



→ CUC IN ACTION →

CURRENT SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY LETTERS, EVENTS, TOPICS & DISCUSSION

FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February is Black History Month, an annual celebration since 1926.

Much of the credit for the creation of this annual observation belongs to Unitarian founded Harvard University's Dr. Carter G. Goodson, who wanted the Black to be "regarded as a participant rather than a lay figure in history".

Perhaps this is an opportunity for your congregation to build bridges to Black congregations or social groups in your community.

Resources for observation of this month may be found at:

<http://www.history.com/minisites/blackhistory/>

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/bhm1.html>

J. McRee (Mac) Elrod

Chair, CUC Racial and First Nations Equity Monitoring Group

http://www.cuc.ca/social_responsibility/racial_equality.htm

~ LETTERS OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ~

CANADIAN MILITARY IN AFGHANISTAN

December 7, 2006

Hon. Peter G. MacKay
Minister of Foreign Affairs Canada
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa ON K1A 0C2

Dear Minister MacKay:

As the President of the Canadian Unitarian Council, representing Canadian Unitarians and Universalists across the country, I am writing to express my concern over the situation in Afghanistan and to request that the Government of Canada conduct a full review of the role of Canadian Forces there.

Our First Principle states our commitment to the worth and dignity of every human being. In 2004 the Canadian Unitarian Council adopted a resolution calling for a Canadian "defence policy that will equip and train our military to ... participate in state interventions for humanitarian purposes that are fully and transparently compliant with international

law ... that has as an overriding consideration the avoidance of serious harm to the civilian population."

In light of this resolution, we are extremely concerned with the number of civilian deaths that are occurring. Just recently, Afghani officials claimed that 60 to 80 civilians have been killed in NATO operations. Even if this figure is high, the perception that civilians are being killed will undermine the desired positive effect of Canada's rebuilding efforts.

The recent increase in the number of civilian deaths has undermined the confidence that Afghans have in the international community and the central government. This loss of confidence should lead us to question whether Canadian troops are in Afghanistan to engage in military missions that try to defeat the insurgents, or if they are there to patrol communities where they are welcome and where they can provide the support needed to allow the Afghans to rebuild.

CANADIAN MILITARY IN AFGHANISTAN CONTINUED... ..

As Unitarian-Universalists, we are asking the Government of Canada to undertake a full public review of the impact and effectiveness of its military and other involvements in Afghanistan and specifically request that the role of Canadian troops be examined to ensure that they are providing security to areas where they are welcomed, and are enabling

the Afghans to rebuild their country. We believe that conflict resolution, peace-building, reconstruction and humanitarian support should be the main focus of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, and that the balance of non-military commitments to Afghanistan should be increased.

Yours sincerely,
Ms Vyda Ng
President
Canadian Unitarian Council

Cc: The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
The Honourable Keith Martin, Liberal Foreign Affairs Critic
Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire, Bloc Québécois Coopération internationale
Ms. Francine Lalonde, Bloc Québécois Affaires étrangères
Mr. Wayne Marston, NDP Foreign Affairs Deputy Critic (for Human Rights)
The Honourable Dawn Black, NDP Defense and Peace Advocacy
The Honourable Alexa McDonough, NDP Foreign Affairs Critic/ International Cooperation

APPROVAL OF TERMINATOR SEED IN CANADA?

Friday, December 8, 2006

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister:

It has come to my attention that the official Canadian position on the on-going ban of terminator seeds is ambiguous, and that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is preparing the road for approval of terminator seeds. Unitarians across Canada are very concerned. We strongly urge you to promote the continued ban of terminator seed technology.

Unitarians consider it a religious imperative for all concerned citizens to protect the sensitive interdependent web of life on this planet, our only home. The primary purpose of every species on earth is to continue life by reproducing itself. Creation is made up of many diverse species and sub-species living in complex ecosystems based on relations of

interdependence. We have no idea what the consequences of introducing something as dangerous as terminator seeds into this web of life will be, and we have no way of testing in advance to find out.

There can be no possible justification for introducing a technology that goes so against the ways of the natural world. The only apparent reason for supporting such a practice is to give the powers of private ownership and property rights to corporations for their personal profit. In the past, in Canada, farmers, universities and governments have worked together to develop new varieties of seed for all to use. In some cases today, corporations take the seed developed by many generations of farmers, make one genetic change, and patent that seed. The introduction of terminator seeds is a step in the process of taking control away from independent farmers and granting control of the world's food supply to private companies.

