

*Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ*

134 Plaza Drive  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3T 5K9 Canada  
T 204.261.6381  
888.622.6337 (toll-free)  
F 204.269.9875  
W [mcccanada.ca](http://mcccanada.ca)

12 July 2017

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
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 government's quietly-announced decision to extend and expand participation in the Global Coalition against Daesh until at least 2019. MCC remains deeply concerned that Canada's military mission in Iraq is fueling sectarian divisions at the political level and among minority groups, contributing to human rights violations, and further destabilizing the situation.

Over the last five years, MCC has programmed over US\$48.5 million in response to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. As MCC's largest-ever humanitarian effort, this response—carried out by 34 local partners across 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 recovery for families returning home. We also support interfaith dialogue among displaced communities to encourage the prevention and resolution of interreligious conflicts *before* they lead to sectarian violence.

Based on our more than six decades of experience in the Middle East, we are aware of the region's tremendous complexities. As our local partners have informed us, religious and ethnic sectarianism exacerbated by years of exclusionary politics, shifting alliances, weakening institutions, and western military involvement has contributed to the rise of extremist activity and further complicated progress for peace.

MCC firmly 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, and we affirm the significant steps Canada has taken to this end.

We remain greatly concerned, however, that Canada's military efforts—renewed and expanded without any public debate, review, or clarity on the nature of Canada's role going forward—are contributing to the emergence of local and regional armed organizations that weaken the state structures necessary for lasting peace.

Training and weapons transfers from the international community are counterproductive to building a unified Iraq. Indeed, Canada's current provision of military training and equipment to Kurdish forces—now evolving to include partners in the Iraqi security 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

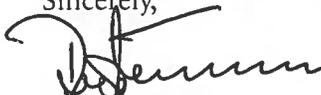
only to consolidate territorial gains but to extend undemocratic control over political institutions, the media, and the economy. In federal Iraq, the multiplicity of competing actors and interests, weakened governance structures, and high levels of corruption also mean that international weapons caches are being diverted to Iraqi militia groups with long histories of human rights violations.

More specifically, the military campaign against so-called Islamic State militants has occasioned numerous human rights abuses by both Kurdish and Iraqi forces. These include allegations of Kurdish abuses against detainees and targeted demolition of Arab properties. 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, torture and abuse of ISIS suspects, and summary killings of civilian populations.

Canada's anti-ISIS military contributions cannot be divorced from these broader political realities. To this end, MCC urges the Government of Canada to end its military assistance to the region. Instead, we encourage investment in a comprehensive peacebuilding approach that addresses the underlying drivers of insecurity. This approach must aim to strengthen inclusive governance and inter-party political cooperation; support community-based initiatives that prevent interreligious conflict and increase social cohesion; address disputed boundaries and oil interests; and tackle 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,



Donald G. Peters  
Executive Director  
MCC Canada

CC: Hon. Harjit Singh Sajjan, Minister of National Defence  
Jean Rioux, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence  
Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Matt DeCoursey, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Hon. Andrew Scheer, Leader, Official Opposition, Conservative Party  
Hon. Thomas Mulcair, Leader, New Democratic Party  
Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party  
Hon. Peter Kent, Official Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, Conservative Party  
Hélène Laverdière, Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, New Democratic Party  
James Bezan, Official Opposition Critic for Defence, Conservative Party  
Randall Garrison, Opposition Critic for Defence, New Democratic Party