Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Issue Brief
Peace and Conflict

Living in God's amazing grace

ELCA Policy Base

Scripture declares God's intent for peace among nations and calls people of faith to work for peace and reconciliation. The prophet Isaiah described the expected messiah as a "prince of peace" and his message as a "gospel of peace." Jesus embodied subtle but compelling peaceful authority as he addressed the powers of his day and proclaimed that "peacemakers" would be called "children of God" in his Sermon on the Mount. Saint Paul worked tirelessly for peace among the early Christian communities and urged peaceful coexistence as a fruit of the Spirit and an ethic for Christian discipleship.

The ELCA's commitment to working for peace is informed by the Lutheran understanding that government is divinely-inspired when it works for the common good. While affirming the legitimate role of governments to enforce laws and provide for the common defense, our social statement, *For Peace in God's World*, states that, "governments should vigorously pursue less coercive measures over more coercive ones: consent over compulsion, nonviolence over violence, diplomacy over military engagement, and deterrence over war."

In the face of ongoing and increasing conflict in the world, peace among all nations may seem like an idealistic dream removed from reality. Yet, as citizens of the United States we are guaranteed the right to participate in our government, and as people of faith, we are called to exercise that right. *For Peace in God's World* recognizes the "awesome responsibility political leaders, policy makers, and diplomats have for peace in our unsettled time. In a democracy all citizens share in this responsibility."

Christians are called to an especially difficult task in working for peace with justice. As Dr. Martin Luther King stated, "peace is not the absence of violence; it is the presence of justice." It is our faith in the crucified and risen Lord that, as *For Peace in God's World* states, "strengthens us to persist even when God seems absent in a violent and unjust world, and when weariness and hopelessness threaten to overwhelm us."

IRAQ
Background

Since the controversial invasion of Iraq by U.S. government forces in the spring of 2003, more than 3,700 U.S. military personnel and at least 100,000 Iraqi civilians have died. While the American public remains deeply divided over the conflict, it is clear that there are no quick fixes or easy solutions to the situation in Iraq.

The land mass that represents modern day Iraq has a long and complicated history. Mesopotamia, touted as the "world's first civilization," flourished on the land we know as present-day Iraq in 3000 B.C. The long and diverse list of rulers of the region includes figures like the Babylonian

Hammurabi, Chaldean King Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus the Great. In the 16th century Iraq became part of the Ottoman Empire, which lasted until World War I when, in 1917, British forces where able to seize Baghdad and defeat the Ottomans who had aligned with Germany and the Central Powers.

French and British officials negotiated the borders of Iraq, guided by the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. In 1920 the "State of Iraq" was established as a League of Nations mandate under British rule. During the British occupation, the Hashimite monarchy was imposed and little attention was paid to the traditional ethnic settlements or the differences between the various ethnic and religious groups in Iraq. The British generally favored the Sunnis, leading to the revolt of the Shi'ites and Kurds who both fought for their independence from Britain.

In 1932 Iraq became an independent state, but tensions and divisions between the various ethnic and religious groups that were exacerbated under British occupation resulted in little commitment by any of the various actors in the country to the central government. Between 1958 and 1979 Iraq was plagued by a series of coups and countercoups. In July 1979, Saddam Hussein was appointed by the sitting president to assume control of the country.

During its first decade of rule, Saddam's regime received broad support from Western powers, the Soviet Union and China, especially during the eight year Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988). This began to change during the early 1990s as Iraq invaded Kuwait over a long-standing territorial dispute. After failing to comply with various United Nations resolutions calling for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, the Persian Gulf War was launched. In April 1991, after six weeks of intense aerial bombing, Iraq withdrew and agreed to a permanent cease-fire which included strict conditions for the destruction of all stockpiles of weapons.

Economic sanctions on Iraq remained in place throughout the 1990s, justified by the need for Iraq to comply with the removal of weapons of mass destruction (U.N. resolution 687). Nonetheless, the sanctions had a considerably negative humanitarian impact on much of the Iraqi population. After the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States, momentum began building for a shift in U.S. foreign policy toward Iraq from maintaining its compliance with U.N. sanctions to the removal of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath government. The suggested presence of weapons of mass destruction and links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda made by U.S. government officials at the time were later found to be non-existent by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (also known as the 9-11 Commission).

In the absence of a U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force in Iraq, U.S. and United Kingdom forces invaded Iraq in March 2003. While Saddam Hussein was swiftly removed from power and subsequently executed, the newly-established Iraqi government continues to struggle to unite the people of Iraq in peace. Violence is persistent throughout the

country, though in varying degrees depending on geographic area, ethnic population densities, and the location of external actors.

Based on ELCA social statement policy and Churchwide Assembly actions related to the war in Iraq, the ELCA calls on all candidates to unite the country behind a responsible plan to end U.S. military operations in Iraq, help broker a political solution to deep-seeded divisions among Iraqis, provide for those displaced by the conflict, and help rebuild security and stability in the region.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates

✓ How will you responsibly end U.S. military operations in Iraq without creating further instability in Iraq or the region?

