

June 19, 2019

The Right Honourable Justine Trudeau, P.C., MP
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

I am writing on behalf of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada regarding the Canadian government's ongoing military involvement in Iraq and the surrounding region. Given MCC's more than 25 years working with local partners in Iraq we remain very concerned that Canada's continuing military efforts in the region are not only ineffective in addressing deep seated conflict but are also fueling further fragmentation and undermining the work of local peacebuilding organizations.

Since 2012 MCC has contributed over \$62.7 million USD to the Iraq and Syria crisis, representing MCC's largest humanitarian effort since the Second World War. This response, carried out by local partners in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, includes humanitarian assistance, development, and peacebuilding projects. In Iraq, MCC partners continue to respond to the needs of those fleeing violence through the provision of food and non-food items, access to clean water and livelihood assistance for those who are returning home. MCC partners also engage in interfaith dialogue among displaced communities, and in communities most impacted by the conflict in order to support peacebuilding and prevention of further conflict.

MCC hears from Iraqi partners that the current situation in Iraq is very concerning. Although ISIS has lost control of most of the formerly held territory, there remain multiple active pockets and resurgences, especially in areas with no state presence, still devastated by the impacts of conflict. However, the influence of ISIS only scratches the surface of the root causes of conflict and forced displacement in the region, not least of which include the destructive impacts of past foreign military interventions. These military operations helped create the power vacuums and fueled sectarian divides, as well as exacerbated political, economic and social exclusion that led to the rise of groups like ISIS. Fragmentation has quickly re-emerged in many regions of Iraq where ISIS has been defeated as well. Once the common adversary – ISIS - has been defeated, the loosely-tied grouping of dozens of Iraqi armed groups, state and non-state actors, have and continue to engage in violent clashes with each other. As tensions rise in the region, especially considering the threat of a foreign military invasion of Iran – a conflict that would have devastating impacts on Iraq and prospects of sustainable peace, not to mention the stability of the region as a whole – it is urgent to address the deep-seated and ongoing conflict in the region.

With almost 100 years of peacebuilding experience, including 70 years specifically in the Middle East, MCC has seen that addressing complex and protracted conflicts requires coordinated efforts, including humanitarian and development responses, as well as peacebuilding, both through diplomatic efforts and grassroots, community-led initiatives.

MCC is therefore deeply concerned by the continued prominence of Canada's military efforts, as evidenced in the latest mission renewal announcement – with no space for public debate – in March 2019 and Budget 2019, including \$442 million over two years. Despite our appreciation for efforts to implement a more comprehensive and coordinated approach in Canada's Iraq and Syria response, specifically humanitarian support, and longer-term program funding, including building opportunities for women and girls impacted by conflict, Canada's continued military presence undermines these efforts. It cannot address the root causes that continue to fuel conflict.

Instead of continuing to intervene militarily in this complex context, as we have outlined in multiple [other letters](#), there are great needs to invest in rebuilding infrastructure, supporting development, and rebuilding trust and the social fabric through grassroots peacebuilding approaches. Mosul, for example, where the Canadian military had been involved, was utterly destroyed in the conflict, yet funding pledges for physical rebuilding, so far, fall far short of estimated needs, and the Mosul population remains deeply divided. In addition, MCC is very concerned about the lack of clarity and clear vision for Canada's military mission in Iraq. Renewed until March 2021, there are few details about current mission activities, including the lack of a transparent exit strategy and clearly articulated goals for a sustainable peace. Not only has there been a lack of debate in Parliament around the military component of the mission, save a handful of very general discussions, the Canadian public has been largely left out of the conversation.

MCC firmly believes that there are no effective military solutions for dealing with the region's complex security issues and protracted crises. We urge the Government of Canada to end its military assistance to the region. Instead, MCC strongly encourages the government to invest in a comprehensive peacebuilding approach that focuses on strengthening inclusive governance and inter-party political cooperation; supporting community-based initiatives that prevent and resolve inter-religious conflict and increase social cohesion; addressing disputed boundaries and oil interests; and tackling political and economic corruption at all levels of society.

As you continue to make important decisions about Canada's involvement in an ever-changing security situation, we urge the government to do so transparently and through robust, public debate about the precise nature of Canada's role and its long-term impact on the security and well-being of the Iraqi peoples.

Sincerely,



Rick Cober Bauman
Executive Director,
MCC Canada

CC: Hon. Harjit Singh Sajjan, Minister of National Defence
Serge Cormier, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence
Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Robert Oliphant, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
Hon. Andrew Scheer, Leader of the Official Opposition, Conservative Party of Canada
Jagmeet Singh, Opposition Leader, New Democratic Party of Canada
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada
James Bezan, Official Opposition Critic for National Defence, Conservative Party of Canada
Randall Garrison, Opposition Critic for National Defence, New Democratic Party of Canada
Hon. Erin O'Toole, Official Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, Conservative Party of Canada
Guy Caron, Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, New Democratic Party of Canada