

October 10, 2014

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you today on behalf of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada to express our deep concern over the Canadian government's decision to become involved in a U.S.-led military campaign against so-called Islamic State (IS) militants in Iraq.

As a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, MCC has partnered with organizations in the Middle East for more than six decades. Since the Syrian crisis began in March of 2011, MCC has allocated over US\$19.8 million in emergency food, shelter, non-food items, education, peacebuilding, and disaster response training in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. In the last number of months, MCC has also provided \$200,000 in food, health care, and other assistance to families displaced by the most recent violence in northern Iraq.

MCC's commitment to peaceful coexistence and the nonviolent resolution of conflict arises out of our identity as a peace church, as well as nearly a century of grassroots involvement in alleviating suffering in conflict zones around the world.

With the current threat of IS forces, we recognize the complexity of the situation. We acknowledge that for some of our partners in Iraq, early airstrikes by the U.S. brought a measure of safety and security. At the same time, all of our partners across Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon are deeply concerned about the impacts of a prolonged military campaign.

In particular, our partners have expressed the following concerns:

- Airstrikes have already brought economic chaos to parts of Syria. The bombing of a granary in northern Syria, for instance, caused grain prices to triple in a few short days;
- Aerial bombardments cannot secure the safety of civilians. Indeed, we know from past conflicts that airstrikes inevitably kill the people they are intended to protect;
- As so-called IS fighters retreat and hide to avoid being attacked, bombing targets will widen. People fear that airstrikes could spread to other countries in the region, leading to a ground-level military campaign and widespread civilian casualties; and
- Most importantly, a bombing campaign will not address the underlying issues that have contributed to the "radicalization" of certain people and the swift growth of IS support. Such issues include the

lack of political inclusion, the exploitation of religious and sectarian divisions, and economic desperation.

In light of our partners' perspectives and our commitment to peacebuilding, MCC urges the Canadian government to seriously reconsider further participation in a combat mission against IS targets. Instead, we respectfully request the Government of Canada to:

1. Address the political and social grievances at the root of the Iraq and Syria conflicts by providing diplomatic support for negotiations to resolve differences regarding territory, revenue-sharing, and other areas of disagreement. Support must also be given for inclusive government processes that uphold the rights of all, including minorities;
2. Support sustained and energetic diplomacy under the auspices of the United Nations. This diplomacy must involve all regional actors including Iran, the continued isolation of which is not constructive for building regional peace and security;
3. Provide further humanitarian assistance. MCC is grateful for funds provided by Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development for our work with refugees and displaced persons throughout the region. Increased humanitarian assistance will alleviate suffering and communicate a measure of goodwill to those who feel abandoned;
4. Give support to religious leaders and civil society groups within Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon that are building relationships of peace and reconciliation across political, sectarian, and religious divides. MCC made this recommendation in our February 2014 submission to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development studying Syria. It became one of the Committee's final report recommendations; and
5. Take immediate steps to sign the Arms Trade Treaty. The international flow of weapons to various rebel groups and factions in the region has contributed to current levels of violence. This treaty will help regulate the transfer and trade of conventional weapons and stem the flow of guns into volatile regions.

As an organization that has consistently embraced nonviolent approaches to conflict, and supported the peacebuilding efforts of our partners in many parts of the world—including the Middle East—MCC firmly believes that there are a broad range of alternatives to armed intervention that can stem the threat of violence and make a constructive contribution to building the prospects for peace.

On behalf of MCC, I offer you our prayers as you continue to make important decisions regarding Canada's involvement in the coming months.

Sincerely,



Donald G. Peters
Executive Director
MCC Canada

CC: The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada
Justin Trudeau, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada
The Honourable John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Paul Dewar, NDP, Official Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs
Marc Garneau, Liberal Party of Canada, Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs and International Trade