Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
—Matthew 5:9

Jesus’ words “children of God” are directed not to those who merely proclaim their opposition to violence and war, but to those who seek better, life-saving ways to resolve inevitable human conflicts.

A United States war with Iran would be an unmitigated disaster, morally and religiously indefensible. U.S. faith leaders must be among the first to rise up, say “No!”—and call for better, more effective, life-saving ways forward.

Given the escalation of confrontation between the United States and Iran, it is time for leaders from our faith communities to point to more effective ways to transform conflict and to speak strongly against military action that could have enormous human and financial costs, and which could easily and broadly escalate.

With tensions rising over attacks on chemical tankers, the shooting down of a pilotless U.S. surveillance drone, and threatened retaliatory air strikes, urgent action is needed now, particularly in the context of an unraveling Iran nuclear deal from which the U.S. irresponsibly withdrew.

Therefore, we as U.S. faith leaders demand that our political leaders seek real diplomatic and humanitarian solutions to the current crisis and refrain from military confrontation with Iran.

While we agree that Iran should repudiate terrorism and not increase uranium enrichment, we stand as religious leaders to say that war is not the answer with Iran and is unjustifiable on moral and religious grounds. Such war would likely have disastrous human and environmental consequences, would be strategically unnecessary, and would lead to regional destabilization, increased terrorism, and unsustainable financial burdens.

Since the start of the war in Iraq, the cost of wars in the Middle East has been almost $6 trillion and 500,000 lives lost. As people of faith, we are motivated by the humanitarian needs and suffering of all people, including the Iranians, who are already afflicted by severe sanctions and who would be the principal victims of military confrontation. We urge our political leaders to learn from the failed policies of the past. Preventing another costly and unjust U.S. war in the Middle East is a moral imperative.

It is time for a different approach.

1 The United States should offer to return immediately to the Iran nuclear deal and use the resulting discussions with Iran to engage in an effective diplomatic process for enhancing regional security. In the meantime, we urge the United Nations and governments in Europe and beyond to create a new forum for diplomacy with Iran, an international platform that could help restore the positive momentum created by the Iran deal and address the multiple geopolitical issues at the roots of the current confrontation, some of which were not covered in the agreement.

2 The United States should end its policy of harsh and punitive trade sanctions against the Iranian people. Some targeted sanctions may be appropriate to counter Iranian support for armed militancy and weapons proliferation in the region, but these measures should be multilateral in nature and targeted against Iranian officials, not against the entire economy or the general population.

3 If necessary, establish safeguards for commercial shipping in the Gulf. The international naval patrols that have helped to stem piracy off the coast of Somalia may provide a model. This would require agreement from multiple countries and a willingness by the United States to cooperate with other states in coordinated operations. In an atmosphere of close confrontation, blunders or isolated incidents must not be used as a pretext for escalating military conflict.

In all these actions, we pray that our government will step back from military acts as an option in this crisis and instead be guided by political wisdom, international legal standards, and the ethical principles of peacemaking, humanitarianism, and civilian immunity. Threats, tearing up diplomatic agreements, and punishing the Iranian people have not worked and are making matters worse.

We call for a different way. Our scriptures instruct us to avoid war and to live as peaceably as possible with all. We call on all our religious leaders, theologians, clergy, and laypersons to speak out against the option of war with Iran. Loving peace is never enough; we must stop making war and do the hard work of learning to make peace, which will require courage, calm resolve, and responsible leadership.
BACK FROM THE BRINK

Faith leaders call for diplomacy, not war, with Iran.

