

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP PREVENT THE NEXT WAR

The world we want to see, one in which nonviolent solutions to conflicts are sought and all people are treated as brothers and sisters, is far from the one we have today. Here are ten actions you can take to move us closer to a world free of terrorism and war.

1. Educate yourself on the issues. One key prerequisite for stopping war is to have an educated citizenry. That means you and me. Make a commitment to learning more about a part of the world or a country that has an antagonistic relationship with the U.S. government, such as Cuba, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, or Syria. Learn about the history, culture, language, religion, and values of that society. The more we understand, appreciate, and humanize people we are taught to see as enemies, the harder it is for our government to persuade us to fight them.

2. Demand truthful media. The media is the voice of democracy. Without a truthful, diverse media, democracy is squelched. Pressure the mainstream media to cover events fairly and to be an outlet for a true variety of voices. Give your local media a list of peace "experts" they should turn to. Complain, call, write, or organize a protest when the coverage is skewed toward war. Support independent news outlets that provide critical information and alternative viewpoints, and encourage others to do the same.

3. Communicate! After you educate yourself, don't be afraid to speak out. Talk with your neighbors, friends, relatives, co-workers, classmates. Talk to people outside the choir and learn from people you disagree with. Call radio and television talk shows, including the conservative ones. Write letters to the editor and opinion articles for your local newspaper. The only way to become an effective communicator is to practice communicating, just as the only way to become an effective writer is to write.

4. Hold your leaders accountable. Whether or not you voted for your city council member or your congressperson, elected officials are civil servants who are supposed to represent you—so pressure them to do so. Develop a relationship with your local representatives, setting up regular meetings between them and your allies in the community. When they take bad positions, like supporting the war in Iraq, make sure they hear from you loud and clear. And if they consistently take bad positions, support alternative candidates.

5. Help the United States kick our oil addiction. U.S. policy in the Middle East and other regions is conditioned by our dependence on foreign oil. It ties us to repressive regimes (Saudi Arabia) and encourages wars for oil (Iraq). A good first step is to cut down on your own oil consumption. Use public transportation, ride a bike, drive fuel-efficient cars, make your home and workplace more energy efficient. Volunteer with a group in your community that's promoting local and statewide initiatives to decrease oil consumption, and join national campaigns like the Apollo Alliance (www.apolloalliance.org).

6. Build the peace movement. The massive outpouring of antiwar sentiment before the U.S. invasion of Iraq showed that there is a wellspring of support for our cause. It just has to be tapped. Join a local group that speaks to you. Go to teach-ins, speak-outs, and marches. Learn from them and help organize new ones that reach out to broader sectors of

the community. Make sure you're connected nationally by joining the listserve of the largest antiwar coalition in the country, United for Peace and Justice (www.unitedforpeace.org).

7. Support members of the military who are speaking out. Support military families who are speaking out against the war, and soldiers who are speaking out and refusing to fight. Two excellent groups are Military Families Speak Out (www.mfso.org) and Veterans against the Iraq War (www.vaiw.net). We also need to support counter-recruitment efforts that provide young people with a truthful picture of the risks of joining the military and of their other options. See www.objector.org for a list of counter-recruitment and support groups for soldiers (including a GI rights hotline).

8. Protect our civil liberties and oppose the backlash against immigrants. If we're going to stop new wars, we've got to be able to speak freely and organize without government interference.

Unfortunately, after 9/11, some of our basic freedoms enshrined in our Bill of Rights are being eroded. Be a community watchdog ready to speak out against repressive measures, from new INS and Justice Department regulations to local police behavior and cases of bigotry. Oppose bills such as the USA Patriot Act that erode our basic rights. Join civil liberties groups such as the ACLU (www.aclu.org) and the Center for Constitutional Rights (www.ccr-ny.org). Remember, when civil liberties are taken away in an emergency, they're rarely restored afterward; and when constitutional rights are denied to any one group, you could be next.

9. Support the creation of a Department of Peace.

We now have a huge, bloated, overactive Department of "Defense," but where is the government body dedicated to preventing war and violence? Thanks to U.S. Representative Dennis Kucinich, there is a piece of legislation in Congress that would create a Department of Peace. Domestically, the department would address issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, and mistreatment of the elderly. Internationally, it would advise the president on addressing the root causes of war and interventions that can be taken before violence begins. Go to the web site www.dopcampaign.org to learn the status of current legislation and how you can support the bill.

10. Teach peace. It is easy to teach children about war; it is much more challenging to teach them how to create peace. Encourage your public schools and libraries to carry peace curricula and create "peace places" in schools. For ideas contact Educators for Social Responsibility (www.esrnational.org), the National Peace Foundation (www.nationalpeace.org), or the Alliance for Childhood (www.allianceforchildhood.net). Help young people find active ways of working for peace and justice through organizations like Kids Can Make a Difference (www.kidscanmakeadifference.org), Free the Children (www.freethechildren.org), or PeaceJam (www.peacejam.org), through which students work directly with Nobel Peace Prize laureates.



The struggle to end war will be the culmination of a global movement that rejects violence on the part of individuals, terrorist groups, and nation-states. That's why your contribution, however big or small, makes a difference. With patience, energy, and determination, keep your eyes on the prize: a world that thrives in peace.