



17 May 2013

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

Fax: 1 613 941 6900

Email: pm@pm.gc.ca

Re: Crises in the Middle East

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

We address this letter to you as church leaders deeply concerned about the multiple crises in the Middle East.

With heavy hearts, we note the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Syria, its need for international support and cooperation throughout its territory, the threats there to Christian churches and schools, and the recent abduction of church leaders; the uncertainty and turmoil with democratic transitions in Egypt; the unresolved decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the rising tensions and stresses within and between various countries in the region. We are concerned for the safety and security of all the people in the region but in particular, the weak, vulnerable and powerless. The spread of sectarian violence puts all generations throughout the region at risk, and are a menace to the hopes and dreams of the younger generations.

We write to encourage you and the Government of Canada to respond robustly and generously to the pressures and tensions experienced by both displaced peoples and by the host countries in the region that provide refuge; to lead in the protection of human rights with special attention to the rights of children, women and minority groups; to hold firm to the obligation for all state and non-state actors to respect international law, particularly in situations of armed conflict; and to assist us in our efforts as churches to work with local peacemakers and providers of humanitarian assistance in the region.

We are writing collectively and unanimously as members of The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) – 24 churches of Anglican, Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Free Church, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox, and Historic Protestant traditions – who together represent 85% of Christians in Canada. Each of our Churches has members, counterparts, and partners engaged in the Middle East. At the same time, our own communities in Canada have among their membership former residents of the Middle East, many of whom have come to our country as refugees. Many of us work together and are involved in local and national dialogues with Jews, Muslims, Baha’i and other faith communities in Canada. All our churches and members are prepared to collaborate with everyone of good will.

Churches in Canada have strong, historic relationships with Christian communities in the region. Over the years, we have also developed and supported interfaith relationships in Canada and in the Middle East. We are encouraged by commitments made in the January 2012 Christian-Muslim Consultation on Christian Presence and Witness in the Arab World, convened by the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches. Furthermore, we support the goal of the Consultation to “*strive to build diverse societies based on human dignity, drawing their strength from faith in the One True God, Creator of all.*”¹ We also recognize the special focus and attention that has been given to the Middle East over recent years by all Christian traditions. These include the September 2012 Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, following a Synod of Bishops at which our various Christian traditions were represented, as well as Muslims and Jews.

With this collaboration and concern in mind, we make the following requests:

- We urge that Canada take into account and respond robustly and generously to the increasing pressures and tensions experienced by both displaced peoples and by the host countries in the region that provide refuge. Thousands of innocent civilians across the Middle East are being killed; many more have been displaced, with some people displaced multiple times over multiple generations. Historically, Canada has made important contributions to alleviating the needs of people in such situations through multilateral and civil society channels. We urge you to address the immediate needs of displaced people, arrange for possible resettlement in Canada at least for a temporary period when appropriate, and work with others to help create the necessary conditions that would enable their voluntary and safe return.
- We also urge that Canada lead in the protection of human rights and work with current and emerging leaders of states and civil society in the region to ensure protection for the rights of all people living there, with special attention to the rights of children, and women, as well as the personal and communal rights of all minority groups, including Christians. People

¹ “Final Communiqué of the Christian Muslim Consultation on Christian Presence and Witness in the Arab World”, January 24-27, 2012, World Council of Churches, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/final-communicue-of-the-christian-muslim-consultation-on-christian-presence-and-witness-in-the-arab-world.html>, accessed on March 19, 2013.

involved in the various revolutions and uprisings hold on to the promise of hope for a better future. However, the resulting uncertainty and instability have left many vulnerable, afraid and under threat. Ongoing conflict and occupation in some countries in the region continue to infringe and violate people's human rights and international law. Canadians place high value on respect for human rights, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our own Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As part of an international policy that upholds and protects these human rights, Canada's new Office of Religious Freedom offers our country an opportunity to model and advocate for appropriate ways to respect and protect the right to freedom of conscience and religion, including freedom to worship. These rights and their corresponding responsibilities are essential to democratic states based on a system of law, and in a world context which is increasingly intercultural and interfaith.

