



Easter Monday, 6 April 2015

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

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Email: pm@pm.gc.ca

Re: Canada's Current Military Mission in Iraq and Syria

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

With you and all Canadians we are deeply troubled by the rise of what has been called by several names: the Islamic State (IS), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This group has been responsible for brutal killings and kidnappings, and other deliberate and massive violations of basic human rights including the displacement and murder of historic Christian communities and the targeting of other religious minorities. These atrocities amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. We commend the Government of Canada for recognizing the gravity of this situation.

We also have serious questions about how Canada is responding. Military intervention will not bring an end to the conflict without a broader internationally sanctioned strategy for achieving sustainable peace in Iraq and Syria. Our partners in the region have expressed concerns about acts of violence that will foster new or renewed grievances, further fracturing the social fabric of Middle Eastern society and making the restoration of peace a more difficult task. We are convinced that military efforts to end or limit the present atrocities must be accompanied by other steps.

We have consulted widely with Churches and our other partners and agencies in the Middle East since the summer of 2014 to hear their concerns and receive advice on how we as Canadian Churches, and Canada as a country, can make the most constructive contribution to building peace in Iraq, Syria and in the wider Middle East region. Members of The Canadian Council of Churches continue to reflect on the implications of extending Canada's military mission to Syria.

Our views are informed by deeply rooted beliefs in the sanctity of human life and dignity, the need to protect vulnerable people from atrocities, and cautions about the past effectiveness of international military interventions in the region. Our partners in the region have expressed gratitude for the short-term relief and protection which many feel that some recent military missions in Northern Iraq have provided. At the same time with our partners in the region we recognize that military involvement in Iraq has had far-reaching effects and has led to tragic consequences.

As a result, we urge the Government of Canada to strengthen its diplomatic efforts, increase humanitarian assistance and support for refugees, support civil society organizations, control arms, and focus on the protection of the rule of law and respect for human rights especially through inclusive government structures in Iraq and Syria.

Diplomatic efforts

Broader diplomatic work is needed in order to stop the flow of resources and weapons to ISIS and to build a comprehensive international political framework that is supported by countries in the region and by the United Nations and international law.

We encourage the Government of Canada to make its diplomatic efforts for peace in the Middle East better known, so that we and other Canadians are more informed and can, in turn, share and discuss these efforts with our Church communities and partner agencies in the Middle East.

Humanitarian assistance and support for refugees

We commend the Government of Canada for providing a substantial amount of humanitarian assistance to displaced Iraqis, Syrians and others in the region. Sadly, the needs continue to be enormous. We believe Canada can and should do more. Members of our churches continue to give generous financial support for humanitarian efforts throughout the Middle East.

We commend the Government of Canada for its assistance to date for those who are internally displaced and refugees in Iraq, Syria and surrounding countries. More needs to be done. Canada's current policy of receiving refugees from the region is unclear and so we seek reassurance that the commitment to sponsor Syrian refugees is not at the expense of resettlement and support for refugees from other countries. Members of our parishes and congregations across Canada, as well as other organizations and volunteers, are eagerly waiting to receive Iraqi and Syrian refugees. Accordingly, we urge you to consult with the Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association to discuss how to coordinate a response in Canada to the refugee crisis. If there is a way we can do more to assist in this matter, we would be pleased to meet with the appropriate officials.

Civil society organizations

A robust civil society is vital for the establishment of peace and the longer term social development of society. Canada can do more to build the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Iraq and Syria through support to Canadian and other international CSOs with partners in the region.

Arms Control

Iraq, Syria and the Middle East region in general are awash in arms. We lament but are aware that Canada has been adding to the stores of lethal and non-lethal military equipment, therefore Canada must ensure that these supplies are not diverted to other parties in the conflict.

The rule of law and respect for human rights with a special focus on promoting inclusive government structures in Iraq

The police, the judiciary, and other arms of government can be educated and equipped so as to respect human rights, to follow fair practices, and to strengthen commitment to the rule of law, thereby giving people a security they have lacked far too long.

