TRUE SECURITY

From Fear to Trust

BY RACHELLE LYNDAKER SCHLABACH

“You have nothing to fear by throwing your trash where it belongs.”

This announcement on Metro, DC’s transit system, caught my ear the other day. After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Metro as well as other public venues removed trash cans that could be easy places to put bombs. Now, Metro proudly announces that “safe” trash cans have been installed and we can all rest easier about throwing away our trash as we travel to work.

Fear has the power to shape our actions in many ways, as individuals and as a nation.

This is not altogether negative. As Martin Luther King, Jr. described it: “Normal fear protects us; abnormal fear paralyzes us. Normal fear motivates us to improve our individual and collective welfare; abnormal fear constantly poisons and distorts our inner lives. Our problem is not to be rid of fear but rather, to harness and master it.”

The natural paradox of fear is that we turn in on ourselves at the very time when we most need others and when we most need God.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, much of the world stood ready to reach out to us. But we chose in our response to largely “go it alone.” Even worse, our nation’s fear of being attacked again led us to attack other nations, causing fear in other parts of the world.

This cycle will never lead to true security, which must be built on right and just relationships and a fundamental trust in God’s power to save.

Indeed, fear can be the window that opens us to trust in God’s all-sufficient power. When the apostle Paul begged God to remove the “thorn” in his flesh, the answer was: “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In this Memo, we look at the ways in which the United States seeks to build “security” and suggest alternatives. Theo Sittler examines the connection between economic justice and conflict (p.3). Krista Zimmerman and Tammy Alexander critique efforts to secure the border (pp.4–5). Gabe Schlabach looks at how our country’s civil liberties have changed since 2001 (p.6), and Valerie Ong describes how security standards have victimized people seeking refuge in our country (p.7).

In small actions and large—as we travel to work and as we, as a society, decide how to spend our federal budget—let us witness to others by trusting in God’s security. For as the writer of 1 John says, “there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18)
Light One Candle

Light one candle for peace
One bright candle for peace
He brings peace to every heart
He comes, he comes

This children’s song kept running through my mind this past Advent season, as I worked with Susan Mark Landis of Mennonite Church USA to promote a prayer and petition campaign for Iran and Iraq.

When my predecessor, Daryl Byler, traveled to Iraq in 2002, he presented hand-crafted oil lamps to religious leaders saying, “when you see this lamp, know that Mennonites in the United States are praying for peace between us.” In February 2007 a delegation of U.S. religious leaders made a similar presentation of lamps to religious and political leaders in Iran.

And so during this past Advent season, we invited congregations to follow up on this promise by lighting a lamp and praying for peace between our countries. We also encouraged congregations to sign petitions to their legislators, making their desires for peace known.

In the midst of this initiative, the U.S. intelligence community released their National Intelligence Estimate on Iran in early December 2007, stating their consensus view that Iran ceased its nuclear weapons program in 2003. This announcement brought relief to many who feared that U.S. military strikes were being planned against Iranian facilities.

But the calls for military strikes have not ceased since the report’s release. President Bush, on his trip to the Middle East earlier this year, reportedly reassured Israeli leaders that the intelligence report doesn’t reflect his own views. He publicly called Iran “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism” and said that the danger must be confronted “before it’s too late.”

Unfortunately this approach of painting an entire nation as our enemy is not likely to enhance U.S. security in either the short or long term.

Its more likely effect will be to close openings for diplomacy, just when that space is so vitally needed for each nation to express its own perspective and security concerns.

Iranians have frequently expressed their desire for positive relationships with the U.S. public. This message was reiterated during a recent MCC delegation to Iran.

And it seems that many in the U.S. want to reciprocate. My husband and I recently attended a film sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution on the history of Iran. The large auditorium was packed full, and many had to be turned away at the door.

Building relationships, person to person and institution to institution, in the end lays a much stronger foundation for peace and security between our nations than any amount of saber-rattling ever can.

But it is critical that these relationships extend to the governmental levels as well. In late January, a resolution in support of stronger diplomacy with Iran was introduced in the House by Rep. Barbara Lee (H.R. 5056). Advocates are working to get a similar resolution introduced soon in the Senate.

These are the kinds of initiatives that we need to be supporting, as we light candles and pray for peace. For the Prince of Peace has indeed come and we are called to follow in his footsteps. ■
President Bush in his final State of the Union address in January urged Congress to pass the free trade agreement (FTA) with Colombia. In his speech he said, “I ask you to approve [the] agreement with Colombia . . . a friend of America that is confronting violence and terror, and fighting drug traffickers . . . So we must come together, pass this agreement, and show our neighbors in the region that democracy leads to a better life.”