Bishop Claude Alexander, The Park Church; Rev. Dr. Chris Antal, Center on Conscience and War; Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Diocese of the Armenian Church of America; Bishop Carroll Baltimore, Global Alliance Interfaith Networks; Marian Batho, Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston; Sr. Barbara Battista, Sisters of Providence; Rev. Dr. Clinton Bennett, Clinton Avenue United Methodist Church; Dr. Ruth Bentley, National Black Evangelical Association; Rev. Traci D. Blackmon, The United Church of Christ; Patty Bowman, Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center; Dr. Amos Brown, Third Baptist Church San Francisco; Rev. Julia Brown Karimu, Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary; Dr. Jamal Bryant, New Birth Missionary Baptist Church; Sr. Maureen Burke, Sisters of Charity; J Ron Byler, Mennonite Central Committee U.S.; Rev. Dr. Malcolm Byrd, Philadelphia Forum for Faith, Law and Civics; Dr. Tony Campolo, Red Letter Christians; Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, Churches for Middle East Peace; Patrick Carolan, Franciscan Action Network; Sr. Joan Chittister, Shane Claiborne, Red Letter Christians; Sr. Mary Ann Connolly, Sisters of Charity; Professor David Cortright, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame; Rev. Dr. Kendrick Curry, The Pennsylvania Ave Baptist Church; Rev. Joseph Darby, Nichols Chapel AME Church; Rev. Paula Dempsey, Alliance of Baptists; Marie Dennis, Pax Christi International; Rev. Julian DeShazer, University Church Chicago; Sr. Judith Desmarais, Sisters of Providence; Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley, Interfaith Power & Light; Rev. Dr. Robert Franklin, Morehouse College; Richelle Friedman, PBVM Sister of the Presentation; Sr. Mary Delores Gatilff, Sisters of Notre Dame; Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Reformed Church in America; Rev. Ebony Grisom, Emergency Food and Shelter Program; Susan Gunn, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns; Rev. Jeffrey Haggray, American Baptist Home Mission Societies; Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale, Ray of Hope Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Rev. Dr. Richard Hamm, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Lisa Sharon Harper, FreedomRoad.us; Rev. Fred Harrell, City Church of San Francisco; Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness; Rev. Dr. Peter Heltz; Rev. Susan Hendershot, Interfaith Power & Light; Rev. Dr. Katharine Henderson, Auburn Seminary; Dr. Obery Hendricks, Columbia University; Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, Church and Society. The United Methodist Church; Rev. Dr. Nathan Hosler, Church of the Brethren; Rev. Dr. Joel C. Hunter, Community Resource Network of Central Florida; Bishop Reginald Jackson, AME Church; Rev. Greg Jarrell, QC Family Tree; Rev. Dr. Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook, Former US Ambassador for International Religious Freedom; Kathy Khang, Author; Madeleine Kirkconnell, Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose; Rev. Tony Lee, Community Of Hope AME Church; Rev. Ben Lowe, Evangelicals for Social Action; Ronnie McDonald, Sisters of Charity; Rev. Carlos L. Malave, Christian Churches Together; Rev. Michael Mata, Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene; Rev. Dr. Walter McCray, National Black Evangelical Association; Sr. Judy McDonnell, Dominican Sisters of San Rafael; Rev. Brian McLaren, Aurora Senior Fellows; Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley, American Baptist Churches; Jonathan Merritt, Author and Columnist; Bishop W. Darin Moore, AME Zion Mid-Atlantic District; Rev. Dr. James Moos, United Church of Christ; Sr. Maryann Mueller, Felician Sisters of North America; Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, Presbyterian Church (USA); Rev. Michael Neu- roth, United Church of Christ; Rev. Dexter Nutall, New Bethel Baptist Church; James Perkins, Greater Christ Baptist Church; Diane Randal, Friends Committee on National Legislation; Senior Bishop Lawrence Reddick, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; Rev. Dr. Alexa Salvatierra, Faith-Rooted Organizing UnNetwork; Dr. Robert Schenck, The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute; Dr. Stephen Schneck, Sojourners Board of Directors; Sr. Doris Schoner, Micky ScottBey Jones, Faith Matters Network; Sr. Maryann Sherlock, Sisters of Charity; Dr. Scot Sherman, Newbiggin House of Studies; Robert Shine, Pax Christi USA; Dr. Ronald J. Sider, Evangelicals for Social Action; Rev. Jason Smith, Alliance of Baptists; Bishop Marc Stenger, Pax Christi International; Mary Sullivan, Sisters of Charity; Rev. Lori Tapia, Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Rev. Adam Taylor, Sojourners; Rev. Dr. Al Tizon, North Park Theological Seminary; Sr. Elizabeth Tooling, Sisters of Charity; Nikki Toyama-Szeto, Evangelicals for Social Action; Rev. Sandra Maria Van Opstal, Chasing Justice; Greet Vanaerschot, Pax Christi International; Joette Venneman, Sisters of Charity; Rev. Jim Wallis, Sojourners; Sr. Teresa Wamuyu Wachira, Pax Christi International; Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Pastor Colin Watson, Christian Reformed Church in North America; Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Skinner Leadership Institute; Rev. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, School for Conver- sion; Jim Winkler, National Council of Churches; Sarah Withrow King, CreatureKind; Rev. Jamila Woods, Jabez Christian Community Church