

## INTERFAITH WORKING GROUP ON DRONE WARFARE

### Addressing the Moral Implications of Drone Warfare

The use of force raises profound moral, legal, and religious questions. While there are differences of opinion within religious communities about some of these questions, there is widespread agreement that use-of-force decisions should be made by humans in a setting where they are aware of and confront the full moral, legal, and, in the case of policymakers, political weight of their decision.

**Armed drones and other unmanned weapons are different from most traditional weapons** because they allow U.S. political leaders to order the use of force without directly putting American lives at risk. It is laudable to reduce the number of U.S. soldiers who are put in harm's way; however, in the past the risk to U.S. soldiers provided a political check on the use of force – an operation involving boots on the ground could easily turn unpopular if soldiers died without a compelling reason. Political leaders can now order the use of drones and other remotely operated weapons and know that no Americans will die as a direct result (though non-American civilians sometimes do and drone strikes can cause an increase in anti-American sentiment). That change makes it more likely political leaders will order the use of force - to order people killed - in situations where they previously would have pursued other options. In essence, drones allow the use of force to become a first, rather than a last resort.

As members of the American faith community, we believe that all life has value and that policymakers have a moral and spiritual obligation to minimize killing. In order to ensure that the decreased operational and political costs of ordering a drone strike (as compared to sending U.S. troops into harm's way) does not result in additional killing, our leaders must adopt new legal restrictions on the use of unmanned weapons. We invite you to join us in our efforts to defend the value of human life and end the harm that the U.S. drone program is doing to our national interests, our shared values, and to our neighbors around the world.

As first steps, we recommend that the U.S. Government:

- **End the CIA's authority to carry out drone strikes.** CIA drone strikes are largely carried out in secret, with little accountability and without justice for affected civilians. The CIA carries out strikes in at least four countries, and the CIA's program of lethal drone strikes has lasted through three Administrations. It is in effect a secret war, one never specifically authorized by Congress or formally acknowledged to the American public. It is unlikely that this program of killing could have continued so long in secret or with so little debate if it were not carried out through the use of remotely-piloted aircraft.
- **Study the long-term consequences of addressing perceived threats through drone strikes.** Appropriate congressional committees or an independent panel empowered by Congress should carry out a thorough study of the long-term impact that continued drone strikes have had on affected communities, the national stability of affected countries, U.S. national security, and other U.S. interests. There should be accountability and transparency for civilian casualties resulting from drone strikes, and special attention should be paid to how drone strikes have impacted social cohesion, family structures, legitimacy of the respective national governments, and communities' perception of the United States and other international actors.

*The Interfaith Working Group on Drone Warfare is a coalition of faith-based organizations working to raise awareness about the moral concerns and consequences of the U.S. government's increasing use of drone warfare. For more information, please contact Matt Hawthorne, Policy Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: [mhawthorne@nrca.org](mailto:mhawthorne@nrca.org).*