Voices to the Capitol

Meditation

February 2016

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Matthew 5:9

“There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace has to be dared. It is a great venture. It can never be safe. Peace is the opposite of security.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1934

Dear Peacemakers,

This is a time when terror and fear seem to reign in so many parts of the world and in our nation and when fear is used to keep us from caring for God’s beloved children regardless of who they are and from where they are coming. And yet, God calls us to be peacemakers. God doesn’t tell us that it is easy or that it is safe. But we are still called to work for peace. The words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor who was part of the resistance against Hitler and who was executed shortly before the end of the Third Reich, remind us that working for peace includes risk. As a nation we can continue to build walls, close our borders to specific groups of people, and increase our military attacks. But this will not bring us closer to peace. Working for peace includes reaching out and building bridges with those who are different from us.

Prayer: God of peace, we ask for your forgiveness when we have been afraid to stand up and work for justice and peace. You tell us to not be fearful but to trust you. Guide us this year in our peacemaking efforts. Amen

Shalom – salam – peace, Andrea

Andrea Paret, Peace with Justice Coordinator, Great Plains Conference

A new bill has been introduced – Contact your legislators to support this bi-partisan bill!

#Pivot2Peace: Prevent Genocide and Atrocities

The following information comes from the Friends Committee on National Legislation: http://fcnl.org/blog/2c/pivot2peace_prevent_genocide_and_atrocities/

We have a bill.

Sen. Cardin (D-MD) joined by Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) and fourteen other senators introduced the bi-partisan Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2016 (S.2551). This bill would focus the U.S. government at the highest levels on effective early prevention of violent conflict as an alternative to the often ineffective late military intervention.

The legislation would permanently authorize the Atrocities Prevention Board, establish the Complex Crises Fund, mandate training for U.S. Foreign Service Officers and require
reports to Congress from the State Department and the Director of National Intelligence.

While this particular bill has been in the works for a little more than a year, efforts to permanently establish the Atrocities Prevention Board and the Complex Crises fund go back many years. This bill’s introduction in the Senate is a culmination of efforts by a diverse group of people and organizations.

Introduction, though, is just the first step. Now we will work to build greater bipartisan support to actually move this bill in the Senate.

The incredible grassroots advocacy that happened at FCNL’s lobby day in November has made this a bi-partisan effort. And we hope that you will continue to engage in this effort by lobbying your senator and encouraging them to co-sponsor the Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act.

Send a message to your senator now!

Six Reasons to Support the Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act


2. Prevent violence: The Atrocities Prevention Board has mobilized staff and funding for violence prevention and mitigation in the Central African Republic and Burundi. It continues to do long-term prevention work in other countries.

3. Save money: Legislation permanently authorizing the Atrocities Prevention Board saves money in the long-term by prioritizing prevention, helping to avoid costly response efforts later on.

4. Protect our troops: We have an obligation as a country to explore every opportunity to avoid sending our military into war. The Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act organizes our government to focus on early prevention to avoid late military intervention.

5. Continue congressional leadership and oversight: The Senate has been a lead voice in encouraging strong action to better prevent and respond to genocide and mass atrocities. The Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act would continue this leadership and oversight role.
   o In 2010, S.Con.Res.71 passed unanimously with bipartisan co-sponsors, urging the creation of what would become the Atrocities Prevention Board.
   o In 2015, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved the State Department Authorization Act, S.1635, which would authorize the Atrocities Prevention Board.

6. Build on bipartisan consensus: Support for the prevention of genocide has a long history, going back to efforts by President Ronald Reagan to ratify the Genocide Convention. Every President since Reagan has spoken about the importance of preventing genocide and mass atrocities.
How do you prevent war before it begins?

Almost every week, we hear new calls for war. Bombs and drones are often Washington’s first choice to solve any foreign policy problem. The U.S. bombed ISIS for a year, occupied Iraq and Afghanistan for a decade, and used drone strikes around the world. But we’re no safer than we were 14 years ago. Here’s the best-kept secret on Capitol Hill: War doesn’t work.

There’s a better way with a proven track record. With coordination, flexibility, and training, the U.S. can help people threatened by violence before the killing starts -- and help prevent wars before they start. New legislation, the Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, will better ensure the government has the training, the tools, and the funding it needs to protect civilians and promote peace.

To download the action toolkit, go to http://fcnl.org/blog/2c/pivot2peace_prevent_genocide_and_atrocities/

Legislative Action

Contact your senators by letter, e-mail or phone.

Sample Letter

[Date]
Dear Senator__________ ,

Please support the forthcoming Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, sponsored by Sens. Ben Cardin, Thom Tillis, and others.

I am very thankful that this legislation was introduced. It provides the coordination, flexibility, and training the U.S. needs to prevent violence. It permanently authorizes the Atrocities Prevention Board, a high-level interagency panel that evaluates and coordinates response to emerging crises.

Atrocities prevention is a bipartisan issue. President Reagan first pushed for U.S. ratification of the Genocide Convention, and a bipartisan Senate resolution urged the president to establish the Atrocities Prevention Board.

By addressing conflicts before they erupt into widespread violence, this legislation could help save lives and save money.

I hope you will cosponsor the Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act and other non-military ways to prevent war.

Sincerely,
[your name]
[your address] [city, state, ZIP]
Additional Action Steps:

- Please pray for our delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conference. Contact them and urge them to support all petitions and actions that support peace efforts. To read about petitions the General Board of Church and Society submitted to the General Conference, go to: http://umc-gbcs.org/blog/general-board-of-church-society-petitions-to-general-conference

- In November 2015, Bishop Scott Jones asked our congregations to show radical hospitality and welcome refugees. Several of our congregations have been welcoming refugees for years. Additional congregations responded right away to Bishop Jones’ call. Others are in conversations and in a time of discernment. Encourage members of your congregation to participate in the upcoming webinars. Webinar #1 will be Thursday, March 10th at 6pm: Where do we begin in welcoming refugees?

- Islamophobia is on the rise. Lack of information and misinformation cause many to fear and misinterpret what the Islamic faith is about. The governors of both Kansas and Nebraska want to refuse entry to refugees from Syria into our states. Here are two excellent resources:
  - Understanding the Rise and Response to Islamic Terrorism – Forum at the Church of the Resurrection https://vimeo.com/152643273
  - Sermon by Rev. Adam Hamilton: http://www.cor.org/bridges, then click on “A Christian Response to Islamic Extremism”

- Encourage your church to celebrate Peace with Justice Sunday on May 22nd (or any other Sunday that works for your congregation).

- Please “like” the Peace with Justice Ministries of the Great Plains Conference facebook page: facebook.com/peacewithjusticeministriesgp

Thank you peace advocates for all you do for peace with justice! Andrea

To read past issues of Voices to the Capitol go to: http://www.greatplainsumc.org/peacewithjustice

Voices to the Capitol is a resource with a focus on peace/non-violence and a variety of justice issues. It includes an invitation to use the gift of our voices to speak out on these issues by contacting our representatives and senators in Washington.

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