attack rich West countries. And finally they see that they could benefit from not (yet) being part of the rich West.

So the War on Terrorism exists and yet at the same time does not exist here. Our own wars are fresh in our memories, and there is a lack of mental energy to face the present threat of World War III. Our governments try to please those in power, but as in the case of the bizarre Croatian donation of landmines to Afghanistan, some months ago, it shows how lost they are about their role in the War on Terrorism.

And perhaps this is for the best, because what sense does it make to fight a War against Terrorism?

Chechnya: Theatre of Terror

by Chris Hunter and Adam Berry, Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development (CPCD)

Senior Russian politicians have used the events of 11 September to reinforce their message that in Chechnya they are fighting and destroying terrorists and that this should be seen as part of the West's drive against international terrorism. The brutal war unleashed in Chechnya in October 1999 is thus euphemistically termed an 'anti-terrorist operation' by the Russian government. Spurious references to a large Chechen al-Qaeda contingent in Afghanistan have been followed by the portrayal of the Moscow theatre hijacking as 'Russia's 11 September', supporting an alleged equivalence between Chechens and terrorism.

The Moscow theatre siege and the targeting of civilians cannot be condoned, but must be understood in the context of Russia's terroristic and cruel campaign in Chechnya, in which over 100,000 civilians have lost their lives in recent years. The desperation of the young men and women who committed the Moscow theatre siege needs to be considered. Unless the situation is resolved in Chechnya, other such desperate acts are likely to follow. Russia's campaign in Chechnya is far from driving terrorism out of the region. On the contrary, the disempowerment and bitterness that it breeds is forcing ordinary civilians – predominantly young men who have missed out on years of education and lost family and friends – into the arms of the extremists.

The second Chechen War began after a series of apartment bombings in Russian cities which killed some 300 people and was immediately blamed, without evidence, on Chechen terrorists. In Russia it is widely considered more likely that the Russian security services were responsible, and evidence was revealed to support this view. Disinformation and anti-Chechen propaganda, accompanied by restrictions on the press – and takeover of independent TV networks – have been a prominent feature of the conflict which brought Vladimir Putin to power. For the Russians, the war is about reassertion of state power and access to Caspian oil; for the Chechens, the continuation of centuries of resistance to Russian domination. Given the chance, however, the separatists would probably still settle for less than complete independence – as long as its moderate, ex-Soviet leadership lasts. Russia's political elite has been doing much in recent months, however, to discredit and undermine such moderates.

International NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights portray the conflict as characterised by the widespread occurrence of war crimes. These crimes include the destruction of civilian areas, torture, collective punishment, arbitrary arrest and detention in 'filtration camps', massacres of civilians, disappearances, extra-judicial killings, rapes, looting, and ransoming of civilian hostages, all carried out with de facto impunity. In regular 'cleansing operations' (*zachistki*), masked soldiers seal off and search an area, detaining inhabitants – mostly young men. Grozny, a city the size of Edinburgh, has been reduced to rubble. Chechen fighters have also been criticized by human rights organizations, for violations on a smaller scale.

Insecurity, and the destruction of housing and infrastructure, have resulted in large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). UNHCR estimates that there are some 140,000 IDPs inside Chechnya and 110,000 in neighbouring Ingushetia. Living conditions are disastrous in both republics but, thanks to media and travel restrictions, there are fewer outside witnesses to the situation in Chechnya.

The 'successful liberation' of the Moscow theatre might be seen as a microcosm of the Russian strategy for 'liberating' Chechnya itself, where there have been several hollow proclamations of victory since 1999. The indiscriminate use of a mysterious gas, civilian deaths, summary executions of unconscious hostage-takers, rejection of negotiations, and disinformation about the number and causes of casualties are perfectly consistent with operations in Chechnya. The official figure for military casualties since 1999 is 4,500, but 11,500 according to the Russian Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. There is no official number of civilian deaths; NGO estimates are in the tens of thousands.

In Moscow and other cities, Chechens – and others of Caucasian appearance – have long been subjected to discrimination: in a 1999 report, Amnesty International documents police persecution, expulsion of Chechens from Moscow, and denial of registration to those displaced by the conflict. Following the hostage crisis, tensions are heightened: Chechens are being harassed by police, drugs and weapons planted on young men, children excluded from school.

Inside Chechnya, the military crackdown has been stepped up and any troop withdrawals cancelled. In a technique copied from Israel, special forces have destroyed the homes of people involved in the Moscow hostage-taking, their relatives given moments to leave. Following the CIA's assassination of terrorist suspects in Yemen, Russia has adopted its own policy of allowing strikes at terrorists abroad which could permit further aerial bombing of Georgia. Contrary to media reporting, however, there is no generalized hatred for Russia among Chechens, who typically differentiate between Russia's leadership and its people – even army conscripts – whom they more often perceive as fellow victims.

The situation around Chechnya has similarly become increasingly tense since the Moscow theatre siege. Since the hostage crisis, Russian forces have been stationed around tent camps in eastern Ingushetia, to 'protect' their 17,000 inhabitants. This move, accompanied by the cutting of energy supplies to the camps and the soldiers' indiscipline, has heightened existing fears of forced return to Chechnya. Soldiers temporarily occupied CPCD tents used for psychosocial activities with traumatized children.

CPCD has campaigned with friends and partners against the closure of IDP camps and the forced return of some IDPs from Ingushetia to Chechnya. This process began in earnest on 1 December 2002 with the closure of IDP camp 'Iman' at Aki Yurt. Despite assurances from President Ziazikov of Ingushetia, IDPs were forced out of their temporary homes of up to 3 years.

The IDPs in the remaining camps in Karabulak, Yandare and Sleptsovskaya number at least 18,000 people. Russian authorities have already ceased distributing food aid in these camps. The threatened closure of these camps on 20 December did not happen, in part due to international pressure, but a new deadline is set for March 2003. Alternative accommodation in Chechnya is to be prepared by then. Many of those evicted from Aki Yurt were not offered alternative accommodation and returned to Chechnya to ruined homes without functioning heating systems in temperatures well below freezing. The majority of those have since returned to the area of the Aki Yurt camp and where possible are living in private dwellings. Most IDPs refuse to return to Chechnya for fears of their security in the republic.

The security situation for humanitarian actors in Chechnya and Ingushetia remains unstable. Two representatives of international humanitarian NGOs were kidnapped in the summer: one has yet to be released. A close associate of CPCD, Aslan Akhmadov, was abducted in Nazran in broad daylight on 27 November 2002, but thankfully was released on 4 January 2003. In late November, the UN security agency UNSECOORD passed on information to NGOs of a planned further kidnapping of an expatriate staff member in the region.

The theatre hijacking has provided a new opportunity to dismiss the possibility of negotiation with the Chechen opposition leadership, and has derailed existing behind-the-scenes negotiations. Aslan Maskhadov, the moderate president whose election in 1997 was recognized by Russia and the OSCE, has been declared responsible by the Russian president. Maskhadov's envoy Akhmed Zakaev, who recently held talks with Russian representatives, has also been accused of terrorist acts, and detained during a peace conference in Denmark, pending possible extradition. As in Israel, the demonization of leaders and 'absence of negotiation partners' appears to have been endorsed by the USA.

The deadlocked war in Chechnya appears set to continue indefinitely, in a global climate where international conventions and human rights concerns are clearly overridden by the security and energy interests of powerful states. International criticism of Russia's methods in Chechnya is set to remain comparatively muted, while President Putin pledges support for the global campaign against terror and complies with US and British actions in Iraq.

The Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development is a British NGO carrying out peacebuilding, humanitarian, psychosocial and educational work in Chechnya since 1994.

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From Violence to Conciliation

by Oliver McTernan

(Unlike the other contributions, what follows was not written for this newsletter but was a paper presented, on 14th November 2002, at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace [a CCTS member organisation]. Oliver McTernan is a Fellow of the Weatherhead Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University USA. We have included his paper because of the importance of the challenge it poses to received thinking on the role of religion in conflict. We look forward to exploring this issue further.)

