

January 31, 2003

The Hon. Jean Chrétien
Prime Minister of Canada
Prime Minister's Office
Langevin Block
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0A2

Open letter to The Hon. Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister of Canada

The Canadian Society for International Health, a national organization committed to the promotion of international health and development in the context of peaceful cooperation, expresses its deepest dismay at the preparation for war against Iraq.

We strongly believe international disputes must be resolved through constructive, peaceful negotiation, with full respect of human rights and dignity and under the guidance of international and humanitarian law. Complex political disputes such as those afflicting the Middle East can only be resolved through a genuine understanding of their deepest causes and historical development. We should not be lured by the false, simplistic promise of an apparently efficient, clear-cut solution offered by destructive military action. A war against Iraq would only raise regional instability and increase the chances of a disastrous chain reaction involving other countries in the area. Such conflict would have long-term global consequences and negatively affect the security of North American people.

Studies conducted by the World Health Organization, the United Nations and the non-governmental organization 'Medact' provide evidence of the disastrous social and public health consequences that a war on Iraq would produce. In addition to a death toll that could easily reach the hundreds of thousands, the conflict would have a wide-reaching humanitarian impact at the international level and be a powerful escalator of collective violence – the instrumental use of violence in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives. The United Nations estimates that 10 million people could be put at risk of hunger and disease in such a conflict.

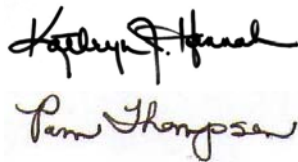
Children, women and the poor, who are already the principal victims of 12 years of sanctions against Iraq, will suffer the most from an armed conflict. In addition to its direct victims, war will also reduce the already limited access Iraqi people have to food, water and medical care, and will have a dramatic impact on entire generations of Iraqis.

Following the example of hundreds of health professionals around the world who have signed appeals to their respective governments, the Canadian Society for International Health urges the Government of Canada to support vigorously, by all means possible, a peaceful solution to the conflicts that threaten the Middle East. Negotiations actively backed and facilitated by the Canadian Government should focus on gradually removing the political, economic, and ethno-cultural causes of such conflicts and on implementing the progressive disarmament of all countries in the area.

Today, you – as the Canadian Prime Minister – and your Government have a unique opportunity to leave a strong legacy of peace and reinforce the traditional image of Canada as an international peacekeeper and mediator.

The Canadian Society for International Health hopes this letter will represent an additional contribution to an informed discussion amongst members of the Government and the public, and will be a reference for all those who are opposed to military action on ethical and humanitarian grounds, regardless of their political or religious viewpoint.

Yours sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is 'Kathryn F. Hensel' and the bottom signature is 'Pam Thompson'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

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