Justapaz, a peace and justice ministry of the Colombian Mennonite Church, recently released the report *A Prophetic Call: Colombian Churches Document Their Suffering and Their Hope*. This report documents cases of human rights abuses carried out by all the armed actors in Colombia, including the government forces. One such case is of a young farmer named Roberto who was shot dead, dressed in fatigues and presented as a guerilla member.

Colombia’s record on human rights and the rule of law is dismal. Colombia is still a country at war. In many parts, the 40-year civil war still rages, killing and displacing many people. Many other cases such as Roberto’s have been documented. Colombia stands as the most dangerous country for union and labor organizers. According to the AFL-CIO, as of December 2007, 38 union members were killed during the year with more than 2,500 unionists killed since 1991. Over 97 percent of these killings remain unsolved.

Furthermore, the conflict in Colombia is deeply rooted in an unequal economic system. The vast amount of wealth and resources are controlled by an elite minority and multi-national corporations, leaving many Colombians desperately impoverished. The cycle of violence and economic repression go hand-in-hand.

Colombia is already home to the world’s second largest population of internally displaced persons and is the world’s largest producer of cocaine; the trade deal will only worsen these problems.

The Bush administration and the Colombian government are engaged in an intense effort to convince Congress that Colombia will be more secure and free under a trade deal. However, based on past experiences with other trade agreements, the FTA will not provide economic security to the Colombian people. In fact, it will deepen economic disparity, fuel the ongoing conflict and fill the pockets of the rich.

The report by Justapaz also documents signs of hope in Colombia. The report states, “While the great debates and national governmental actions have focused on war, negotiations, and rights of those who possess weapons, the churches instead work to understand the victim. The churches see victims not only as the protagonists of the story, but as integral beings,” who participate in the well-being of the whole community.

**Call on your member of Congress to vote against the Colombia FTA and stand with Colombian brothers and sisters by joining in the Days of Prayer & Action (see p.8).**
Several months ago, Mennonite Church USA wrote a letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) sharing concerns about continued efforts to militarize the U.S./Mexico border. The letter highlighted the distress experienced by separated communities and rising numbers of migrant deaths.

The Department’s response focused primarily on perceived security threats. “[The] mission,” it wrote, “is to promote border security strategies that protect against and prevent terrorist attacks and other transnational crimes.”

The administration is not alone in harboring fears about terrorism and the border. Most federal lawmakers believe fortifying the U.S./Mexico border will help secure the United States from those who wish to inflict harm. At a potential price tag of $49 billion for 700 miles, they see barriers as a reasonable response to security concerns associated with immigration.

But many border communities and lawmakers see the issue differently. They believe physical barriers are, if nothing else, ineffective. “You show me a 50-foot wall and I’ll show you a 51-foot ladder,” said Arizona governor Janet Napolitano. In other words, migrants determined to reach the United States are unlikely to be turned back by barriers and harsh environments.

Governor Napolitano’s conclusions were supported by young men I met on a recent trip to Mexico. During their attempt to cross the border into the United States, they had experienced arrest, deportation, injury and the death of traveling companions. They were willing to try again.

And if migrants are undeterred by border fencing and difficult terrain, would-be terrorists are not likely to be deterred either.

To truly address the security concerns inherent in human migration, the United States needs to do at least two things more effective than erecting a barrier. One of these things will be difficult and feel intangible; the other will be relatively simple. Both will require less fear and more trust.

First, we need to take seriously the existence of economic disparity and disenfranchisement around the world.

The roots of international terrorism and economic migration in the Americas are distinct and complex issues. But both would be better addressed by U.S. policies that focus not on fear and narrowly-conceived self interests but on multilateral problem solving, peacebuilding and the common good. It will take a long time to change conditions, but success will mean millions of additional people with the ability to earn a living and find hope in their countries of origin.

We also need to treat would-be employees and separated family members with dignity and allow them to enter and leave through attainable legal channels. To quote Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio’s 2006 congressional testimony, “national security is not just about keeping those who harm us out of our country, but about keeping those who help us in and allowing others who want to help us to enter.”

Most immigrants would prefer to immigrate through official channels, even when doing so involves background checks and filling out paperwork. But outdated quotas and immigration laws make it more difficult for many people to come here legally than to enter without inspection. These policies have resulted in millions of unidentified residents resistant to community policing efforts. When we provide real immigration avenues for people with valid reasons to be here, federal law enforcement officials will be able to focus on serious threats and find ways to engage more residents of the United States in their efforts.

