

GA-1331
(Sense-of-the-Assembly)
RESOLUTION CONDEMMING DRONE WARFARE

Adopted by the General Assembly

WHEREAS, we who claim to follow Jesus Christ have been called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) and have been told by Jesus, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27) and we have been given a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18); and

WHEREAS, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of lethal drones, not exclusively in war zones;¹ and

WHEREAS, individuals have been targeted and killed by the United States using drones, including four American citizens,² and this action is questionable under both international and U.S. law;³and

WHEREAS, innocent people, including children, have been killed and severely injured in drone attacks; and noncombatant populations, both in and outside of war zones, have been traumatized by the continual threat of attack by drones that fly overhead virtually non-stop in some areas;⁴ and

WHEREAS, the use of drones piloted by individuals thousands of miles away from the targets may lessen the restraint and reluctance to engage in deadly force that is called for when injury to American soldiers is likely;⁵

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting in Orlando, Florida, July 13-17, 2013, condemns the use of lethal drones, particularly, but not exclusively, outside of war zones; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that this General Assembly direct the General Minister and President to send a letter to the President of the United States expressing the General Assembly’s condemnation of drone warfare.

¹ See <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/politics/2013/February/Obama-Admins-Increased-Use-of-Drones-Under-Scrutiny>

² http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/02/05/16856963-american-drone-deaths-highlight-controversy?lite

³ See http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2016371864_clericlegal01.html, <http://livingunderdrones.org/report-legality/>

⁴ See <http://web.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/human-rights-institute/COLUMBIACountingDronesFinalNotEmbargo.pdf>

⁵ See <http://www.economist.com/node/21531433>

Background

The use of drones by the United States has increased significantly since President Obama took office. The U.S. had about 50 drones when then President George W. Bush declared a war on terrorism in 2001. Today the Pentagon has approximately 8,300 drones in addition to drones controlled by the CIA. Both the military and the CIA use them in combat missions and counterterrorism operations. Drones have been employed in lethal operations in at least six countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and Libya. Drones are not only used in combat situations such as Afghanistan, but also outside of war zones.

A recent study by Stanford University and New York University⁶ raised questions about the number of civilian deaths and injuries that are reported to occur during these strikes. The Obama administration has regarded all military age men killed in a strike as combatants and consequently, its estimates of civilian deaths have been inevitably low. According to the SU/NYU study, "The best currently available public aggregate data on drone strikes is provided by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ), an independent journalist organization. TBIJ reports that:

"from June 2004 through mid-September 2012, available data indicate that drone strikes killed 2,562-3,325 people in Pakistan, of whom 474-881 were civilians, including 176 children. These strikes also injured additional 1,228-1,362 individuals."

Furthermore, the study indicates US drone strike policies cause considerable unacknowledged harm to the ordinary lives of civilians, beyond death and physical wounds. Drones hover continually over communities in northwest Pakistan, unexpectedly attacking homes, vehicles, and public spaces. Their presence haunts the population, evoking anxiety and psychological distress among civilian communities. Those living under drones face the continual fear that a deadly strike may occur at any time, and a sense that they are powerless to protect themselves. These anxieties impact behavior, as they create chronic and toxic stress. The US practice of striking one area repeatedly, combined with evidence that strikes have killed rescuers, makes both community members and humanitarian workers fearful or reluctant to help injured victims.

It is not clear that the use of lethal drones has helped make the US safer. The strikes have undoubtedly killed suspected combatants and disrupted armed groups. However, serious concerns about the efficacy and counter-productive nature of drone strikes have been raised. The number of "high-level" targets killed as a percentage of total casualties is quite low, about 2%. Furthermore, evidence suggests that US strikes have inadvertently aided recruitment to violent anti-American armed groups and motivated violent counter-attacks. As the *New York Times* has reported, "drones have replaced Guantánamo as the recruiting tool of choice for militants."⁷

⁶ See <http://livingunderdrones.org/>

⁷ See <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/world/obamas-leadership-in-war-on-al-qaeda.html?pagewanted=all>

Drone attacks in Yemen have served to strengthen the influence of al-Qaeda and spread hostility toward the US. The Yemenis are not driven by ideology but by injury and a sense of revenge. In 2009 the first known drone strike killed 14 children and 14 women. Of the dozens killed, only one was known to have had al Qaeda connections.⁸

The tragic deaths of noncombatants have led to detrimental political and economic impacts. A drone strike in May of 2010 killed a prominent sheik and the deputy governor of Marib Province, Jabir al-Shabwni. In revenge, his tribe attacked the primary pipeline for the country, costing Yemen over \$1 billion dollars. This tribe, along with others, had an important role in opposing Al Qaeda yet a drone attack led them to feel betrayed and injured.⁹

The use of drones to perform targeted killings and the blatant disregard of international borders significantly undercuts respect for the rule of law and international legal protections. Such actions establish dangerous precedents in the global community. The US government's failure to be transparent about its targeted killing policies; to provide needed details or adequately set out the legal factors involved in decisions to strike hinders the necessary and open debate about a crucial aspect of US foreign and national security policy. Serious doubts have been expressed about the legality of strikes on individuals or groups who do not present an imminent threat to the US.

Finally, by having the pilots of the drones safely seated in a building half a world away, killing without danger of being killed, one of the factors that deter armed conflict is removed, weakening the reluctance to use deadly force. Immediate hazards for American military personnel no longer are at the forefront of considerations. The ease that drone warfare makes it to kill without being killed may lessen the motivation to seek nonviolent, diplomatic solutions to conflicts. It is worth noting that when American deaths are not in the news, conflicts often fade from the national consciousness.

⁸ See http://articles.cnn.com/2009-12-18/world/yemen.alqaeda_1_yemeni-government-official-al-qaeda-airstrike?_s=PM:WORLD

⁹ See <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/world/obamas-leadership-in-war-on-al-qaeda.html?pagewanted=all>