

April 7, 2017

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

I am writing on behalf of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) U.S. to express our dismay regarding increased militarization by the United States in Syria and Iraq and its impact on the long-term wellbeing and security of people in the region. As followers of the Prince of Peace, we decry all forms of violence and urge you to pursue a diplomatic, political solution instead.

We are deeply troubled by the use of U.S. airstrikes against a Syrian airfield, which directly engages the U.S. in war against the Syrian government. These airstrikes were carried out without authorization from the United Nations Security Council or debate in the U.S. Congress. We urge you to not further escalate military actions in a region that has already suffered so greatly from violence and war.

We are also concerned by the U.S. and coalition airstrikes near Mosul and Raqqa that have taken the lives of hundreds of civilians. These airstrikes may have been carried out in violation of international humanitarian law, to which the United States is bound as a party to the Fourth Geneva Convention. The U.S. has also been steadily increasing the number of troops in Iraq and Syria, without congressional approval.

In Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, MCC carries out projects in humanitarian assistance, development and peacebuilding through local partner organizations. These partner organizations report that local communities are experiencing a heightened level of fear due to U.S. airstrikes. They also report an [increase](#) in internal displacement, as people flee the fighting. These worrying developments are compounding the existing humanitarian crisis and serve to undermine U.S. credibility in the region. Rather than pursuing military strategies, our partners urge us to “listen to the people crying, speaking and looking for peace.”

The militarized approach to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq is fueling sectarian divisions at the political level and amongst minority groups, contributing to human rights violations and further destabilizing the situation. Military efforts against ISIS are contributing to the emergence of local and regional armed organizations that weaken state structures, undermining their capacity to build lasting peace.

Based on our six decades of work in the Middle East, MCC believes there is no effective military solution for dealing with the region's complex security issues and protracted crises. Rather, 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.

We urge the U.S. government to immediately cease further militarization of the region and to invest instead in a comprehensive approach addressing the underlying drivers of insecurity. This includes increasing humanitarian assistance to the region, investing in robust diplomatic efforts to resolve the crises, and supporting community-based initiatives that prevent and resolve inter-religious conflict and increase social cohesion. Our policies should be rooted in the principles of justice, respect and peace, which will provide a long-term, sustainable basis for security in the region.

Thank you for hearing our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Ron Byler', with a stylized flourish at the end.

J Ron Byler
Executive Director

cc: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis