

**Pax
Christi
Australia**

**International
Christian Peace Movement**

National President: Father Claude Mostowik MSC

61+2+9550 3845

0411 450 953

mscjust@smartchat.net.au

August 9, 2014

The Hon. Tony Abbott, MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of Pax Christi Australia which is part of the international movement for peace Pax Christi International, based in Brussels.

As you are aware, diplomatic negotiations have failed to halt the atrocities occurring in Syria. The failure of the UN Security Council to achieve consensus on referring the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court on the 22nd of May was disheartening. Nevertheless, until a political solution is reached, every government has a responsibility to put diplomatic pressure on those actors exacerbating the conflict by supplying arms to warring groups in Syria.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which opened for signature in June 2013, has not yet entered into force. We are mindful that Australia has signed on to this Treaty. The ATT must be interpreted in such a way as to stop the arms transfers that continue the Syrian conflict. The ATT is not the only document governing arms transfers. All arms transfers' activities must be carried out in compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. An arms embargo from the UN would also be a very effective measure, and [name of Member Organisation] encourages you to raise this possibility during UN negotiations.

Pax Christi Australia strongly urges you to apply diplomatic pressure on those states that continue to supply arms to any side in the conflict, including to the Assad government and to violent opposition forces, both secular forces and jihadist groups. The Russian Federation and Iran are supplying weapons and ammunition to the Syrian government; several European countries and the United States are supplying or plan to supply arms to opposition forces; and support for the jihadist groups frequently comes from private donations in Persian Gulf countries, including Qatar and Kuwait. Arms transfers, whether to government authorities or to opposition forces, merely prolong the conflict and allow the atrocities to continue.

Pax Christi also calls on all nations should keep pressing for cross-border humanitarian aid to be allowed to assist some of Syria's most vulnerable citizens. Enforcement of UN Security Council resolutions 2139 (2013) and 2165 (2014) is essential. These resolutions, which seek to alleviate 'chilling darkness,' are mechanisms by which these humanitarian goals can be accomplished.

*Pax Christi is a Christian worldwide movement for peace and disarmament.
It regards justice and human rights as central to peacebuilding
and fosters the spiritual dimension of peacemaking.*

Postal Address: PO Box A681 Sydney South NSW 1235 Australia

In light of the immensely destabilizing impact that the flow of foreign fighters into Syria has on the region and the world, your government is reminded to exercise its full power to stop your citizens from taking up arms in Syria.

With over 160 000 deaths and six million displaced persons, the Syrian conflict continues to destroy Syria's population and its rich culture, inflicting tremendous suffering on all Syrians. The international community has a responsibility to do all it can to halt the atrocities. Even before substantive progress is made in diplomatic negotiations, all states have an imperative to do all that is feasible to prevent the atrocities from continuing. Applying pressure to halt the arms flow to Syria will lessen the amount of blood that is spilled in this ongoing conflict.

Pope Francis, on his recent visit to the Middle East, spoke out against the 'lacerating' violence in Syria, and specifically called attention to those profiting from arms trade to Syria. Pax Christi International echoes his call for peace: 'May God convert those who have projects of war. May he convert weapons manufacturers and traffickers so they become constructors of peace.'

The Pax Christi Australia membership sincerely appreciates your consideration, and we hope that you decide to take action on this most pressing of issues.

Yours Sincerely,

Father Claude Mostowik msc
President

Cc.

The Hon. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

The Hon. Senator David Johnston

The Hon. Bill Shorten, Leader of the Federal Opposition

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