

Letter to President Obama

by Sanford Berman

Dear President Obama,

I voted for you a year ago fully expecting that U.S. policies would—under an Obama administration —sharply differ from those of George W. Bush. I particularly hoped that foreign policy would drastically change, now being governed by a solid commitment to human rights and nonviolent conflict resolutions. This would have meant, for instance, ending extraordinary renditions, closing the torture-tainted Bagram prison, swiftly terminating our occupations of both Iraq and Afghanistan, dismantling the more than 700 American bases in some 120 countries, withholding our substantial aid to Israel until it permanently withdraws from Palestine, and fomenting real nuclear disarmament by destroying our own nuclear arsenal (all of it, not just token reductions).

And as a final example, I implored you on May 29th and June 22nd to “immediately sign the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning land mines,” a weapon that has globally wreaked havoc on civilians, especially children. The reply to my petitions appeared in the form of a news snippet in the local paper with the headline, “U.S. won’t sign onto landmine ban.”

That’s not what I voted for. That’s not something to be proud of as a loyal American. It’s a continuation of machismo, militarism, and plain insensitivity to human welfare. It’s Bush all over again. Please, no more shattered arms and legs! Sign the treaty. And then attend to all the other policy changes needed to make the United States less of an imperial, know-it-all, fear-and-profit-driven bully and more of a wise, compassionate, respectful friend and partner.

Yours for peace and justice,  
Sanford Berman

Sanford Berman was involved in the international library movement known as “critical librarianship,” which seeks to make access to information socially responsible. He has been called “the original radical librarian;” his early followers referred to themselves as “sandynistas” or “guerilla catalogers.” Sandy was the head cataloger at the Hennepin County Library (Minnesota) from 1973-1999. In retirement, he continues his activism in the form of picketing and letter writing.