

Pax Christi Opposes NZ Military Involvement in the Middle East Conflict

Pax Christi Aotearoa-New Zealand joins Pax Christi national sections from across the world in opposing current moves to find a military solution to the critical human rights situation developing in Iraq and Syria. As a first step, we are preparing a statement to be sent to the Prime Minister asking that he refrain from his current intention to take New Zealand into the US-led coalition planning further military intervention in the region.

Like most people across the globe, we deplore the tactics of the so-called ISIS group to promote their campaign to enforce their dominance over areas in Syria and Iraq through brutal suppression of minorities and video-taped executions. But we join the many analysts who say that further military intervention will exacerbate the violence and increase the suffering of innocent people and communities.

We feel that by putting forward images of “beheadings in Queen Street”, the Prime Minister’s plays into the hands of the perpetrators of atrocities by enhancing their efforts to create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, not conducive of a rational response. It also puts us the company of those who can think of only military solutions to complex political, social and religious situations. To a great extent, the ISIS group has been able to build on resentment of previous Western military adventures in the region to develop its already extensive support; this resentment can only be increased by further military “solutions”. Furthermore, relationships among the various participants in the existing conflict are too complex to be resolved by a simplistic “them/us” approach. This complexity can only be resolved from within the region, by means which involve some kind of dialogue and negotiation among all those directly affected by the conflict, as has been illustrated over recent decades in places like Northern Ireland, South Africa and Germany.

We would ask our government to pull back from any hasty participation in another “coalition of the willing” if for no other reason that they have proven themselves in the past to be not only ineffective but have also contributed greatly to today’s situation. We have to recognise the folly of such an approach and find ways to work, logically through the United Nations Organisation, to engage the whole world in a global solution to this and like conflicts. In the short term, we can focus on creating and supporting means of humanitarian aid to refugees and other victims of existing conflict. This should be done in consultation with Muslim associations within New Zealand.

Jan Oberg of The Transnational Foundation provides some alternative approaches well-worth following. Among them are:

- “Deploy a robust, impartial, globally-composed UN-led force ... to defensively protect people ... towns ... infrastructure etc, something like in Bosnia-Herzegovina” but “big enough” and with “the funds ... to make it work.”
- “Cooperate with Russia and Iran – without them no political solution can be found.”
- “The only actor worth supporting ... is civil society”... If you want a democratic peace, they ... should be invited to consultations and negotiations, not ... [those] ... who have caused the conflicts”
- “ Invite ... all conflicting parties to tell the world about two things: what do they fear and what do they want in the future?”

Such an approach might enable the world to develop more intelligent, rational and humane means to resolve conflict and to realise that war can no longer be an option if the survival of humankind is a goal.

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