

Pax Christi International

Ten Years later: commemoration of the 9/11/2001 attacks.

Ten years after the attacks of September 11, 2001

Ten years ago the world was shocked by the horrific events in the United States. Almost 3000 civilians died in the violent attacks executed by the terrorist organization, Al Qaeda. The impact of the attacks on the global community was unprecedented, in part because people worldwide directly witnessed the dramatic events.

In the immediate aftermath, President George Bush Jr. announced in strong words a series of tough security and retaliation measures: the U.S. was at war with international terrorism and was determined to win the battle. Many states followed the U.S., reinforcing their security and intelligence capabilities, but deadly terrorist acts were not prevented in Bali (2002), Madrid (2004) and London (2005).

Today the attacks of 9/11 are 10 years behind us. An era when “the global war on terror” dominated the international political scene has passed. Al Qaeda has lost much of its strength and relevance. Yet, no one could declare the war on terror to have been a success. Rather, it has weakened and eroded our highest values. Pax Christi International mourns this erosion of our democratic values and diminishment of our liberties for the sake of counter-terrorism. Laws have been enacted and measures taken in the last decade that have limited human rights and violated the rule of law, including the use of secret prisons, torture and unlimited preventive detention. As recently as 2006, the United Nations called human rights one of the four foundations of a global counter-terrorism strategy.

U.S. military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, often based on unilateral decisions, have caused deep suffering and have alienated the political classes. These developments have played into the hands of terrorist movements promoting anti-Western sentiments. It is crucial to remember that terrorism and armed violence in Iraq, Afghanistan or Pakistan have caused many times more casualties than were perpetrated in the U.S. in September 2001.

Illustrative of this counter-productive approach are the secretive operations executed by drones, unmanned aircraft increasingly used to eliminate terror suspects in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The legality of these operations is highly questionable as they can be seen as executions without trial. In addition, these operations take place without the consent of the countries concerned, therefore constituting a violation of the sovereignty of states. Even the former head of U.S. intelligence, Dennis Blair recently criticized the use of drones because it is harming the reputation of the U.S. in states like Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia or Pakistan.

Ten years after the terrorist strikes of 11 September 2001, international terrorism as given form by Al Qaeda in the late 90s has weakened, but it is not clear what long term impact the so-called war on terror has had. Over the past decade the U.S. alone has spent more than \$ 1.2 trillion on its counter-terrorism strategy and on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. At the same time, recent developments make it very clear that the citizens of the long stigmatized Arab world are longing, just like we are, for a world free from oppression and fear, a world shaped by social and economic justice and the eradication of poverty.

Pax Christi International calls the international community to make every effort to help all people to achieve these legitimate desires and aspirations. This is the most effective way to remove the breeding ground of misunderstanding and violence. Pax Christi believes that violence is not an answer to violence. Rather, the prevention of violence and nonviolent conflict management must be more than ever at the centre of every political action.

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