Statement of the AAA Committee for Human Rights concerning the tragedy and aftermath of September 11, 2001

The American Anthropological Association Committee for Human Rights (CfHR) condemns the brutal terrorist attacks upon the people of New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania on September 11. We sympathize most deeply with the families and friends of the thousands of innocents who were murdered. We honor their memory as well as the memory of the hundreds of rescue workers who lost their lives selflessly trying to save others.

Terrorism constitutes a gross violation of human rights. It is a crime against all of humanity for which there can be no justification. Just as we condemn terrorism and those who are responsible for it, we also denounce those in the U.S. and abroad who attack others solely because of their ethnicity, race, or religion. These acts result from unwarranted xenophobia, ignorance and intolerance. We urge all to respect and help others in this time of mourning.

Those responsible for the terrorist attacks of September 11 should be brought to justice. However, we urge all governments to respect human rights as they pursue suspects. Innocent men, women and children should not be killed or harmed in the rush to retaliate. We support government efforts to increase security at home, but we urge government not to unreasonably jeopardize civil liberty and civil rights. As we devise plans and propose legislation to deter future terrorism, we must be vigilant to protect our constitutional order and bill of rights. We must not abandon our cherished rights, liberties and patriotic duties out of fear.

We urge our government and scholars to make every effort to learn the motives behind these terrorist attacks. What drove these men to murder so many innocents and commit suicide in the process? We cannot prevent future terrorism unless we learn the answer to this basic question.

We urge our government to increase its commitment to human rights, both at home and abroad. A human rights-based foreign policy means supporting oppressed peoples rather than oppressive governments. It means respecting the human rights of the poor, politically weak, dominated, and suppressed as well as those of the powerful and rich. It means adhering to international human rights and humanitarian law, including ensuring the well-being of refugees and other protected peoples. And, it means taking action and seeking solutions that respect the rule of law.

We urge our government to seek solutions within the realm of the International Court of Justice and other institutions that allow a just hearing of complaints in a rights-protective arena. And, we urge our government to support the creation of the International Criminal Court so that those suspected of committing future acts of terrorism, crimes against humanity and genocide can be brought to justice before a recognized world body.

Finally, we, the members of the CfHR, recommit ourselves to the task of promoting universal respect for human rights and peace in cooperation with fellow humans everywhere.

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Terrorism: How can Anthropologists Respond?
In these times of crisis our commitment to democracy, civil liberties and human rights is tested. As the U.S. and other governments move to discover and disrupt terrorism, there is the concern that hard won civil rights will be surrendered to our fear and that organizations that are engaged in human rights works may be casualties as well. If "homeland security" comes to mean scrutinizing dissident groups or labeling Basque, Irish, and any Muslim group as potentially “terrorist,” it will be our duty as intellectuals to articulate the complexities. Internationally, there is a clear risk that organizations and movements that have developed in response to human rights abuses, that speak with impassioned voices, may find their phones tapped, their assets frozen, and their rights-protective actions interpreted as threats to national security.

As the world struggles to come to terms with the new situation, anthropologists have a special role to play in educating and challenging our leaders to consider the complex factors that structure belief systems, generate oppressive conditions, and give rise to violent actions. The conditions that allow terrorism to flourish may be ignored as a single target emerges. Yet if the conditions are not changed-- if we cannot promote better listening by "the West" to the grievances of oppressed peoples-- new leaders will inevitably arise.

Anthropologists argue against ethnocentric perspectives, appreciating the variety of cultural paths to human living, portraying the basic goodness of "the other", but also understanding our species' potential for violence. We encourage anthropologists to offer analysis of the human conditions that may lead people to be vulnerable to the appeals of terrorist organizations, to find means to promote tolerance, and to voice concerns and advocacy for the preservation of human rights. And, we encourage anthropologists to assist the communities they work with in expressing their own concerns and views on terrorism: How do indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups see themselves and others in this growing global conflict?

The Committee for Human Rights offers the following practical suggestions for actions anthropologists can take to contribute to our new world situation.

1. Educate yourself and your community. Identify and help promote resources that address human rights and human wrongs, the rule of law, and the history and sociocultural conditions that influence current realities.