For further reflection and study on immigration:

Numbers 15:15–16
Deuteronomy 10:17–19, 24:17–22
1 Corinthians 12:12–13
Ephesians 2:13–22
The jaguar. The ocelot. The gray wolf. These are not typical faces of the immigration debate. However, they may be the next casualty of enforcement-only solutions aimed at securing the U.S./Mexico border.

The border region is replete with public lands, including national wildlife refuges, national monuments, and national forests. In Arizona, more than 85 percent of the land along the U.S./Mexico border is under federal control. Large swaths of pristine land provide a habitat for an abundance of plant and animal life, including many species that are found nowhere else in the U.S.

Stricter Border Patrol enforcement in urban areas in recent years has pushed migration into remote areas—areas such as Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, home to over 500 species of plants, 50 species of mammals, and nearly 300 species of birds. Migrant traffic, both foot and vehicle, causes severe damage to this previously unspoiled natural habitat. Border Patrol enforcement efforts, which include the use of off-road vehicles, helicopters, lighting, and fencing, cause further devastation.

The governments of the U.S. and Mexico have worked together for years to protect the fragile border ecosystem through agreements such as the La Paz Agreement on Cooperation for the Protection and Improvement of the Environment and Border 2012. But the current U.S. border security strategy, centered on constructing hundreds of miles of fencing along the border, ignores environmental concerns. Proposed barriers, whether fence or concrete, will cut through places like Organ Pipe, severing migration routes and destroying thousands of acres of wildlife habitat. Dozens of animal and plant species along the border are considered endangered or threatened. The border fence could be the final nail in their coffin.

Undocumented immigrants are often scorned as “lawbreakers,” but, in this case, it is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that is breaking U.S. laws—many of them. In October of last year, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff waived several environmental laws in order to push forward construction of another section of the border fence. This was the third waiver in as many years. The laws Chertoff considered insignificant enough to ignore include the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Wilderness Act. Such laws are designed not only to protect wildlife and natural habitats, but to protect human health as well.

What allows DHS to waive U.S. law? A provision in the REAL ID Act which was designed to speed along completion of a small section of the border fence in San Diego is now being applied more broadly to allow DHS to circumvent inconvenient environmental laws in order to construct large sections of the fence in other areas.

The Borderlands and Conservation Security Act, H.R. 2593, has been proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives to mitigate damage to federal and tribal lands in the U.S./Mexico border region. The bill would require DHS to coordinate border protection strategies with federal land managers, tribal officials, and local communities. It would also ensure compliance with laws intended to protect air, water, wildlife, culture, and health and safety.

In the name of security, DHS is taking actions that are leading to the destruction of the very homeland they are trying to secure. Ask your representative to co-sponsor H.R. 2593 and require DHS to respect existing environmental laws—laws designed to protect our homeland.
Imagine this. There is unrest in your country of Colombia. You have been kidnapped by the FARC guerrillas and forced to work in their encampment. Several weeks later, you escape. You receive refugee status in neighboring Ecuador, but your hopes of receiving protection and being resettled to the United States are shattered.

Under expansive U.S. security laws, you would be barred from entry into the United States for providing “material support” (the work you were forced to do during your abduction) to a “terrorist organization.”

The problems with material support bars are not new. Congress first enacted a material support bar as part of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. However, the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 and the REAL ID Act of 2005 (introduced after Sept. 11, 2001) expanded the definition of “terrorism” and listed “terrorist organizations.” Those who provided “material support” to the designated organizations would not be eligible for asylum in the United States. Moreover, a mechanism for differentiating between supporters and victims of those organizations was not provided. Instead of finding refuge in the United States, individuals were turned away for some of the very reasons they sought safety.

This year, Congress made important changes to the material support bar laws which allow the administration to grant waivers to eligible individuals. They include the Hmong and Montagnards who were displaced because of their support or affiliation with U.S. forces in the Vietnam War.

While the amendments are an improvement to the broad application of the material support bar, appropriate implementation of the new provisions will be vital. How will the administration respond to the refugees in camps and asylum seekers on hold in detention including those who are not eligible to receive waivers? Many lawmakers and U.S. citizens are willing to create “false security” by jeopardizing innocent victims in the process. Continuing to do so may foster the conditions that create terrorism and isolate the United States from the rest of the world. The interest of security must be balanced with a sense of pragmatism and compassion.
Franklin D. Roosevelt famously stated at his first inaugural address that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Yet one of Roosevelt’s first acts at the beginning of U.S. involvement in World War II was to place approximately 110,000 Japanese-Americans into internment camps for the mere “crime” of their Japanese ancestry. Ultimately, though, Americans acknowledged this wrongdoing, and in 1988 (46 years too late) a Democratic Congress and a Republican president united to criticize the internment, citing “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.”

