

## My statement before the judge

John Dear | Jan. 22, 2008 On the Road to Peace

*It's a powerful experience to stand before a judge and be sentenced to jail for saying no to war, injustice and nuclear weapons, something I highly recommend for all followers of the nonviolent Jesus. It really helps clarify one's discipleship, one's citizenship in God's reign of peace, one's faith, hope and love. In these days of war, genocide, nuclear weapons, poverty, executions, abortion, torture, global warming, and violence of every description, it's a grace to be in trouble with the empire for practicing nonviolence, for daring to offer a word of peace, for serving the God of peace.*

*On Thursday morning, Jan. 24, I'll stand in Federal Court in Albuquerque, N.M. and be sentenced for our effort, nearly a year and a half ago now, to visit the office of our senator. Judge Donald Svet asked us to write letters to him about ourselves, and allowed my co-defendants each to make a statement at their sentencing last November. Here below are excerpts from my notes of what I will say in court on Thursday, if allowed. Regardless of the outcome for me, my prayer is that more and more people will speak out against this evil, ongoing U.S. war on Iraq and in the process, we might all reclaim our fidelity to the nonviolent Jesus.*

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In 1999, I led a delegation of Nobel Peace Prize winners to Iraq and met with thousands of Iraqis, including Vice Premier Tarik Aziz, the United Nation's leading officials, the directors of non-governmental organizations (including Margaret Hassan, head of CARE, who was assassinated several years ago), the nation's leading imams, the papal nuncio, and doctors who explained the effects of the U.S.-led sanctions, which killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children during the 1990s. I remember visiting the girls' high school in Baghdad, and hearing hundreds of girls cry out with tears, "Why are you trying to kill us?" It was painful to witness so much suffering. Since then, I've been trying to tell the world that we must stop killing Iraqis, including children.

I went to the Federal Building in Santa Fe, N.M., on Sept. 26, 2006 to present Sen. Pete Domenici's office a copy of the "Declaration of Peace," calling upon citizens everywhere, including senators and congressional representatives, to speak out against the U.S. war and occupation on Iraq, to work to stop the war and pursue nonviolent solutions for the people of Iraq and the Middle East. I wanted the staff of Sen. Domenici to fax the statement to him and ask him to sign it. Some of us had already mailed a copy to him, but had not received a response.

As a Christian and a priest who walks in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day and Mahatma Gandhi, I believe no Christian can support this war and still claim to follow the nonviolent Jesus, because Jesus commands us to "put down the sword" and "love our enemies." Jesus blesses peacemakers, not warmakers. Christians and all religious people are called to obey a higher law, God's eternal law of nonviolence.

I wanted to explain to the senator and his staff, that this war is a complete disaster for the United States, Iraq,

and the world. From the start, it was a complete fabrication. The President and the Pentagon claimed they were searching for weapons of mass destruction, even though many people around the world knew there were none in Iraq, and claimed that Iraq was involved in the September 11th attacks, which many also knew was impossible. The U.S. government used these lies to steal Iraq's oil and further establish U.S. military control in the region. This war is illegal (in violation of international law and the Nuremberg Principles), totally unjust and immoral, downright impractical and mortally sinful.

This war has turned the entire world against our country, and sowed the seeds for future terrorist attacks against us. It does not promote security but instead threatens everyone's security. It wreaks havoc on the people of Iraq and the Middle East, as well as our country and the people of New Mexico. It is also a complete waste of money. Those billions of dollars spent killing Iraqi children should be used instead to house the homeless, feed the hungry, provide universal healthcare and better schools, heal the returning veterans, and cleanup the environment, here in New Mexico, in Iraq, and throughout the world.

I want the senator and the New Mexico government and the federal courts and all government leaders to stop this war because it is killing thousands of U.S. soldiers, including New Mexicans, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, mainly civilians. No one deserves to die so that U.S. oil corporations can get richer, or for any reason. Our message is: The killing must stop now. That day, I carried the names of every U.S. soldier killed, and some 10,000 Iraqi civilians killed, and read them aloud to remind myself and others of this reality. Although many people are now against this war, unfortunately, the killing still goes on, and still needs to stop.

So I hope that Sen. Domenici, his staff, New Mexico's government and the U.S. government will reverse its stand, stop the killing, end this evil war, make massive reparations to the people of Iraq, and seek new nonviolent, non-military policies for the people of Iraq, the United States and the world. I also hope that you, Judge Svet, will join us by working to end this evil war and pursuing God's reign of nonviolence.

This morning, I think of Mahatma Gandhi as he stood before a judge on March 18, 1922. "Non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as cooperation with good," he said. I think this war is evil, and every effort to legalize this war and our weapons of mass destruction is evil, so I will continue to resist this evil war in a spirit of Christian nonviolence, love and truth. Accordingly, I will not pay any fine, nor will I undertake any community service; my whole life is community service. I can not cooperate with this unjust system which continues to kill sisters and brothers in Iraq and elsewhere.

As Gandhi said to his judge, I think you have two options: either renounce your guilty verdict upon me and join our campaign to end this war by upholding international law and the Nuremberg principles and supporting those who work nonviolently to end this war; or if you really support this unjust system which makes war, maintains weapons of mass destruction here in New Mexico, and kills people in Iraq and Afghanistan, then give me maximum sentence.

The whole world knows this war is a disaster. History will judge us all for where we stood, what we did, what we said at this *kairos* moment. I urge you to choose life, take a stand for peace, and call upon the whole country to speak out against this war and be converted to the truth of nonviolence.

But I take my case to a higher court, and plead before the ultimate judge, the God of peace, for us all: "Give us a new world without war, poverty or nuclear weapons, a new world where one and all live by your eternal law of nonviolence. Help us to end this war and abolish war forever. Thank you, God of peace, for hearing my plea. Amen."

If John is not in prison, he will lead a special Lenten retreat Feb. 22-24, "The Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Nonviolent Jesus," at the Kirkridge Center in Bangor, Pa. ([www.kirkridge.org](http://www.kirkridge.org) [1]). The new DVD, "The Narrow Path," featuring his teachings on Gospel nonviolence, is available from [www.sandamianofoundation.org](http://www.sandamianofoundation.org) [2]

. To attend one of his speaking events, or to host him later this fall for a reading from his forthcoming autobiography, see: [www.johndear.org](http://www.johndear.org) [3]

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