

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

By: Mennonite Central Committee Canada

- **Recommendation 1:** Government of Canada should commit to additional funding in Official Development Assistance (ODA) to double ODA over the next five years, from current levels of 0.26 to 0.5% of GNI. This increase should also include an action plan to reach the 0.7% of GNI global benchmark. Within that funding, Canada should focus on localization with a clear commitment to grassroots peacebuilding.
- **Recommendation 2:** Government of Canada should review its contributions to addressing insecurity and conflict in Iraq and the surrounding region. This includes ending the military component of Canada's intervention through transferring the \$442 million currently invested in Operation Impact to development assistance and local peacebuilding initiatives to address root causes of conflict and work for long-term peace.
- **Recommendation 3:** Government of Canada should double its international contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) to a \$50 million annual contribution.
- **Recommendation 4:** Government of Canada should maintain immigrant and refugee settlement service at current levels in 2021. This funding should not be considered part of Canada's Official Development Assistance contributions.
- **Recommendation 5:** Government of Canada should commit funding in the amount of \$2.5 million a year to Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) Canada.

Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCC) was formed 100 years ago in response to the crisis of famine and forced displacement in southern Russia (present-day Ukraine) in 1920, in the aftermath of the First World War. For a century, we have responded to the needs of the most vulnerable in Canada and around the world. We celebrate our centennial by reflecting on a history of work through local community partners and faith-based groups in over 50 countries, based on a belief in peacebuilding, human dignity, and right relationships between all peoples. We hear from partners the devastating impacts of COVID-19 around the world in exacerbating already existing situations of vulnerability.

We encourage the Canadian government to look to support the needs of vulnerable people everywhere, especially when it comes to the needs of displaced peoples and people living in areas of conflict, some of the most vulnerable in this current crisis. We also encourage continued support for the most vulnerable here in Canada through funding dedicated to newcomer integration and restorative justice. Strong financial commitments internationally and in Canada are needed for a global recovery that will benefit all.

Recommendation One: Government of Canada should commit to additional funding in Official Development Assistance (ODA) to double ODA over the next five years, from current levels of 0.26 to 0.5% of GNI. This increase should also include an action plan to reach the 0.7% of GNI global benchmark. Within that funding, Canada should focus on localization with a clear commitment to grassroots peacebuilding.

Two billion people living in conflict-affected states will be among the hardest hit by COVID-19. The pandemic is exacerbating already acute needs in these contexts (e.g. rising food insecurity). Violence and conflict also contribute to the [spread of disease](#) and increase vulnerability to infection. Within these exacerbated needs, women are particularly affected. COVID-19 is also worsening the situation for people forcibly displaced by conflict: population density in camp and urban refuge settings makes physical distancing impossible, adequate WASH services are most often absent or insufficient, and asylum is no longer accessible to people fleeing violence. Recovery will be very challenging. Canada has an important role to play through increasing Official Development Assistance (ODA).

This increase in ODA should focus on flexible and long-term funding for local organizations who are working with the most vulnerable, especially those engaging in peacebuilding and human rights protections. A re-commitment to the [localization principles of the Grand Bargain](#) is desperately needed, especially for grassroots and local peacebuilding organizations. Support for these organizations has been [reduced globally](#). Four out of five of local peacebuilders have experienced a reduction in their funding for peacebuilding following the onset of the pandemic, leading to program suspensions. The future of many small civil society organizations is at risk.

In the face of pressing challenges, local organizations and faith communities continue to be the best positioned to respond for immediate humanitarian relief, continued human rights advocacy, and peacebuilding work needed for recovery. Local actors, such as MCC partners, have an in-depth knowledge of risks and how to respond, while at the same time engaging communities and local governments in process of conflict mediation, resolution, recovery and advocacy. These are

the organizations that are well positioned to engage in rebuilding and recovery post COVID-19 and a key place to invest financially in a holistic recovery.

Recommendation Two: Government of Canada should review its contribution to addressing insecurity and conflict in Iraq and the surrounding region. This includes ending the military component of Canada's intervention through transferring the \$442 million currently invested in Operation Impact to development assistance and local peacebuilding initiatives to address root causes of conflict and work for long-term peace

We encourage a careful review of current and prospective foreign military missions and financial commitments. As COVID-19 is demonstrating, global safety and security are founded in access to health care and social safety nets that allow for physical distancing and access to basic services, such as food and health care. Funding currently invested in defence could be better used in addressing immediate global recovery needs through humanitarian support, alongside addressing root causes of conflict.

One clear example is Operation IMPACT in Iraq, slated to end in March 2021, unless it is renewed for a fifth time.

