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National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

March 8, 2004

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

On behalf of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, I greet you in peace! I do so especially mindful of the conflicts and hardships in which all people of goodwill find themselves during these difficult times.

In letters, dated December 8, 2003, to Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, with copies to Attorney General John Ashcroft, I requested permission to lead an interfaith delegation of religious leaders to visit the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. This request stemmed from our religious conviction that all people be treated with dignity, which translated to our humanitarian concern for the detainees' physical and mental health, pastoral concern for their spiritual welfare, and civic concern for their rights under US law and accepted international agreements.

We were denied permission to visit detainees, as stated in a letter to me, dated January 8, 2004, from Dr. Jeffrey M. Starr, Principal Director for Special Operations Program Support in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense. In denying us access, he wrote that limited access is granted only to the International Committee of the Red Cross and governmental officials, and that the detainees are receiving treatment that is humane and, "to the extent appropriate," consistent with the Geneva Convention.

Despite the fact that some detainees have been freed and two others have finally been charged, the National Council of Churches continues to be concerned for the well being of the overwhelming number of detainees who remain in captivity with no change in status. As a sign of our continuing civic concern for their right to due process, we have signed onto an *amicus* brief in the relevant case to be heard by the US Supreme Court. As a sign of our continuing humanitarian and pastoral concern, with this letter to you we are renewing our request for permission to visit the detainees at Guantanamo.

**2nd Request
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The members of our delegation would each represent large constituencies that share these religious and human rights concerns. It would certainly reassure these religious leaders and their communities, as well as those of all of our member communions, which collectively include some 50 million US Christians, to know that their concerns are respected by our country's political leaders. Therefore, I ask you to grant this request and allow a National Council of Churches delegation to visit Guantanamo.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert W. Edgar". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Rev. Robert Edgar
General Secretary

cc: Secretary of State Colin Powell
Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld
Attorney General John Ashcroft