2. Promote analysis and discussion in your classes, department, and college community. Organizing a well-framed and well-moderated panel including several different analytical perspectives can promote academic discussion and analysis of the tragedy, its aftermath, policy implications, civil rights, etc. Choose speakers well, frame the panel with encouragement for respect for diversity of perspectives, hold speakers to times so the audience can participate actively, and seek help from media relations people for a well-timed press release to bring out the media to share ideas with the public. We can all remember previous wars, when discussions and debates became polarized and unproductive, when people felt silenced or voices became strident. Can we offer sagacity?

3. Make yourself available to the media. Many of us probably have been called upon offer insights into Islam, political movements, and key regions of the Middle East and South Asia. The media relations people at our universities are receiving many calls for expertise. If you work in a University setting, raise the issue in your department meeting, identify people who can provide information to the media, and then take the initiative to call university media relations or journalists themselves to offer expertise. If you don't have media training, consider getting a couple of quick lessons from the media relations
people at your university, if you work at one. Or participate in the AAA-sponsored media workshops at the annual conference.

4. Assert your voice in broader community forums. If you have provocative ideas or important insights, write about them. Submit your comments to the editors of your local newspapers and magazines. Editorial columns and letters can be an excellent venue for promoting tolerance and understanding of Muslims and Arab-Americans who may be experiencing backlash discrimination. Community forums can also be an important venue to draw attention to alternative views. Volunteer to be on a panel on terrorism or a multi-faith perspective on tolerance. Help organize one. Help organizers write their press releases or offer to edit them.

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ONLINE RESOURCES ABOUT TERRORISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Advocacy Project <http://WWW.ADVOCACYNET.ORG/> The Advocacy Project was created in the summer of 1998 by a group of individuals with a commitment to human rights and an interest in information technology.

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/> "Amnesty International is a worldwide campaigning movement that works to promote all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards." Press releases, briefing documents, and resource links concerning the United States response to September 11, 2001 terrorist actions can be found on the USA webpage at http://www.amnestyusa.org.


Civilrights.org: The Online Social Justice Network <http://www.civilrights.org> Civilrights.org's mission is to empower the civil rights community to lead the fight for equality and social justice in the emerging digital society through the establishment of an online social justice network. Civilrights.org is a project of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, a coalition of 180 organizations working side by side in the fight for equality and justice. For information on the human rights aspects of terrorist events and military response, see http://www.civilrights.org/news_and_events/tragedy.html#a2

Crimes of War Project <http://www.crimesofwar.org> This site contains analysis of key questions relating to crimes of war, including questions involving terrorist acts of September 11, 2001 and subsequent military response. Site further illustrates material contained in the 1999 book "Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know" edited by Roy Gutman and David Rieff (W.W. Norton).

Education Development Center <http://www.edc.org/spotlight/schools/beyondblame.htm> Education Development Center curriculum called "Beyond Blame: A Reaction to the Terrorist Attack" for grades 6-12, on justice, fairness, and inappropriate group blame.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation <http://www.forusa.org//NewsFrame.html> The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) 911 Resource Packet, developed by an interfaith organization committed to active nonviolence as a transforming way of life and as a means of radical change. FOR educates, trains, builds coalitions, and engages in nonviolent and compassionate actions locally, nationally, and globally.

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/ > Human Rights Watch is dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world. We stand with victims and activists to prevent discrimination, to uphold political freedom, to protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime, and to bring offenders to justice. We investigate and expose human rights violations and hold abusers accountable. We challenge governments and those who hold power to end abusive practices and respect international human rights law. We enlist the public and the international community to support the cause of human rights for all."

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) <http://www.icrc.org> The full texts of international humanitarian law treaties and commentaries are available at the ICRC web site.

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights <http://www.lchr.org/> "Since 1978, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights has worked to protect and promote fundamental human rights. Its work is impartial, holding all governments accountable to the standards affirmed in the International Bill of Human Rights."

Physicians for Human Rights <http://www.phrusa.org/> "Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) mobilizes the health professions and enlists support from the general public to protect and promote the human rights of all people."

Prevent Genocide International <http://www.preventgenocide.org/> Prevent Genocide International is a nonprofit educational organization established in 1998 with the purpose of bringing about the elimination of the crime of genocide.


United Nations International Law Website <http://www.un.org/law> This site contains the tests of international law treaties and information about the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda War Crimes tribunals.
