

21 September 2001

ACT 30/021/2001

A Joint Civil Society Statement on the Tragedy in the United States

In the wake of the tragic events that took place in the United States of America on 11th September 2001, we wish to extend our deepest condolences to all who have lost loved ones and to the millions more whose lives have been affected. The horrific scenes we have witnessed remind us that all too often, in many places around the world, innocent people are the victims of conflict and aggression beyond their control.

During this time of shared grief, we pay tribute to citizens, non-profit organizations and rescue workers whose acts of bravery and volunteerism sum up the best of our common humanity. We urge continued support for the important work being done by a range of civil society organisations to help people affected by this current crisis as well as by the increasing political violence around the world.

At the global level, we want to raise our voices for peace, justice, human rights and the rule of law. Those who have planned, carried out or abetted these appalling crimes must be brought to justice. This tragedy makes plain the need for a system of international justice, relying on rules of evidence, proof of guilt, respect for rights and due judicial process.

We should resist efforts to target people because of their race, religion, ethnic background or appearance, including immigrants in general and people of the Islamic faith and Arab community in particular. We note with great concern the attacks against people believed to be Muslims or from the Arab community and the desecration of mosques and Sikh Temples.

Great care must be taken in the use of language and images. Neither justice nor peace will be served by the demonisation of particular communities. As leaders in civil society, we have an obligation to ensure that every part of the community is respected, that its voice can be heard, and that human rights and public safety for all are upheld. We appeal to the media to

act responsibly in their use of imagery or inflammatory language. We also wish to stress the vital role of information and communications to promote informed debate and decision-making.

While emotions are running high, we urge restraint on the part of political leaders. To react with wisdom and long-term effect, leaders must not act in haste, unilaterally, or indiscriminately. We call for a strong commitment to human rights, international law and humanitarian concern in any actions that are taken. We should be motivated by the demand for justice, not revenge, and by the pursuit of peace, exhausting all peaceful measures so that many more innocent victims do not suffer. We feel strongly that there is no purely military solution to the kinds of acts that we saw last week. Indeed, the blunt instrument of war may further intensify a cycle of violence and attract new recruits to terror.

We do not underestimate the difficulty or the urgency of the task facing political leaders. But we are convinced that a safer world for all can only be achieved by the extension of human rights and the rule of law. As they act to prevent such attacks in the future, we urge governments to uphold the fundamental civil liberties that underpin democratic participation. We believe that in a world afflicted by vast inequality, governments and citizens alike have a responsibility to work for sustainable development and social inclusion. Across the whole range of non-profit activities for the public good, we encourage civil society organisations to redouble their efforts to weave anew the torn fabric of our lives.

We appeal to world leaders to protect and strengthen the institutions of civil society. We believe firmly that robust local and national communities - linked internationally and inspired by an ethos of compassion and tolerance - are our best defence against those who would sow hate and destruction.

A key strength of civil society is its diversity. We, as a group of concerned organisations, encourage our colleagues in civil society across the world to give practical statement to the objectives of this

statement in ways they deem most appropriate. In addition, we invite other organizations to add their endorsement to this statement.

Finally, we hope that from the pain and sorrow of recent events hope may yet rise again for the establishment of a more peaceful, just and sustainable world order.

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Amnesty International

Oxfam International

World' Alliance' of YMCAs

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

OneWorld International

Association for Progressive Communications

World Organisation of Scout Movements

International Association for Voluntary Efforts (IAVE)

The Council on Foundations (USA)

State of the World Forum (USA)

PACT International (USA)

MWENGO (East and Southern Africa)

ActionAid (UK)

Save the Children (UK)

Catholic Institute for International Relations (UK)

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (UK)

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

British Overseas NGOs for Development (UK)

Panos Institute - London

European House (Hungary)

Centre for Development Research (Bulgaria)

4

Pakistan Association for Continuing/Adult Education -  
PACADE

Center for Alternative Development Initiatives  
(Philippines)

The Open Estonia Foundation

Democracy Development Programme of South Africa

National Centre for Citizenship (Australia)

Volunteering New South Wales (Australia)

The Smith Family (Australia)

GADIS - Grupo de Analisis y Desarrollo Institucional y  
Social (Argentina)

Instituto Venezolano de Estudios Sociales y Políticos  
(Venezuelan Institute for Social and Political  
Studies)

Josep Xercavins i Valls, Ad Hoc Secretariat, Ubuntu -  
World Forum of Networks

Sarah Melendez, CEO, Independent Sector (USA)

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