

Catholic Church. National Conference
of Catholic Bishops.
Resolution on imperatives...
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Resolution
on
**Imperatives
of
Peace**

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November 16, 1972

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF
CATHOLIC BISHOPS**

Peace (Therapy)

This is a critical moment in the history of the Vietnam war. Intensive efforts on the part of our government as well as other parties involved appear to be refining the final details of a settlement which will end the fighting. Recalling our exhortation a year ago to our nation's leaders and to leaders of all nations to "bring the war to an end with no further delay," we pray earnestly to Christ, the Prince of Peace, for a successful outcome of the present negotiations: that is, for a just and lasting peace with stability and freedom for all the nations and peoples of Southeast Asia. We couple this prayer with a plea to both sides for an end to bombing and terrorism which are causing such loss of civilian life and destruction of the land itself. Indeed, a particularly anguishing and, in many cases, immoral aspect of this war has been the suffering and death inflicted on non-combatants.

It is vitally important that Americans now turn their attention to the task of reconciliation not only in Southeast Asia but also in our country. This war can well leave a residue of bitterness which could poison our national life for years to come. This must not be allowed to happen. We must instead seek to resolve our differences in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect.

Special attention must be given to the young people of our nation whom the war has profoundly affected in so many ways, material, psychological, and spiritual. Our returning veterans and especially the wounded and the prisoners of war, must be given every possible consideration and assistance to enable them to reintegrate their personal and professional lives into civilian society. Our sincere compassion should be extended to the families of men killed in the fighting. The dead, the maimed, and the missing in action should have constant remembrance in our prayers. Those who continue to serve in the military should also receive the moral and material support of the nation.

In a spirit of reconciliation, all possible consideration must be given to those young men who, because of sincere conscientious

belief, refused to participate in the war. A year ago, we urged "that the civil authorities grant generous pardon of convictions incurred under the Selective Service Act, with the understanding that sincere conscientious objectors should remain open in principle to some form of service to the community." (*Resolution on Southeast Asia, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November, 1971*). We again urge government officials and all Americans to respond in this spirit to the conspicuous need to find a solution to the problems of these men. Generosity represents the best of the American tradition and should characterize our response to this urgent challenge.

Generosity must also mark our participation in efforts to rebuild the war-torn nations and societies of Southeast Asia. There can be no doubt that the people of North and South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have suffered a tragedy far greater than ours. The dramatic and successful programs of aid and reconstruction carried out by the United States following World War II provide a model for what is demanded of us now. We must be unstinting in the expending of our moral, material and technical resources and skills on behalf of the people of Southeast Asia who have suffered so grievously.

Finally, we believe that the imperatives of peace now demand intensive study of many complex and pressing moral issues. The return of peace should not cause a slackening of attention to these matters. The experience of recent years amply illustrates the fact that grave ethical and moral questions regarding warfare remain unresolved. While recognizing the right of self-defense, we are nevertheless convinced that war is not an apt means of settling disputes. The quest for viable means of preventing war and for effective alternative methods of resolving conflicts—through such agencies as the United Nations—is an urgent imperative. Technological skill in the science of war must not outstrip humane skill in the arts of peace. Church agencies, including the United States Catholic Conference, Cath-

olic educational institutions, diocesan offices for justice and peace and organizations of the laity should in the months and years to come take a leading role in the effort to work for international justice and to find ways to ensure that peace—which, God willing, is returning to Southeast Asia and also to the United States—will be the permanent condition of human life in all nations and for all time.



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