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the United States western political leaders were anxious to stress that their war was not against Islam, a religion, they hailed to be peace loving and tolerant. Muslim leaders in the United States and Europe endorsed this perception of their faith by quickly disassociating themselves from their coreligionists, who had claimed responsibility for the atrocities. Islam, they claimed, had been hijacked for political purposes. The media endorsed the prevailing mood, declaring that grievance, and not creed, was the rationalization behind the indiscriminate killing in New York and Washington.

Laudable as these reactions may appear at first, and especially in so far as they undoubtedly helped to curtail mindless revenge attacks on the migrant Muslim communities in western societies, none do justice to the complexity of the growing phenomenon of faith based violence. Who can claim to understand fully the minds and motives of those young, educated and talented men, who spent the last months of their lives, meticulously planning the destruction of themselves and thousand of others? Who can claim with certainty that it was grievance, real or imagined, and not their religious beliefs, that motivated their use of commercial aircrafts to commit mass murder? The documents found in luggage left behind at Boston's Logan airport by Mohamed Atta, the alleged ringleader of the 9/11 hijackers, clearly reveal that they were acting upon deeply held religious convictions, and that they regarded what they were doing as a sacred duty, aimed at giving glory to god.

The US led coalition succeeded in ousting Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network from their strongholds in the mountains of Afghanistan, an action that undoubtedly helped to disrupt, at least temporarily, their ability to inflict similar large-scale atrocities. This success should not, however, be allowed to delude us into thinking that the war against terrorism, and in particular terrorism that is religiously motivated, can be won on the battlefield alone. It would be foolhardy to think that the world has seen the last of religious terrorists like Mohamed Atta and Richard Reid, the British 'shoe bomber' and self confessed member of al-Qaeda, who attempted to blow himself up with his fellow passengers on a flight from Paris to Miami. These two young men, who came from completely different ethnic and social backgrounds, were united in their readiness to sacrifice their own lives, evidently believing themselves to be on a sacred mission and acting on God's authority in the ultimate battle between good and evil.

To single out one religion as the sole perpetrator of terror in the world would be to distort the historical record and contemporary reality, as well as to misjudge the extent and the complexity of the problem. Today in different parts of the world adherents of all the major world faiths can be found justifying atrocities on the grounds that their cause is righteous. They hold in common the belief that those who die in defending their faith will immortalize themselves. From Indonesia to the Balkans, the Middle East to Kashmir, India to Nigeria, Northern Ireland to Sri Lanka, Christians, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs justify the use of violence on the grounds that they are protecting their religious identity and interests.

The American Academy of Arts and Science Project report, edited by Marty and Appleby, provides a valuable insight into the mindset of religious extremists in so far as it helps to identify several ideological and organizational characteristics that these religiously diverse groups hold in common. A concern over the erosion of religion's role in society is uppermost on each of their agendas. Their goal is to reshape society in accordance with their group's creedal and ethical beliefs. They reject ideas like relativism and individualism, which they see as threats to their personal, social, and religious identity, and yet they make effective use of modern technology to further their causes. They are highly selective in the parts of their tradition and sacred texts that they choose to highlight, and are absolute about the truthfulness of their interpretation of divine revelation. Their worldview is tainted by a dualism that sees a clear-cut division in life between good and evil. They demonise anyone who challenges or who is indifferent to their cause. They imagine themselves as part of a larger cosmic struggle and as being actively engaged in the advent of a new messianic age. Their male, authoritarian, charismatic leaders provide mandatory norms of behaviour for those chosen or elected to belong. The groups' boundaries are clearly defined and separate the members from outsiders. They acknowledge no room for compromise either with wayward coreligionists or with outsiders in their struggle to counteract the threat to their group identity or in their struggle to impose their own monolithic religious structures and norms of behaviour on a global scale.

The social injustices, poverty, unemployment, and political repression, that leave millions dispossessed, provide fertile breeding grounds for militant groups but these conditions are not in themselves the prime cause for why people kill in God's name. The question, 'Why do they hate us?' which obsessed the American media for months after the 9/11 attacks assumed that the prime motive for these attacks was grievance and thus diverted attention from the fact that religiously motivated terrorism is not a new phenomenon. The perceived partiality of United States policy in the Middle East and its willingness to prop up autocratic regimes that serve America's best interests may well be the root cause of a deep anger and rage among Arab populations but it is not the sole cause for the attacks that we witnessed on 9/11. People killed in god's name before the coming of modernity, secularism, globalization, cosmopolitanism and even the founding of the United States of America. The current conflict in Kashmir cannot be blamed on globalization or American foreign policy. Likewise the roots of an intensely intolerant strain of Islam are deeper than just a reaction to the existence of Israel, the autocracy of Arab regimes, illiteracy and destitution. The same is true of other faiths. The social and political milieu may act as a trigger but the roots of intolerance and militancy are found in the way in which today's violent extremists interpret their foundational or sacred texts.

