March 9, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON K1A OA2

Dear Prime Minister,

The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace was founded by the Catholic bishops of Canada in 1967 to inspire the solidarity of Canadians towards people suffering the injustice of poverty in the Global South, and it has since become one of Canada’s most established international development organizations. Development and Peace has been responding to the Syrian crisis inside Syria, and in neighbouring countries, since the fall of 2012. The organization has invested over $24.2M in humanitarian aid and in local initiatives to promote peace, which has assisted more than 600,000 Syrians in the region. Since September 2015, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE has received $3M in donations for our Syrian response, 2.2M of which is eligible to be matched by the Syria Emergency Relief Fund.

With the strength of our Canada-wide movement, which brings together thousands of members who advocate for justice, human dignity, and peace, Development and Peace is now leading a national advocacy campaign for peace and dignity for Syrians. We are also joining the Caritas Internationalis campaign for peace in Syria, along with 165 other member organizations around the world.

Development and Peace welcomes the recent announcement to increase the amount allocated to humanitarian aid and long-term development in Syria. We are also supportive of the government’s decision to end Canada’s participation in air strikes on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. While we are very encouraged by these steps we believe that Canada ought to play a more active role in finding a politically-negotiated solution to this conflict.

With the help of our humanitarian team and our local partner organisations in the region, we have identified three concrete measures to be taken by the Government of Canada in order to address the most pressing issues that Syrian people are facing and work towards a lasting peace for Syria.
Recommendation 1: Contribute to the peace process by making the voices of Syrian civil society heard

Development and Peace believes that military engagement in Syria will not bring a just resolution to the crisis. Only a political, diplomatic solution is viable. In order to contribute to the peace process, we are asking the Canadian government to show leadership by creating avenues for Syrian civil society, especially women and marginalized groups, to have their voices heard, while ensuring their security. Development and Peace urges Canada to create spaces for groups from Syrian civil society to express their priorities and propose solutions, in a parallel, secure process that feeds into the UN-led peace process. Through a civil society forum, roundtable discussions, position papers, or other alternative mechanisms, the Government of Canada can ensure that the people who will rebuild Syria are part of the process from the start.

Recommendation 2: Ensure access to humanitarian aid and protection of civilians

Canada should show leadership by doing everything in its power to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected by securing access to humanitarian aid inside Syria. Civilians must be protected through unconditional, monitored ceasefires, cessation of attacks on civilian infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and water supplies, and the immediate lifting of all sieges by all parties. Without access to humanitarian aid, more Syrians will suffer and a generation of children will grow older without the nutrition and education that they deserve and need.

Recommendation 3: Support both social cohesion and self-sufficiency of refugees in neighbouring countries

Canada should support social cohesion and livelihood projects in Syria’s neighbouring countries, that are open to all people, including all refugees and citizens who are living in poverty, to allow them to meet their needs in dignity. It is necessary to complement humanitarian aid with measures to allow refugees to work in dignity, side by side with local residents of host countries. Development and Peace is uniquely positioned to assist in advancing these objectives, particularly in the case of recommendation 1 and 3. To conclude, Mr. Prime Minister, we appreciate your government’s commitment to consultation and participation, and it is in this spirit that we make these recommendations to take action on the root causes of the conflict and end the suffering of millions of Syrians.

Yours sincerely,

David Leduc
Executive Director