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Progressives urge a new path in Afghanistan

by Tom Roberts

NCR Today

In an open letter to President Barack Obama, Sojourner's Jim Wallis and a number of other progressive religious leaders urge the president to take a new approach to the conflict in that country.

Titled, "Build, Don't Destroy in Afghanistan," the letter states, in part:

We believe that after eight years of war we need a whole new approach in Afghanistan. And we respectfully and prayerfully suggest to you a different strategy that we would name: the humanitarian and development surge.

First, lead with what we know works ? massive humanitarian assistance and sustainable development. We know that what can re-build a broken nation; inspire confidence, trust, and hope among its people; and undermine the appeal of terrorism is massive humanitarian assistance and sustainable economic development. And it costs less ? far less ? than continued war.

Many of us as religious leaders are deeply involved with the people and organizations who know places like Afghanistan the best; and they are neither the military nor the private contractors who increasingly dominate U.S. foreign policy in war-torn regions. Rather they are the NGOs, both faith-based and secular, doing relief and development work which have been there for years, have become quite indigenous, and are much more trusted by the people of the country than are the U.S. military. We've also learned that it is vitally important that humanitarian and development assistance should be provided, as much as possible, by independent civilian and non-governmental organizations, both international and local? rather than using aid as a government adjunct to military operations. Another way to say it is that the best face of America to the world is a baseball hat and not a helmet.

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