Farmers have saved seed since the beginnings of human agriculture. Each farmer has saved the seed that thrived best in a particular place under particular conditions to ensure the best possible results for

APPROVAL OF TERMINATOR SEED IN CANADA? CONTINUED... ..

the next crop year. The diversity of the seeds have provided optimal chances for survival under different conditions. Terminator seeds promote reduction in genetic diversity. The Seeds For Survival program of the Unitarian Service Committee is a proven model that has helped poor farmers in the third world survive drought and bring land back into production. This program empowers farmers to stay on the land and feed their families.

So far, Canada has supported the international moratorium on Terminator Seeds at the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. We applaud this decision. The Canadian Unitarian Council appeals to you to be firmly committed to maintaining this ban.

Canada's position on terminator seeds is important

Yours sincerely,
Vyda Ng
President,
Canadian Unitarian Council/ conseil unitarien du Canada

Cc: The Hon. Chuck Strahl, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
Wayne Easter, Liberal Agriculture Critic
André Bellavance, Bloc Québécois Agriculture Critic
Alex Atamanenko, NDP Agriculture Critic
Elizabeth May, Green Party Leader

**OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE 12/07/06
CUC SR LETTER: CANADIAN MILITARY IN AFGHANISTAN**

In reply to your email of December 7, 2006

Ms. Vyda Ng
President
Canadian Unitarian Council
vyda@cuc.ca

c.c. St-Hilaire.C@parl.gc.ca
Lalonde.F@parl.gc.ca
Marston.W@parl.gc.ca
Black.D@parl.gc.ca
McDonough.A@parl.gc.ca
Martin.K@parl.gc.ca

Dear Ms. Ng:

Thank you for your email of December 7, 2006, concerning the nature of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan.

It is in Canada's national interest that Afghanistan become a secure and self-sufficient democratic state that never again serves as a terrorist haven. The Government of Canada is taking an integrated approach that is focused on helping the Afghan people bring stability to their country, strengthen governance and reduce poverty. Canada is in Afghanistan at the request of the Afghan government and under United Nations authorization.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO CANADIAN MILITARY IN AFGHANISTAN CONTINUED... ..

Canada has an integrated approach. Security and development are there to support the diplomatic and political process launched in Bonn, in 2001, followed now by the Afghanistan Compact launched in London, in 2006. These documents set out the key benchmarks on which the international community and Afghanistan have agreed. This reflects Canada's engagement in Afghanistan, which focuses on three critical areas: stability, governance and poverty reduction.

Canada has made a clear commitment to stabilizing Afghanistan and contributing to the creation of a more secure environment within which the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country can take place. On May 17, 2006, the Canadian Parliament voted in favour of extending and expanding our leadership role in Afghanistan. This includes the establishment of a permanent Embassy, the extension of current Canadian Forces and Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) deployments to Kandahar for an additional two years, and an increase in development assistance to \$310 million from 2007 to 2011. Canada's multi-faceted contribution now consists of close to \$1 billion in development assistance (2001 to 2011), a near doubling of the Canadian Embassy personnel in Kabul, command of a PRT in Kandahar, and the deployment of 2300 Canadian Forces in support of operations in southern Afghanistan. The Canadian government also has a good track record of disbursing our pledges and promoting the development of Afghan capacity through the support for Afghan government programs and institutions. Canada's contributions have helped Afghanistan achieve measurable success. Among the country's remark-

able strides are the adoption of a new constitution that enshrines protections for human rights, such as gender equality. As well, Afghanistan has had successful presidential and legislative elections. Reforms in the areas of defence, justice and finance have begun. Millions of refugees are being reintegrated. Heavy weapons that were used to destroy much of the country have been cantoned. Thousands of women, once relegated to the margins of society, are now able to access credit and finance in order to pursue livelihoods. Significant progress has been made in demining. Overall, Afghanistan is moving forward with the help of the international community, including Canada.

The Canadian government has made progress, but as attacks in Afghanistan have continued, challenges do remain. Transition takes time. Capacity cannot be meaningfully developed in a few short years. This is an important reason for Canada to remain engaged.

To learn more regarding Canada's engagement in Afghanistan, I invite you to visit the following website of the Government of Canada at www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca.

You also raise specific concerns regarding Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. As this matter falls under the purview of my colleague the Honourable Gordon O'Connor, Minister of National Defence, I have taken the liberty of forwarding your correspondence to him for consideration.

Thank you again for taking the time to write and share your views.

Sincerely,
Peter G. MacKay
Minister of Foreign Affairs
c.c. The Honourable Gordon O'Connor, P.C., M.P.

To receive all statements from the CUC, send a blank email to cuc-news-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and you will be subscribed to the read-only email list with 1-2 messages per month.