✓ How will you support Iraqi leaders in achieving a stable, representative government that promotes and protects human rights and the rule of law?

✓ What will you do for the millions of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons who have faced severe hardship because of the war?

✓ What will you do to restore confidence in U.S. policy among Muslims in the Middle East?

Israel and Palestine
Background

The 2005 Churchwide Assembly encouraged participation in an ELCA campaign for engagement in Israel and Palestine called "Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land." This campaign has identified the three main areas of accompaniment, awareness, and advocacy as contributing to a stable presence and working toward a sustainable relationship between a viable Palestine and a secure Israel.

The historic tensions within this region have been exacerbated in recent times by the unintended consequence of distrust of the U.S. government's intentions among many in the Muslim world following the Gulf War and the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. This distrust has increased misunderstanding among some Christians and Muslims but also led to more intensified efforts at interreligious dialogue for peace and cooperation. Another factor has been the rise of "Christian Zionism," a reading of Christian theology that unnecessarily heightens tension and obstructs a stable détente and willingness among parties to negotiate a peaceful settlement. The ELCA looks to engage more forthrightly Christians holding this view as part of its commitment to a stable region and peaceful Jerusalem shared among the Abrahamic faiths.

Apart from engaging in specific theological dialogue and supporting a multi-faceted economic and humanitarian effort in the Middle East, the ELCA encourages the United States government to more fully facilitate a process of dialogue and conflict resolution between Israel and Palestine, bringing to bear its diplomatic and economic strength, and framing the dialogue within the regional landscape of other interested parties and nations. As in the past, it is unlikely that any progress will be made unless the United States is again willing to engage all parties at a high level on various aspects of the territorial dispute, including the need for a shared Jerusalem.

Therefore, along with affirming our own church-related efforts, the ELCA calls on the U.S. government to act as a leader in the international community and to actively encourage a sustained and meaningful dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian governments toward a final status agreement, and among a broader circle of relevant parties.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates

✓ How will you bolster U.S. diplomatic efforts toward the goal of achieving a two-state solution to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine?

✓ How will you work to build comprehensive peace throughout the region, particularly between Israel and its neighbors?

Darfur
Background

Sudan has been plagued by internal conflict for nearly 40 years. A variety of complex factors, including race, ethnicity, religion, and economic disparities have fueled a 21-year conflict between the politically dominant Muslims/Arabs in the north and the more impoverished Christians/animists in the south. On January 9, 2005, the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) to end the civil war and begin a six-year Interim Period.

This significant step toward peace between northern and southern forces in Sudan, though imperiled at times, continues to be overshadowed by the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Darfur, the western region of Sudan. Tensions between African-Muslim ethnic groups and nomadic Arab ethnic groups in Darfur date back to the 1930s. For decades, Sudan's central governments in Khartoum have shown little interest in resolving these ethnic tensions or preventing Arab militias from attacking non-Arabs in Darfur.

Since the 1980s, a variety of non-Arab groups from the Darfur region have unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the central government in Sudan. When Sudan's current government, the National Congress Party (NCP), came to power in the early 1990s they began arming Arab militias to disarm African ethnic groups in Darfur. In February 2003, two rebel groups, the

Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), rose in opposition to the NCP. NCP's support of Arab militias, including the Janjaweed, has steadily increased since that time.

In 2003, government-backed militias, known as the Janjaweed, began systematically committing mass atrocities in Darfur. Estimates of innocent civilians killed range from 200,000 to more than 450,000. More than 1,500 villages have been destroyed, leaving more than 2.5 million Darfurians displaced, with an additional 2 million dependent exclusively on humanitarian aid for survival.

Despite significant international outcry and the signing of various cease-fires and peace agreements, the government of Sudan has consistently demonstrated a commitment to propagating continued violence and suffering in Darfur. Furthermore, what began as an uprising by two distinct rebel groups in Darfur has splintered into at least 14 factions with disparate objectives and often violent consequences. Death and destruction in Darfur will not end without a sustainable political agreement that is negotiated between warring parties.

With more than half of 7 million Darfurians either internally displaced or exclusively dependent on external aid, coupled with the rising number of deaths due to violence, the U.N. and U.S. officials consider the humanitarian situation in the Darfur region to be one of the worst in the world. At the same time, the sustainability of the CPA, which is governing peace between the north and south, is increasingly fragile.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates

✓ Despite significant international outcry and the signing of various cease-fires and peace agreements, the government of Sudan has consistently demonstrated a commitment to propagating continued violence and suffering in Darfur, where at least 200,000 innocent civilians have already been killed. What will you do to simultaneously build the will for a political resolution in Darfur while bolstering the Comprehensive Peace Agreement currently governing Southern Sudan?

✓ The humanitarian situation in the Darfur region of Sudan is considered to be one of the worst in the world. More than half of 7 million Darfurians are either internally displaced or exclusively dependent on external aid. What will you do to help ensure the implementation of a hybrid African Union/United Nations peacekeeping force in Darfur in order to protect innocent civilians and create an environment where aid workers can deliver life-saving interventions safely?

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