

A Statement of Solidarity with Our International Partners
By the Alliance of Baptists in Annual Meeting
Greenville, South Carolina
April 2, 2005

As we celebrate the theme of the 19th Annual Convocation of the Alliance of Baptists, “Coming Together by God’s Surprising Grace,” we thank God for the rich gifts of partnership with sisters and brothers in Cuba, Zimbabwe, and Sri Lanka. We are grateful for the mutually enriching mission we share with the Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas de Cuba, Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe, and Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya, and pledge ourselves anew to become ever more faithful partners as together we proclaim the gospel of the living and liberating Christ.

Recognizing the gospel truth that of those to whom much is given much will be required, we resolve to address the most pressing needs of these partners in our stewardship of resources and influence, as follows:

Sri Lanka

- 1. Tsunami relief.** We pledge to redouble our efforts, in collaboration with those of many others in our own country and around the world, in helping to rebuild the nation of Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the deadly tsunami of December 26, 2004. We will do so by addressing the range of livelihood issues that cry out for resolution and by supporting the efforts of Church World Service, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and Habitat for Humanity in building houses for the homeless.
- 2. Debt relief.** We urge the government of the United States and international lending institutions for forgive the debts of the nation of Sri Lanka in the interest of addressing its immediate and overwhelming needs to rebuild communities and care for the poorest of its citizens.
- 3. Evangelical witness and persecution of Christians.** We promise to work in concert with the Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya and its ecumenical partners in discerning how best to provide assistance in the interfaith context of Sri Lanka and to pray for our Sri Lankan brothers and sisters as they render a faithful witness to Christ in the face of increasing violence against Christians by some of their fellow citizens.
- 4. Congregational partnerships.** We invite Alliance-affiliated congregations to undertake church-to-church partnerships with congregations affiliated with the Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya.

Zimbabwe

- 1. HIV/AIDS.** We renew our commitment to do our part in the prevention and eradication of HIV/AIDS, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, including bringing pressure to bear upon our own government to fulfill existing financial pledges and make bold new investments to those ends. Especially in the case of Zimbabwe, we declare anew our solidarity with the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe in speaking out boldly for the prevention of the virus that causes the acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Recognizing that virtually every Zimbabwean family is directly affected by this pandemic, we pledge to pray for the churches of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe as they minister to the needs of victims and their families. We commend the labors of Alliance members and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship representatives Fran and Lonnie Turner in their creative and inspiring ministries to combat HIV/AIDS throughout southern Africa. We express our willingness to make special efforts to strengthen church and faith-based partnerships that support work on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS and other pandemic diseases. We also express our willingness to partner in this work with other faith communities and bodies that are doing so.
- 2. Economic deprivation.** We express our collective dismay at the systematic denial of food to the people of Zimbabwe, at exorbitant rates of unemployment, and at the continuing devaluation of that nation's currency, all of which contribute to alarming poverty. Although we do not presume to speak to Zimbabwe's internal political situation, we urge our own government to give a higher profile to the desperate plight of poor nations around the world – including Zimbabwe – in our commercial and trade policies.
- 3. Church development.** We renew our commitment to a vital partnership between the Alliance of Baptists and the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe in the planting and nurturing of churches, including those new congregations served by BCZ home missionaries, and invite Alliance-affiliated churches to enter into partnerships with these fledgling sister congregations.
- 4. Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe.** Remembering that our introduction to the work and witness of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe came about as a result of an initial partnership with the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe, we renew our commitment to the vitality of that institution. We applaud its determination to preserve academic freedom and integrity and pledge our continued support to that end.

Cuba

- 1. Travel restrictions.** We declare again our unstinting opposition to our government's denial of the fundamental right of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba and to the listing of Cuba as a terrorist nation by the Department of State. We support proposed legislation in Congress to lift outright the ban on U.S. citizens to travel freely to Cuba and commend our partner organization, the Latin America Working Group, for leading the legislative effort to that end. We object in the strongest possible terms to the inhumane restrictions on travel to their homeland by U.S. citizens of Cuban descent, announced last June 16 in the *Federal Register*, and effective scarcely two weeks later without benefit of public hearings and in the face of objections by those most directly affected. We decry the restrictions announced the same day on educational institutions' right to sponsor trips to Cuba for cultural and educational purposes. We object strenuously to the repeated denial of travel visas to citizens of Cuba, including representatives of our partner organization, the *Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas de Cuba*, on the specious grounds that their presence in the U.S. would be contrary to our national security interests.
- 2. Agricultural sales.** We protest the Bush administration's suspension last November of the transfer of money to U.S. agricultural firms making legal sales of food to Cuba and to proposed legislation requiring Cuba to make advance payment for U.S. agricultural imports. Such a change in the current regulatory scheme would have the inevitable result of reducing and perhaps eliminating the sale of food to Cuba by U.S. agricultural interests.
- 3. Congregational partnerships.** To enable the continued and uninterrupted partnership of congregations affiliated with the Alliance and the *Fraternidad*, we will seek the renewal of the license issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury to the Alliance of Baptists which expires November 30, 2005. We urge Alliance-affiliated churches already in partnerships to renew and strengthen their covenants of understanding with sister churches in the *Fraternidad* and encourage those churches exploring partnerships to continue their consideration of such relationships in anticipation of the renewal of the Treasury Department license.

Finally, we confess that as citizens of the United States of America we are generally and abysmally ignorant of and unconcerned about the rest of the world. As members of the Alliance of Baptists, we pledge ourselves to correcting those deficiencies among ourselves to the end that we may be God's partners in the reconciliation of the nations and peoples of the world and in the renewal of creation itself.

