

September 13, 2001

## **TO ALL OUR FRIENDS SCATTERED AROUND THE WORLD**

Are we scattered or rather are we united in being worlds apart?

We can guess what is going on in the hearts of many among you, mainly in the hearts of our American friends in or outside of the United States. We are sorry to see you passing through the fire of such despicable terrorism like that which we have experienced for over fifty years, and although on a smaller scale, in no way suffering less pain or struggling less with questions. So many have been, and are being, killed because of national ideologies, but what happened in New York and Washington DC goes beyond whatever atrocities we can imagine. Our heart is bleeding very seriously. Life would seem absurd for all those who were crying for help in the Twin Towers and for those who were kidnapped in the plane.

There are so many questions for the survivors and for the tens of thousands of beloved relatives and friends of the innocent victims. I refuse to say we can do nothing. I still believe, more than ever, that we can make a difference, a difference within our own selves. We can make a difference in our close and remote surroundings and we can make a difference in our wider society.

Since that horrific, apocalyptic vision of the planes crashing into the Twin Towers I have been meditating on the absurdity of the Cross. I have been questioning so many over-exaggerated, selfish attachments to power, wealth, prestige and arrogance. It seems that staying on the Cross would make everything absurd and meaningless, would make life void of any value. We are not born to die. We are not born to be killed and much less are we born to kill and to make others suffer.

The Cross of the perpetrators is more absurd than that of the victims. They, the perpetrators, need a light at the end of their dark tunnel of life, a light that would not be another fire frightening everybody. They need a light which would be rather the light of sunrise, of dawn, of hope. For the victims and their beloved ones, we need to question the destination, the meaning, the justification. I do not think that there is any justification to explain what has happened, but here, more intensely than at any time in my life, I feel the need to overcome and to go beyond the Cross.

The light in the dark tunnel of the appalling, ongoing terror in many countries of the world, that was condensed in this horrifying terror attack against the Twin Towers and Washington DC needs to be a light of hope, a light of consolation. This is a dark tunnel crammed with questions. Why? How come? What for? From where? Who did? Who assisted? - and so on and so on. We need the very special light that shone out from the empty tomb, that left us with the one question - "Where is He?" And it presented us with the one answer - "Here I am. Peace be with you. Be not afraid. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

Our dear beloved friends, I am sure you feel the tremendous amount of affection and emotion we want to include in every word of this letter. Despite the fact we continue our work with our 4,500 students our hearts are turning to you. We lift you up whether you are American

Christians, American Jews or American Arabs. We lift you up to the Lord who is the only real consolation possible.

The students and faculty at Mar Elias Educational Institutions join me in this deep, heartfelt expression of solidarity. Every morning we explain to them the horror of violence and of enmity that is nurtured with hatred very often coming out of a deep sense of injustice and of real frustration. We continue our life together, Christians, Moslems, Druze and Jews. Nothing will break this bond of friendship and of common origins. We were all born babies. We wanted to help and students were enthusiastic to give their blood. We are far away from the United States so we called the American Embassy inviting them to accept our offering of our own blood. They were extremely nice and grateful. We have in the past done this. Three hundred of our students, Palestinian Arabs, Moslems and Christians, willingly donated their blood for injured Jewish citizens in Tel Aviv. We prayed that this would never be repeated again and that there would be nobody thrown into the beds of the hospital needing blood. The same prayer goes out from our heart – that nobody in the United States, Europe, Canada, Australia, the Middle East or anywhere would need blood because of terror attacks.

The alliance that has to be built today should not aim only at terrorism. It should aim at justice, at integrity, bread for the hungry, liberation for the prisoner and homes for the homeless. It is easy to take revenge. It is much more difficult to repair a situation that is already deeply deteriorated, so much so that it becomes a source of despair for many people who have nothing more to lose.

You can imagine the repercussions in our own area of the Holy Land. It is the ideal time for those who want to take revenge and flex their military muscle, settle accounts with another kind of innocent people while the world is busy with the horror of another kind of terror. I invite all of you to speak less about peace, and to consider more seriously the issue of justice. A justice that does not include settling accounts but changing the situation, and that would benefit the oppressed as much as the oppressor, the powerful as much as the powerless.

We might be babbling – we cannot find the real words to express the deep hurting pain and the strongly founded faith. Together my dear friends on our small planet, and only together, can we change something with the help of God Almighty – the God of Justice, the God of Peace and the God of Life who does not kill.

Yours with special affection,

Rev Abuna Elias Chacour  
President: Mar Elias Educational Institutions