

**No. 0119**

(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

**CALLING FOR THE RELEASE OF LORI BERENSON FROM PRISON IN PERU**

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

WHEREAS, Lori Berenson, a twenty-six year old American freelance journalist was accused of treason by a hooded military court in Lima, Peru, on January 11, 1996, and sentenced to life imprisonment without possibility of parole; and

WHEREAS, the Organization of American States, Amnesty International, the Washington Office on Latin America and other independent human rights organizations have protested that her trial was unjust and that she is a prisoner of conscience\* suffering unusually harsh conditions who deserves to be released; and

WHEREAS, the United States Embassy in Peru and the U.S. Department of State protested to the Peruvian government that she was denied due process, was not tried in an open civilian court with full rights of legal defense, in accordance with international juridical norms, and 222 members of Congress and 43 senators have called for her humanitarian release; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Military Council of Peru declared her life sentence and charge of treason null and void on August 28, 2000, but a new civilian trial threatens double jeopardy and an additional 20-year sentence in a country still struggling to achieve democracy; and

WHEREAS, Lori Berenson maintains her innocence, corroborated by a guerilla leader in testimony, and her commitment to justice for the poor honors God (Psalm 146) and is exemplary of the policies and practice of world mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada under Jesus' definition of mission (Luke 4:18);

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting July 13-17, 2001, in Kansas City, Missouri, inform the Ambassador of Peru in Washington, D.C., that it deplores the conditions under which Lori Berenson was tried, sentenced and imprisoned;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the United States Department of State be advised that basic human rights and the treatment of American citizens by foreign governments are serious concerns of our churches, not only on humanitarian grounds, but because of international travel of church members, the overseas service of our missionaries and the exchange of persons and

delegations among religious bodies across international lines;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the president of the United States be urged to seek the release of Lori Berenson on the basis of his mandate (United States Code 22, Section 1732) to achieve liberation for an American citizen wrongfully imprisoned in a foreign country by any means necessary short of war.

\*Prisoner of conscience: Defined by Amnesty International as the imprisonment, detention or other physical restrictions imposed on any person by reason of his or her political, religious, or other conscientiously held beliefs or by reason of his or her ethnic origin, sex, color, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth or other status, provided that he or she has not used or advocated violence,