

President Barack Obama
The Office of the President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20500

May 15, 2015

RE: TARGETED LETHAL DRONES PROGRAM

As senior leaders of our respective denominations and faith groups, we write to express our grave concerns about America's lethal drones policy. The recent news of U.S. citizen Warren Weinstein's inadvertent death by drone strike is disturbing and shows the deadly risks of drone warfare.

As people of faith, we share common values from our diverse traditions which broaden our concerns beyond national security objectives and national borders. We believe in the intrinsic value of all humanity and creation, compelling us to work for the common good of all people through the principles of love, mercy, just peace, solidarity, human dignity, restorative justice, and reconciliation. The U.S. practice of utilizing unmanned aircraft for targeted killings is contrary to shared values, which guide us, our faith communities, and most Americans.

Our concerns center first on the thousands of deaths, both intended and unintended, that have resulted from lethal drones technology. Despite the prevailing notion that drones are precise, the recent tragedy involving the death of a U.S. citizen demonstrates this is not the case. Indeed, such tragedies seem to happen frequently. Because the U.S. government rarely acknowledges its drone strikes or reports the intended and unintended deaths, our best knowledge of victims come from non-governmental organizations and journalists. The estimates of widespread casualties are devastating and morally unacceptable to us.¹²³⁴⁵⁶ Additionally, the deprivation of due process to citizen targets and the Administration's unaccountable creation and control of a secret "kill list" are alarming to us, and counter to our notions of human dignity, participatory processes, and rule of law.

A second cause of concern for us as faith leaders is the secrecy and lack of accountability that surrounds these targeted drone strikes. The power to decide who will live and who will die has become lodged squarely in the Administration's hands with the wide-ranging 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force. With that unchecked power, the Administration has secretly selected targets and conducted strikes without publicly disclosing these activities, explaining their basis of legality, reporting who was killed, or if unintended victims were compensated. This unaccountability prevents the public and their elected representatives from having the ability to meaningfully oppose the policies or fully understand what is being done in our name.

¹ http://www.democracynow.org/2014/12/3/a_precise_us_drone_war_report

² <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/namingthedead/?lang=en>

³ <http://rt.com/news/230131-yemen-child-killed-drone/>

⁴ <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/will-i-be-next-us-drone-strikes-in-pakistan>

⁵ <http://www.newsweek.com/wedding-became-funeral-us-still-silent-one-year-deadly-yemen-drone-strike-291403>

⁶ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/14/world/middleeast/legal-advocacy-group-says-us-drone-program-sets-dangerous-example.html?_r=0

A final concern is our firm belief that drone strikes do not make us safer, but instead lead to perpetual destructive conflict and extremism. Rather than simply taking the place of human bodies in a conflict, drones actually expand conflict by taking us into combat where we otherwise would not go.⁷ They enable reliance on warfare as the first resort.

This ever-growing warfare has increased fear in communities, aided recruitment of extremist groups and failed to eradicate terror or bring about security.⁸ Effectively combatting extremism requires nonviolent, creative strategies, including sustainable humanitarian and development assistance, and policies and programs that address the political, economic and social exclusion that fuel radicalization. Several organizations, many of them religious, are pursuing such strategies around the world. These efforts deserve more attention and support, but resources instead are consumed by the endless drones war.

We join together as leaders of faith communities to urge a halt to lethal drone strikes, accountability for past strikes, and a negotiated agreement holding the international community to the same standards.

cc: United States House of Representatives
United States Senate

Sincerely, *

J Ron Byler
U.S. Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS
Executive Director
NETWORK: A Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Patrick Carolan
Executive Director
Franciscan Action Network

Sr. Patricia J. Chappell
Executive Director
PAX Christi USA

Very Rev. Carl Chudy, SX
Provincial Superior
Xaverian Missionaries in U.S.

Carole Collins
Director of Finance and Operations
Alliance of Baptists

⁷ http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/task_force_report_final_web_062414.pdf

⁸ <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Terrorism-Index-Report.pdf>

Shan Cretin
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Joan Diefenbach
Executive Director
NJ Council of Churches

Very Rev. Michael Duggan, MM
U.S. Regional Superior
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

Betsy Dwyer
Director
Commission on Justice
Glenmary Home Missioners

Very Rev. James J. Greenfield, OSFS
President
The Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe
General Secretary
General Board of Church and Society
The United Methodist Church

Jim Higginbotham
Co-Moderator
Disciples Peace Fellowship

Mark C. Johnson
Executive Director
The Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice

Rabbi Nancy Fuchs Kreimer, Ph.D.
Director, Department of Multifaith Studies and Initiatives;
Associate Professor of Religious Studies
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston
Director
Disciples Justice Action Network

Gerry G. Lee
Executive Director
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Rabbi Michael Lerner

Rabbi
Beyt Tikkun Synagogue
Editor
Tikkun Magazine
Chair
Network of Spiritual Progressives

Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley

General Secretary
American Baptist Churches, USA
Chairperson
National Council of Churches of Christ, USA

Stanley J. Noffsinger

General Secretary
Church of the Brethren

Rev. Gradye Parsons

Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (USA)

Diane Randall

Executive Secretary
Friends Committee on National Legislation

Bill Scheurer

Executive Director
On Earth Peace

Kavneet Singh

Secretary General
American Sikh Council (ASC)
(Formerly World Sikh Council - America Region)

Sandra Sorensen

Director of Washington Office
Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ

The Rev. Sandra Strauss

Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach
Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed

National Director
Office for Interfaith & Community Alliances
Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

Jim Winkler

President and General Secretary
National Council of Churches

Scott Wright

Director
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

*Denominations listed for affiliation purposes only