Freedom of conscience and religion and respect for human rights more generally are essential to the emergence in Iraq of an open, peaceful, and democratic society. These principles represent a basis for building security for countries, for citizens, and for communities. Canada should take leadership in the protection of human rights by working with established and emerging community leaders giving special attention to the rights of minorities, women, and children.

A belief in God's mercy is shared by Christians, Jews and Muslims. We have come together in one another's presence to raise our voices in prayer for peace for Iraq and Syria. We are committed to dialogue with Muslim communities in Canada, recognizing that violent distortions of Islam are causing misunderstanding and suffering in the world and in Canada for peace-loving Muslims, as well as in non-Muslim communities. We condemn any attempts to demonize Islam and peaceful, law-abiding Muslims.

We pray for all the victims of this conflict, for those who will aid in their relief and resettlement, as well as our enemies, for we desire their good as well as our own. As you and the Government of Canada, along with all Members of Parliament, participate in ongoing decision-making on Canada's role in Iraq and Syria please be assured of our prayers for you and all who bear this important responsibility.

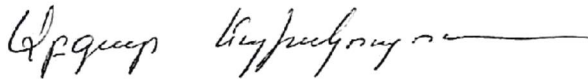
Cosigned by the leaders of member denominations of The Canadian Council of Churches:



The Most Reverend Fred Hiltz
Archbishop and Primate
The Anglican Church of Canada




+Very Rev. John Philip Renato Miclat, OMHS
Apostolic Catholic Church of Canada Overseer



His Grace Bishop Abgar Hovakimian
Primate
Armenian Apostolic Church Canadian Diocese



The Rev. John Tonks
President
Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms



The Rev. Tim McCoy
Executive Minister
Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec



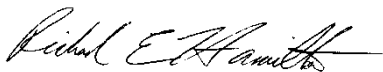
The Rev. Jeremy Bell
Executive Minister
Canadian Baptists of Western Canada



+Paul-André Durocher
Archbishop of Gatineau and
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops



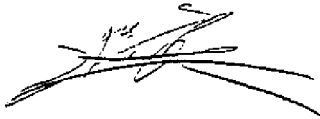
Elaine Bishop
Clerk
Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)



Rev. Richard E. (Rick) Hamilton
Interim Regional Minister
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada



The Rev. Darren Roorda
Canadian Ministries Director
Christian Reformed Church in North America



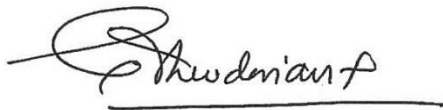
L.K. (Rev. Fr.) Messale Engeda
Head Priest and Administrator of
The Ethiopian Orthodox Church of Canada



The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada



His Eminence Metropolitan Sotirios
Archbishop
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto (Canada)



Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius
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The Rev. Willard Metzger
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Mennonite Church Canada



+Irénée
Archbishop of Ottawa and the Archdiocese of Canada
Orthodox Church in America



Rev. Zbigniew Kozar
Polish National Catholic Church of Canada



The Rev. Dr. Stephen Farris
Moderator of the 140th General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church in Canada



Commissioner Susan McMillan
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The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda Territory



The Rev. John Kapteyn
Clerk
Regional Synod of Canada, Reformed Church in America



His Grace the Most Reverend Lawrence Huculak, O.S.B.M.
Archbishop of Winnipeg and Metropolitan
Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada

+ Yuriy, Metropolitan

His Eminence, The Most Rev. Metropolitan Yuriy (Kalistchuk)
Archbishop of Winnipeg and the Central Eparchy
Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

Gary Paterson

The Right Rev. Gary Paterson
Moderator
The United Church of Canada

c.c.: The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, The Leader of the Official Opposition
Justin Trudeau, MP, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
Elizabeth May, MP, Leader of the Green Party of Canada
Louis Plamondon, MP, Acting Leader of the Bloc Québécois in the House of Commons

The Honourable Robert Nicholson, Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Canadian Council of Churches represents 25 denominations of Anglican; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox; Protestant; and Catholic traditions. Together we represent more than 85% of the Christians in Canada. The Canadian Council of Churches was founded in 1944.