

Media release: Open letter on military deployment to Iraq

Peace Movement Aotearoa

11 February 2015

In response to yesterday's announcement that the New Zealand armed forces will begin specific training for a possible deployment to Iraq, more than 30 representatives of peace, justice and faith organisations and academics have sent an open letter to government Ministers and Members of Parliament today strongly opposing any military deployment and stressing there are more useful contributions New Zealand can make.

The letter points out that the situation in Iraq and Syria is the direct result of the tragic history of western military intervention in the region, in particular the 2003 US-led military invasion of Iraq and subsequent brutal eight-year long occupation. The further involvement of western armed forces in the Middle East, whether in a training or combat capacity, will do nothing but bring more violence, killing and hardship to the peoples there. Military trainers will add nothing of value to peace processes in the region.

The Prime Minister's assertion that the deployment of combat troops to Iraq is the price of membership in the exclusive Five Eyes "club" implicates New Zealand in atrocities and human rights violations committed by any of the states involved. This diminishes rather than enhances our security, and will make it more difficult to be an independent honest broker on the Security Council. Such a "club" is completely at odds with the government's stated commitment to an international order based on respect for human rights.

If endless overseas military deployments are the price of membership of the Five Eyes "club", which in any event is New Zealand's most significant contribution to US and UK-led military interventions in other countries via the Waihopai Spy Base, then it is clearly not in our best interests and New Zealand must withdraw from it.

The signatories to the letter call on the government to make a positive contribution to peace in Iraq and Syria:

- by providing non-military humanitarian aid to intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations working in the region, and in particular for the resources currently earmarked for military deployment to be transferred instead to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian assistance agencies; and
- by increasing support for diplomatic processes to bring about comprehensive and long term solutions to the crises in Iraq and Syria.

The text of the letter and list of signatories is included below and is available online at <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/IraqOpenLetter0215.pdf>

There is an opportunity for anyone who is opposed to the military deployment to post a message of support for the open letter at <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/photos/a.116526771728034.9538.116517195062325/813782048669166>

You can add your name to the open letter at <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/iraq2015.htm>

Open letter on military deployment to Iraq

11 February 2015

To all Government Ministers and Members of Parliament,

We strongly oppose the commitment of any military support by the New Zealand government to the war in Iraq and Syria, and are appalled by the Prime Minister's use of the Gallipoli anniversary as a mantle to cloak a new deployment of combat troops to the Middle East.

The situation in Iraq and Syria is the direct result of the tragic history of western military intervention in the region, in particular the 2003 US-led military invasion of Iraq and subsequent brutal eight-year long occupation. The further involvement of western armed forces in the Middle East, whether in a training or combat capacity, will do nothing but bring more violence, killing and hardship to the peoples there. Military trainers will add nothing of value to peace processes in the region.

We advocate for the self-determination of all people, in this case the people of Iraq and Syria. Any solution to this crisis must come from them, with diplomatic support from the international community. As the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq and others have stated, comprehensive solutions will only come about through an inclusive political process.

The Prime Minister's assertion that the deployment of combat troops to Iraq is the price of membership in the exclusive Five Eyes "club" implicates New Zealand in atrocities and human rights violations committed by any of the states involved. This diminishes rather than enhances our security, and will make it more difficult to be an independent honest broker on the Security Council. Such a "club" is completely at odds with the government's stated commitment to an international order based on respect for human rights.

If endless overseas military deployments are the price of membership of the Five Eyes "club", which in any event is New Zealand's most significant contribution to US and UK-led military interventions in other countries via the Waihopai Spy Base, then it is clearly not in our best interests and New Zealand must withdraw from it.

We call on the government to make a positive contribution to peace in Iraq and Syria:

- by providing non-military humanitarian aid to intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations working in the region, and in particular we call for the resources currently earmarked for military deployment to be transferred instead to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian assistance agencies; and
- by increasing support for diplomatic processes to bring about comprehensive and long term solutions to the crises in Iraq and Syria.

Signed,

Edwina Hughes, Coordinator, Peace Movement Aotearoa

Professor Kevin Clements, Director, National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago

Helen Kingston and Virginia Stocker, Golden Bay Peace Group

Mike Treen, Global Peace and Justice Auckland
Murray Horton, Spokesperson, Anti-Bases Campaign
Kevin McBride, National Coordinator, Pax Christi Aotearoa-New Zealand
Elizabeth Duke and Elizabeth Thompson, Yearly Meeting CoClerks, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Haahi Tuuhauwiri
Pauline McKay, National Director, Christian World Service
Celine Kearney, President, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Aotearoa section
Chris Barfoot, Chair, Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Centre Trust
Pania Lawsen, Hokianga Catholic Workers
Caroline Ongleo-Calub, Acting General Manager and Head of Peace Development, The Peace Foundation
Commander Robert Green RN (Ret'd) and Dr Kate Dewes, Co-Directors, Disarmament and Security Centre
Fr Peter Murnane, Waihopai Ploughshares
V. Jonathan Hartfield, Chairman, New Zealand Anglican Pacifist Fellowship
Jess Murray, Otaki Women's Peace Group
Richard Northey, Chair, International Affairs and Disarmament Committee, The Peace Foundation
Dr. Teresia Teaiwa, Pacific Studies, Victoria University of Wellington
Professor Jane Kelsey, Faculty of Law, University of Auckland
Professor Dr. Klaus Bosselmann, Director, New Zealand Centre for Environmental Law, Faculty of Law, University of Auckland
Professor Richard Jackson, Deputy Director, National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago
Associate Professor Annabel Cooper, Department of Sociology, Gender and Social Work, University of Otago
Associate Professor Jenny Bryant-Tokalau, Pacific Islands Studies, Te Tumu (School of Maori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies), University of Otago
Associate Professor Yvonne Underhill-Sem, Development Studies, School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland
Dr. Heather Devere, National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago
Professor Murray Rae, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Otago
Dr David V Williams, Professor of Law, University of Auckland
Dr Pala Molisa, School of Accounting and Commercial Law, Victoria University of Wellington
Rosemary McBryde, Centre Administrator, National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago

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