During the struggle for civil rights in the United States, politicians who benefitted from segregation repeatedly used racist and irrational fears of African-Americans (who couldn’t vote) to win the support of poor whites (who could), even though their policies undermined the interests of African-Americans and whites alike. Eventually, people of good will from many backgrounds came together to support civil rights for all citizens of the United States.

U.S. history is full of stories such as these, where harmful policies are implemented or sustained by the paralyzing politics of fear. Every U.S. generation has had to face its own fears. Our times are no different.

Sept. 11, 2001 was a day of sadness, rage and fear for many people in the United States (and around the world). The images of planes exploding, skyscrapers collapsing and smoke blanketing the largest city in the United States shocked most U.S. residents, who were not aware of the anger and resentment caused in large part by our foreign policy.

In the aftermath of that terrible day, some people let their fears control their actions, and assaulted Muslims and Arabs (and people, like Sikhs, who looked like they might be). Thankfully, the people committing crimes in fear or retaliation were in the minority. But many more became paralyzed by their fears and allowed their elected officials to pass dangerous and harmful legislation without opposition.

A mere 44 days after the events of Sept. 11, Congress passed the 342-page-long USA PATRIOT Act. Only 66 representatives and one senator opposed the act, which was rushed through the voting process with little time for debate or amendment. The PATRIOT Act violates many civil liberties U.S. citizens have taken for granted, allowing the government to more easily monitor citizens’ private telephone, email and financial records, often without a warrant. The Act also allows the government to indefinitely detain immigrants suspected of aiding terrorism without formally charging them and without providing evidence of their wrongdoing.

While some parts of the PATRIOT Act have been ruled unconstitutional, other parts have been made stronger and more troubling since 2001. In August 2007, Congress passed the “Protect America Act of 2007,” which allows the Attorney General or the National Director of Intelligence to authorize wiretaps without court orders, as long as one of the parties being monitored is outside the United States. As this article goes to press, Congress is debating whether to once again strengthen this power to wiretap without a warrant, and whether to pardon telecommunications companies that broke the law by handing over phone records (of all their customers) to the government.

Traditionally, government assaults upon civil liberties have disproportionately targeted immigrants and other people of color, as well as as groups that advocate for peace. There is no evidence that the situation will be different this time. We need to oppose these infringements, now and in the future.

The politics of fear often work in the short term, which is why they have been used repeatedly throughout U.S. history. But history also shows that these tactics are eventually defeated, when people pay attention and challenge their fears.

BY GABE SCHLABACH

While some parts of the PATRIOT Act have been ruled unconstitutional, other parts have been made stronger and more troubling since 2001.
USFUL ADDRESSES

MCC U.S. Washington Office
920 Pennsylvania Ave SE
Washington DC 20003
(202) 544-6564
mccwash@mcc.org
mcc.org/us/washington

Senator______________
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510
(202) 224-3121
senate.gov

Representative______________
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515
(202) 224-3121
house.gov

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington DC 20500
(202) 456-1111
president@whitehouse.gov

Bridging Divides: Uniting the Church for Peacemaking, April 11–12
A conference in Washington, DC for pastors, theologians and practitioners working for peace in the church and the world (apcwdc.mennonite.net). Email keith@apcwdc.mennonite.net for more information.

Conference on Middle East Peace, April 20–22
“Calming the Storm: Middle East Peacemaking in a Turbulent Time” is a conference sponsored by Churches for Middle East Peace, to be held April 20–22 in Washington, DC. Visit cmep.org for more information and to register.

Days of Prayer & Action for Colombia, April 27–28
Join with sisters and brothers in the United States, Canada and Colombia to pray for an end to the violence and suffering in Colombia, and to take action for an end to unjust U.S. policies towards Colombia (mcc.org/us/washington/days). Email tshitther@mcc.org for more information.

2008 Iraq Forum & Advocacy Days
This April, act and learn about durable, humanitarian solutions for Iraqi refugees and other innocent civilians affected by violence in Iraq. For more information, visit epic-usa.org.

New Sudan Advocacy Campaign
The MCC Washington Office has launched a new web campaign, Waging Peace in Sudan. At mcc.org/us/washington/sudan, you will find background materials, small group resources, and advocacy tools to help you start a new campaign in your congregation, or take an existing campaign to the next level. Contact Tammy Alexander at talexander@mcc.org or (202) 544-6564 x113 for more information. (Tammy is available to speak in churches upon request.)

New Resources Available
A free print brochure on Native American issues is now available, as well as a Native Issues page on the Washington Office Web site (mcc.org/us/washington/issues/nativeamerican). Please email us at mccwash@mcc.org for more information.