To curtail the spread of religiously inspired terror will require a greater willingness for self-critical reflection by both political and religious leaders than we have witnessed so far. An essential first step is for them to acknowledge that religion can be an actor in its own right. To achieve this will require a sea change in the mindset that has dominated the media and politics for most of the 20th century. The entrenched view that religion is not a cause for conflict stems from the influence that the writings of Marx, Freud and Durkheim still have on the political and social sciences. Their psychological and socio-economic explanations for religion still hold sway even in the face of evidence that the secularisation process may be in retreat.¹ The 'reductionist' approach seeks to reduce 'what may appear complex to something simple'. When applied to conflict analysis religion is judged to be nothing more than a surrogate for political power and ambition, an effective mobilizing force that can help to gain the advantage over revivals in the competition for land or primary commodities but not in itself a cause for conflict.

Religious leaders also need to reflect more critically on their own failure to provide more effective leadership and witness to the true fundamental values of their respective faiths. They need to be challenged and encouraged to be more decisive in working to eradicate the influence of the extremist groups that frequently use the anonymity of the larger faith community to disguise their distorted intentions and murderous activities. During the conflict in Bosnia, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, spoke of the need "to restore religion to its rightful role as peacemaker and pacifier". It is true that all religions aspire to peace but it is questionable whether religion has ever fulfilled that role. The fact that all major world faiths have at times sanctioned the use of violence to protect or to promote their own sectarian interests allows religious terrorists today to claim moral justification for their actions. The faith inspired terrorist can find, in his or her religious tradition, role models that give legitimacy to their own use of violence. It is not enough, therefore, for religious leaders to disown the murderous actions of their coreligionists and to denounce these terrorists as misguided fringe groups.

Those who have grown to accept uncritically the 'secularisation thesis' that has shaped political thinking for the best part of the last century find it extremely difficult to understand that theology and belief can, and indeed do, form people's political judgements.

¹ Alan Aldridge, Religion in Contemporary World, pages 89-122.
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Religion is not a passive agent waiting to be ignited into a political flame by some unscrupulous political or tribal chauvinist, as Peter Berger would have us believe when he writes, ‘...upsurges of religion in the modern era, are in most cases political movements that use religion as a convenient legitimisation for political agendas based on non-religious interests, as opposed to movements genuinely inspired by religion’² Religious activists are also capable of being opportunist and of using the political ambitions of nationalist or tribal leaders to gain advantage and privilege for their particular beliefs and traditions. Vjekoslav Perica puts the problem in focus when he writes, ‘[F]rom the globally televised scenes of the burning Bosnian government towers in Sarajevo in 1992 to the smoke, fire and death at the World Trade Center in Sept. 2001, the world seems to have experienced some kind of apocalypse rather than a religious renaissance. Religion was a factor instrumental in bringing about both these catastrophic events’.³

The present priority should be to lessen the risk of religiously motivated conflict by promoting confidence building and understanding among peoples of different political cultures and faiths, and especially between Islam and the West. A paradigm shift in political thinking is also essential if we are to curtail an intensification of religiously motivated violence. The political and academic world needs to outgrow their secularist mindset and stop dismissing or excusing religion as a cause of conflict. There is an urgent need to develop more creative and inclusive approaches to conflict resolution and prevention. The secular and faith worlds need to unite in bringing together religious and community leaders in order to train them in the skills of working across the boundaries that currently divide them. The call for tolerance is a wholly inadequate response in the face of today’s crisis.

² Peter L. Berger, *Secularism in Retreat*, National Interest, Winter 1996-7 pages 3-12.

³ Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols* pages 221.

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