



Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

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Statement in opposition to the military intervention in Libya

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The Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers) is dismayed that the Government of Canada has again embarked on military action, this time in Libya. We grieve at the loss of life and the misery inflicted on all those, both civilians and military, affected by this war.

Friends have stood firm in opposition to all war as intrinsically wrong since the birth of the Society in the 1600s. This is because war treats people as being expendable. We see individuals as being unique and precious and carrying within them something of God.

However, our objection to this latest, hastily conceived, military action, which still appears to have no clear objectives, is also motivated by reasons of universal concern. First and foremost, time and time again, we have seen action announced as brief and clinical escalating and escaping the control of its authors. The hard truth is that it is much easier to start a war than to end a war. Moreover, perhaps the hardest task is dealing with the aftermath, and this aftermath includes both material rebuilding and the psychological rebuilding of peace and trust.

As we have seen, apart from the human and material losses, war creates lingering bitterness on the part of its victims and their international supporters. This additional attack on Libya will inevitably create more resentment and desire for retribution and violence.

We are, of course, far from oblivious to Libyans' legitimate yearning to rid themselves of a corrupt and repressive ruler, who does not hesitate to employ massive force against his own people to hang onto power. We stand behind Libyan civilians using non-violent means to demand more democratic rights.

The tactics employed to create the "No Fly Zone" raise great concern. Ironically, civilians are being killed in a campaign intended to protect them. These deaths fall under the military euphemism "collateral damage".

Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the national church of Friends in Canada, in its consideration of the UN policy of Responsibility to Protect, cautioned against the trap of "last resort" thinking. By countenancing military intervention "in the last resort", this way of thought distracts from the work of responding with non-military, nonviolent actions. The Secretary General's Report on the Implementation of Responsibility to Protect of January 12, 2009 emphasized the many and crucial non-military, nonviolent actions that are available and need to be strengthened. We are saddened to see this concept being used in the context of a "No-fly Zone" over Libya.

What then is to be done?

1. We urge the Canadian government to use its diplomatic influence and its resources to support non-violent, locally-led democratic change in the interest of promoting equality, justice and a lasting peace throughout North Africa and the Middle East.
2. As an urgent step, all parties to the conflict should be urged to implement a ceasefire. Our government should work in concert with the UN Security Council, the African Union, the Arab League, the US and the European Union to bring all parties to the table for a negotiated settlement of the conflict.
3. The international community must focus on providing humanitarian aid to the hundreds of thousands of people affected by the fighting in Libya. Humanitarian assistance efforts must be designed and implemented by qualified civilian agencies and not by the military.
4. We must cooperate with the United Nations, the European Union, the Arab League and the African Union, to continue to implement an arms embargo to Libya that is grounded in international law.
5. The international community can follow up on the UN Security Council resolution that refers the Qadhafi government to the International Criminal Court in order to hold government officials accountable for actions they take against their fellow citizens.

We recognize that such a diplomatic, humanitarian approach will be time-consuming and demand intense international engagement. We believe, however, that these apparently more tedious methods are the only ones that will pave the way to a long-lasting, stable and peaceful solution for Libya and the region as a whole.