

## **United National Peace Conference (UNAC)**

Saturday, July 23, 2010

Greetings! Good Morning!

My name is Greg Coleridge with the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee and Northeast Ohio Antiwar Coalition

On behalf of the 31 cosponsoring organizations that comprise the United National Antiwar Conference, I welcome you to this historic national conference to bring the troops home now!

Our deepest thanks go out to the Albany area antiwar, peace and justice community who are our hosts, facilitated by Joe Lombardo.

There are roughly 600 of you in this space and thousands more who are watching the live stream of these proceedings from coast to coast and border to border...and beyond.

Those of us who are physically gathered here in Albany have a unique and privileged opportunity over the next 36 hours

- To actively listen to and learn from each other,
- To grapple together on some difficult issues, and
- Hopefully by early Sunday, to have democratically and inclusively agreed on an action plan addressing issues, approaches and strategies that can be taken back to national, regional and local organizations for their feedback and endorsement to end all US wars and occupations NOW!

This is the third national antiwar conference over the last 3 summers (Pittsburgh last year, Cleveland in 2008). There are a few common threads. Each has been larger in attendance than the preceding one. Each has built on the institutional successes and lessons learned from the last one. Each has served to establish and deepen relationships among activists from broad sectors of the peace and justice community. And each has taken place at a time of rapidly deteriorating political, economic, military and social conditions across the Middle East and rising and creating grassroots protests and resistance in the US and the world to the wars, occupations, attacks and planned assaults in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Iran and beyond.

This last point is significant. Many of you here and no doubt many more watching on their computers have been in the forefront of the varied protests and resistance against the unsustainable US policies toward the Middle East.

Policies of: More troops. More deaths. More money. More debt. More bombs. More injuries. More corruption. More occupations. More drones. More bases. More privatization. More advisors. More dehumanization. More blockades. More environmental destruction. More excuses. More myths. More delusions. More lies. Endless more. When is endless more sustainable?

In response, this past year people here and people watching have organized

- Rallies and marches to immediately end the Iraq occupation in all its forms

- Protests and sit-ins to end funding for the war and occupation in Afghanistan
- Boycotts and blockades of Israeli manufactured goods
- Calls to prevent attacks on Iran
- Flotillas to break the siege of Gaza
- Resolutions declaring that true security comes from spending money on jobs and education, not wars and occupations
- Campaigns to amend the US Constitution to abolish corporate personhood and the legal doctrine that money equals speech.
- And diverse forms of protests and resistance from diverse people who wear everything from military uniforms to keffiyahs to buttoned down business suits to button plastered hats to marching shoes to anything colored pink.

It is you in this room, hearing this message and others who are not yet activists who are increasingly realizing the madness of it all. The tide is turning. Through actions and campaigns like those just mentioned, these unsustainable wars and occupations will end. They will end. And it will be because of what you have already accomplished added to what strategies and actions that will emerge from this conference

So welcome. Let us begin. Let us engage. Let us grapple. Let us do it with love and respect. But let us not forget our responsibility. To those abroad. To those here at home. To those not yet born who will have to inherit more violence, destruction and waste if we fail to force the politicians and militarists to do what they have not done on their own.

Let us unite. Nationally. As antiwar, peace and justice forces. In this conference. To end the wars and occupations in the Middle East NOW!