Hon Murray McCully MP

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Parliament Buildings

Private Bag

Wellington

Dear Mr McCully,

In 2015 New Zealand will take its seat on the United Nations Security Council. In the months leading up to this moment, we ask you to seize this unique opportunity to seek a just and lasting solution through the United Nations and other international bodies to the terrible situation caused by the ISIS terrorists.

The Peace and International Justice Committee of the Catholic Diocese of Auckland and the Pax Christi Aotearoa New Zealand believes that neither New Zealand nor any country should be drawn into another “coalition of the willing” without engaging in wide ranging diplomacy, reaching out to the Muslim and Middle Eastern population in this country and seeking the broadest possible coalition of partners willing to engage in a search for a peaceful solution to the terrible situation in Iraq and Syria.

Pope Francis has declared: “It seems the value of human life is not considered anymore, that the person does not count and may be sacrificed to other interests.” ISIS has committed numerous atrocities against the ordinary people of Syria and Iraq – Muslims, Christians and people of other faiths – in the name of its co-called caliphate.

However, while acknowledging the horrific realities of the situation on the ground, we must think about why ISIS arose and what conditions are necessary to prevent it re-emerging.

The atmosphere that allowed ISIS to exist was created by the complete failure of the United States and its allies to acknowledge the consequences of the invasion of Iraq, compounded by a total unwillingness to think beyond the immediate battle and to build civil, religious and other partnerships that would allow for a peaceful rebuilding of the country.

History teaches us that ISIS may be defeated on the battlefield, but it also teaches us that such bloodthirsty fanaticism will not disappear completely unless conditions exist in which such hatred can no longer thrive. This will only happen if the all concerned powers – secular and religious - become constructively involved in seeking to create these conditions.

We express our solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters who decry ISIS in the name of Islam. Leading Islamic scholars and religious and secular authorities have also roundly condemned ISIS and its barbaric behaviour.The Saudi grand mufti Sheikh Abdul-Aziz Al al-Sheikh has issued a *fatwa* declaring terrorism a "heinous crime" under [sharia law](http://www.theguardian.com/law/sharia-law). Al-Azhar’s Grand Mufti Shawqi Allam, Egypt’s highest religious authority, has denounced the Islamic State as a threat to Islam and said that the group violates both Sharia law and humanitarian law.

ISIS has been able to feed on the resentment against western adventurism in the Middle East. As with any terrorist group it thrives by pressuring western governments into reacting more and more oppressively.

Unfortunately, some governments, most recently that of Australia, have reacted in ways that promote hatred of innocent Muslims and deny basic human rights to their own citizens who legitimately question or report on the actions of their governments. We do not wish to see the same injustice happening here in New Zealand.

We appeal to the New Zealand government to avoid falling into the same trap and creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity which hinders rational discussion.

Adhering to the principle of participation and solidarity, the New Zealand government must draw on the insights and understanding of this country’s Muslim associations.

We join the appeal of the Middle Eastern communities in New Zealand to increase the refugee quota and the provision of humanitarian aid for the victims of conflict.

We ask that our government and our country take a stand that will define who we are as a people.

Let New Zealand make its name on the UN Security Council as a country which is capable of independent thought and which engages with the wider world with justice and peace*.*

Respectfully yours,

Peace and International Justice Committee Pax Christi Aotearoa New Zealand

Catholic Diocese of Auckland