

**Testimony before New York City Council Committee on State and Federal Legislation
June 9th, 2005
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Clergy and Laity Concerned about Iraq**

Statement to City Council on Resolution 367 in support of Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Bill(HR 2631)

My name is Rev. Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou and I am the national coordinator of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Iraq which is a program of the United for Peace and Justice-the largest anti-war coalition in the nation, I am honored to lend the support of 150 religious organizations around the country to Resolution 367 in support of the Religious Freedom Peace Tax fund Bill HR 2631.

"It is not enough to rebel against the lack of justice but we must also rebel against the lack of imagination." These words by Princeton Professor Cornel West and Harvard Law Professor Roberto Unger serve as the foundation of my comments before the council this afternoon. Central to American democracy has been the capacity of legislative bodies to extend democratic opportunity to citizens. The passage of Acts such as the Voting Rights and Public Accommodations of 1964 and 1965 were essential for the establishment of justice in the public discourse and policy. These legislative mandates were borne from the crucible of morally conscientious activism and social upheaval.

The current war and occupation of Iraq represents another moment of great social concern and requires the citizenry to pause and reflect upon the nature of war. Given the current crisis that our cities face through out the nation and dire unemployment rates in this great city, one would be remiss not to look critically at the fiscal priorities of our nation. Moreover, the psychic and spiritual destruction that war breeds hinders the positive creativity of the imagination and impedes the vitality of the soul. Is this how we imagine democracy?

The Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund is a great asset to the democratic experiment as it is morally sensible and an imaginative piece of legislation. Sponsored in the House of Representatives by John Lewis, who found his way in to public life and the civil rights movement through the seminary, the Peace Tax Fund Bill upholds the highest form of moral democratic ideals. Allowing citizens to place their fiscal priorities in life affirming activities is a democratic combination of citizenry and conscience. The passage of the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Bill would demonstrate that our government is committed to creating and maintaining a space for a peace witness in public life and policy.

Finally, we would extend our gratitude to the New York City Campaign for a Peace Tax Campaign and the New York City Council for this historic gathering. It is the intention of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Iraq to replicate this hearing in city councils, church basements, and street corners around the nation because democracy and history mandate it.

Thank you for any time and considerations given to this important bill in a time such as this.