- We urge that Canada hold firm to the obligation for all state and non-state actors in the region, without exception, to respect international law, particularly in situations of armed conflict. We hear from fellow Christians that peaceful popular movements in the region are seeking peace with justice, self-determination, democracy and freedom. This echoes what God desires for everyone; that all might have abundant life. In the current conflicts in the Middle East, imbalances in military and political power risk denying some groups the realization of these rights. International law provides a vital framework to check abuses of power and protect the rights of the vulnerable.
- Canada can play a positive role by ensuring that trade and economic development initiatives involving our country contribute to building peace by providing benefits for all parties and avoid initiatives that could deepen causes of conflict.

As with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance, we also welcome the approval of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) by the United Nations General Assembly on April 2, 2013. We trust that the ATT, once it is ratified and signed by 50 countries and comes into force, will assist the international community in restricting the flow of military equipment to conflicts in the region, such as the current civil war in Syria, where the unrestricted flow of weapons fuels the fires of hatred and armed violence.

We believe that with steadfast support for justice and peace, together with an even-handed approach from countries in the region, as well as from the members of the international community, including Canada, the diverse peoples of the Middle East can achieve the full realization of the rights for which they are striving, but which ongoing crises threaten and jeopardize.

Thank you for considering our requests. We would welcome an opportunity to meet with government representatives to share our experience and perspectives further, and to strengthen practical ways of working with local peacemakers and providers of humanitarian assistance in the region.

We continue to pray for you and the Government of Canada in exercising your responsibilities and efforts in the Middle East. We are inspired by the Middle Eastern prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 65:17-25

The Glorious New Creation

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD — and their descendants as well.

Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

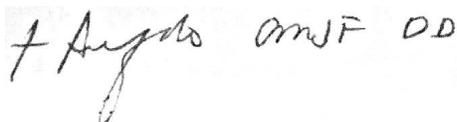
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Sincerely,



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



+ Adolfo Robert Rodriguez Fernando, OMJF, DD
Archbishop, Archdiocese of North America – USA and Canada
Apostolic Catholic Church Incorporated



His Grace Bishop Bagrat Galstarian
Primate
Armenian Holy Apostolic Church, Canadian Diocese



The Rev. Dr. J. Daniel Gibson
President
Atlantic Baptist Fellowship



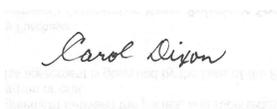
The Rev. Tim McCoy
Executive Minister
Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec



The Rev. Jeremy Bell
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Canadian Baptists of Western Canada



† Richard Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton and
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops



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Ben Vandezande
Director of Canadian Ministries
Christian Reformed Church in North America



The Rev. Fr. Marcos Marcos
Protopriest
The Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada



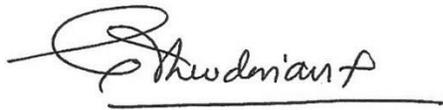
L.K. (Rev. Fr.) Messale Engeda
Head Priest and Administrator of
The Ethiopian Orthodox Church of Canada



The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop
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His Eminence Metropolitan Sotirios
Archbishop
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto (Canada)



Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius
Bishop of the North American Diocese
Mar Thoma Church

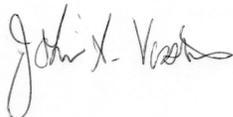


The Rev. Willard Metzger
General Secretary
Mennonite Church Canada

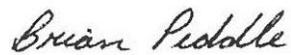
S.E. Irénée (Rochon)
Bishop of Québec
Administrator of the Archdiocese of Canada
Orthodox Church in America



Bishop Sylvester Bigaj
Polish National Catholic Church of Canada



The Rev. Dr. John Vissers
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The Presbyterian Church in Canada



Commissioner Brian Peddle
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The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda Territory



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



His Grace the Most Reverend Lawrence Huculak, O.S.B.M.
Archbishop of Winnipeg and Metropolitan
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His Eminence, The Most Rev. Metropolitan Yuriy (Kalistchuk)
Archbishop of Winnipeg and the Central Eparchy
Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada



Nora Sanders
General Secretary
The United Church of Canada

c.c.: Elizabeth May, MP, Leader of the Green Party of Canada
The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, The Leader of the Official Opposition
Daniel Paillé, MP, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Justin Trudeau, MP, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada

The Honourable John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs