

13 February 2017

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

Dear Minister Freeland,

I am writing on behalf of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada regarding the government's ongoing involvement in Iraq. Given MCC's history in the region, we remain concerned that Canada's anti-ISIS military efforts are contributing to the emergence of local and regional armed organizations that weaken the state structures necessary for lasting peace.

Over the last five years, MCC has programmed over \$US42 million in response to the Syria and Iraq crises. As MCC's largest-ever humanitarian effort, this response—carried out by our local partners in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan—includes ongoing projects in humanitarian assistance, development, and peacebuilding. Within Iraq, MCC is responding to the needs of those fleeing intensified violence through the provision of food assistance and non-food items, access to clean water, and livelihood assistance for families returning home. We are also supporting interfaith dialogue initiatives among displaced communities in order to encourage the resolution and prevention of interreligious conflicts before they lead to sectarian violence.

As an organization with over six decades of experience in the Middle East, MCC believes that humanitarian, development, and diplomatic measures that address deep-seated political, social, and economic grievances must be at the core of the international community's response to the Syria and Iraq crises. As such, we affirm the significant steps the Canadian government is taking to this end, including the recent decision to appoint a resident ambassador to Iraq and expand Canada's diplomatic presence in the region. When oriented towards efforts that strengthen inclusive governance and inter-party political cooperation, these diplomatic tools can play an important role in helping build long-term peace.

MCC remains deeply concerned, however, that Canada's provision of military training and equipment to Kurdish forces is intensifying internal tensions and accelerating Iraq's fragmentation. Within the context of evolving Iraqi Kurdish politics, western military support is enabling a cadre of Kurdish political leaders not only to consolidate territorial gains but to extend undemocratic control over political institutions, the media, and the economy. In federal Iraq, the multiplicity of competing actors and interests, weakened governance structures, and high levels of corruption also mean that international weapons caches are being diverted to Iraqi militia groups with long histories of human rights violations.

More specifically, the military campaign against ISIS has occasioned numerous human rights abuses by both Kurdish and Iraqi forces. These include allegations of Kurdish abuses against detainees, reports of targeted

demolition of Arab properties, and use of repressive practices against local Arab populations. Similarly, Iraqi security forces and their allied militias have been accused of systematic human rights and laws-of-war violations including abductions, restrictions on the movement of internally displaced peoples in certain territories, and summary killings of civilian populations.

Canada's anti-ISIS military contributions cannot be divorced from these broader political realities. Training and weapons transfers from the international community are counterproductive to building a unified Iraq in that they are fueling sectarian divisions at the political level and amongst minority groups; contributing to human rights and laws-of-war violations; and further destabilizing the country. Apart from these concerns, MCC firmly believes there is no effective military solution for dealing with the region's complex security issues and protracted crises.

For these reasons, 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 addresses the underlying drivers of insecurity—thereby 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.

On behalf of MCC, I offer you my prayers as you continue to make important decisions about Canada's involvement in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,



Donald Peters  
Executive Director  
MCC Canada

CC: Matt DeCoursey, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Hon. Harjit Singh Sajjan, Minister of National Defence  
Hon. Peter Kent, Official Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, Conservative Party of Canada  
Hélène Laverdière, Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, New Democratic Party of Canada  
James Bezan, Official Opposition Critic for Defence, Conservative Party of Canada  
Randall Garrison, Opposition Critic for Defence, New Democratic Party of Canada