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

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*Denominations listed for affiliation purposes only