According to MCC's local partners in Iraq, the situation in Iraq was very concerning long before COVID-19. ISIS has lost control over its formally held territories, but deep societal fragmentation persists. The influence of ISIS only scratches the surface of the root causes of conflict and forced displacement in the region, not least of which include the destructive impacts of past foreign military interventions. Such past interventions helped create power vacuums, fueled sectarian divides, and exacerbated social and political exclusion.

As tensions continue to rise in the region, along with escalated humanitarian needs due to the pandemic, it is urgent to address the deep-seated and ongoing conflict. MCC has seen that addressing complex and protracted conflicts requires coordinated and locally led efforts, including humanitarian and development responses, as well as peacebuilding.

MCC is therefore deeply concerned by the continued presence of Canada's military efforts and defence resources, as Iraq's complex protracted conflict will not be solved in the long term through foreign military interventions. Due to COVID-19, fewer than 100 Canadian troops remain in Iraq, with hundreds of others waiting to redeploy. This is a key moment to reassess Canada's role and we urge the Government of Canada to end its military assistance to the region.

Canada can play a role in building a peaceful, stable and democratic Iraq, through transferring military funding towards investing in local and grassroots organizations working on rebuilding the society – through humanitarian initiatives, long-term development, land dispute resolution, equitable access to resources, and inter-religious and sectarian peacebuilding.

Recommendation Three: Government of Canada should double its international contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) to a \$50 million annual contribution.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency ([UNRWA](#)) provides essential services to the 5.6 Palestinian refugees under its mandate. UNRWA is the only multinational organization

supporting Palestinian refugees and its financial health is essential for these refugees who continue to live in situations where they do not have access to durable solutions. MCC local partners also tell us that Palestinian refugees, including those in Gaza, are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 in the Middle East. Many Palestinian refugees face shortages of key medicines, broken water and sanitation systems, and lack of economic resources. They already confront challenges to participation in formal economic structures in the various countries in which they currently reside. The impacts of COVID-19 will further reduce the capacity of host countries to provide support for Palestinian refugees.

Canada currently pledges \$18-25 million annually to UNWRA, but lags behind many other donor countries. For example, in terms of [proportion of GNI](#), both Norway and Ireland gave more to UNRWA. In response to the impacts of COVID-19 and ongoing lack of services for Palestinian refugees, Canada should double their annual contribution, up to \$50 million annually.

Recommendation 4: Government of Canada should maintain immigrant and refugee settlement service at current levels in 2021. This funding should not be considered part of Canada's Official Development Assistance contributions.

Despite the failure to meet 2020 immigrant targets due to COVID-19, we encourage the government to maintain current levels of immigration settlement services in the next budget. Many support service agencies are facing financial setbacks due to reduced charitable giving and access to other economic supports due to impacts of COVID-19. Stable and dependable funding will ensure that agencies that engage in settlement work through contribution agreements can plan and implement services. Settlement agencies also play an important role in ensuring that newcomers understand public health guidelines and therefore work to ensure community health. Funding continuity will also support the overall integration of refugees and other immigrants into Canadian society. These integration and community public health contributions are important aspects of Canada's immigration program. Given rising levels of xenophobia, the investment of resources into healthy integration will provide newcomers with a sense of home in Canada and a desire to support Canada's wellbeing. This will in turn support Canada's own economic recovery through workforce and community development.

Recommendation 5: Government of Canada should commit funding in the amount of \$2.5 million a year to Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) Canada.

[Circles of Support and Accountability \(CoSA\) Canada](#) is the national organization that represents the work of CoSA across Canada. CoSA is a community-based response to men and women who have committed one or more sexual offences and are being released into the community without adequate support to assist them in reintegration. CoSA is guided by the primary aim of no more victims and works towards creating safer communities. Funding for CoSA is an investment in evidence-based policy with research consistently demonstrating that CoSA is successful at reducing recidivism. Existing research (Wilson, Cortoni and McWhinnie, 2009) demonstrates that sexual re-offending rates for men who participate in CoSA are 80% lower than for men who do not participate in CoSA. These findings have been replicated internationally. Further to this, research has demonstrated that CoSA programs adds value to Canadian society in terms of

reducing real pain and suffering of sexual victimization in addition to a reduction in economic costs of sexual victimization. (Chouinard and Riddick, 2015). Given the important work being done by CoSA in keeping communities safe we ask the government to provide stable funding for CoSA in order to ensure this critical social service continues.

We also encourage strong investments in community-based restorative justice mechanisms to implement recommendations from the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#) and [the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Call for Justice](#).