NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

The Declaration of Peace

John Dear | Aug. 22, 2006 On the Road to Peace

The U.S. war on Iraq goes on unabated. Ordinary people die every day by the gruesome violence provoked by our military presence. Our war over the last three years has killed at least 45,000 Iraqi civilians, possibly as many as 100,000. And there is no end in sight.

But the end can be imagined, and we can work toward it. This week, some friends in New Mexico are gathering to plan a nonviolent witness to call for an end to the U.S. war on Iraq. We've marched during the past few years. And we've kept vigil, lobbied Congress and prayed for peace in a spirit of nonviolence, as have people all over the country.

People all over the country are saying: Bring the troops home; close all U.S. bases in Iraq; fund a peace process for a post-occupation transition; reconstruct Iraq through massive reparations; and spend the hundreds of billions of dollars used to kill Iraqis instead on schools, jobs, healthcare, and low-income housing here at home, including the reconstruction of New Orleans.

Such, my friends and I believe, is what Gandhi and King themselves would urge. And they would, we believe, urge us a step further. Both insisted that nonviolence is not passive, reactionary or weak. It requires creativity, assertiveness and risk-taking. Against conventional wisdom, nonviolence out-muscles violence. It takes the lead, harnesses the best in humanity, and puts violence to shame. Nonviolence sets the agenda, takes action, and trumps lies with the truth. It sees through to its goal. Which is nothing less than the breakthrough of justice and peace.

Thus inspired, we plan to meet this week, like others around the country, to see how we might up the nonviolent ante. We take our lesson from the Pledge of Resistance, the movement launched in the early 1980s by my friend Ken Butigan. Tens of thousands pledged to oppose then-U.S. President Ronald Reagan's contra war on Nicaragua. And at an appointed time, if the war failed to end, they committed themselves to nonviolent civil disobedience. We know now that that campaign pressed the Pentagon and hastened the end of the contra war.

This past spring, Ken and his colleagues started a similar campaign. Ken and I traveled to New York City in May. There we discussed his proposal with Leslie Cagan, coordinator of United for Peace and Justice, the largest peace coalition in our nations history. The Bush administration, we said, will not bow to protest. It can tolerate marches and vigils for years to come. The time has come for more.

After much preliminary organizing, United for Peace and Justice, and some 200 others groups, launched The Declaration of Peace, a national campaign to pressure the U.S. government to end the war on Iraq.

The plan is simple. It calls for the immediate end of the war on Iraq, but presuming it doesn't end in the next few weeks, it urges every peace group in the nation to organize nonviolent civil disobedience at their local

congressional representatives office during Sept. 21-28, 2006, just days before Congress adjourns for the fall elections. During the targeted week, we will hold our banners, and demand a return of the troops. We will sit in with steadfast nonviolence and demand an end to this mad war. And throughout the fall we will keep up public pressure until we reach a breakthrough for peace. We've already signed up thousands.

The Declaration of Peace Pledge reads in part as follows:

I join with the majority of U.S. citizens, the people of Iraq, and people around the world in calling for a comprehensive end to the U.S. war in Iraq. I solemnly pledge to

1. *Call on the Bush administration and Congress to immediately withdraw all U.S. troops from Iraq, with no future redeployments;*
2. *Urge my congressional representatives to adopt a bring-the-troops-home-now position, and to establish a concrete, comprehensive withdrawal plan no later than Sept. 21, 2006, International Peace Day, just days before Congress adjourns;*
3. *Participate in marches, rallies, demonstrations and other peaceful strategies to establish this plan*
4. *Engage in nonviolent civil disobedience, as conscience leads me, if this plan for a comprehensive withdrawal is not established and activated no later than Sept. 21, 2006.*

Some prominent organizations have already signed on: Pax Christi USA, Peace Action, Call to Action, CodePink, War Resisters League, and the Network for Spiritual Progressives.

The time has arrived for just such a systematic, organized national campaign to demand peace with Iraq. The time has come to employ the old movement weapon of civil disobedience. Every major movement for peace in our history was able to turn a corner finally when its members disrupted the big business of war, illegally and nonviolently.

I urge readers to sign on to the Declaration of Peace (www.declarationofpeace.org [1]), spread the word, sit in, and speak out: We, the people, declare peace. Bring the troops home now! If we do, we'll find ourselves in greater allegiance to the nonviolent Jesus who commands us to love the enemy, and who has gone ahead of us on the road to peace.

******

John Dear is a Jesuit priest, activist and author, most recently, of *You Will Be My Witnesses* (Orbis) and *The Questions of Jesus* (Doubleday). For information, see: www.fatherjohndear.org [2]. To sign the pledge, go to: www.declarationofpeace.org [1]

Source URL (retrieved on *07/11/2014 - 07:57*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/declaration-peace

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/www.declarationofpeace.org
[2] http://ncronline.org/www.fathterjohndear.org