



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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October 26, 2017

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster
National Security Advisor
National Security Council
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Mattis, Secretary Tillerson, and National Security Advisor McMaster:

In August, President Donald Trump announced his strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia. As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I will share our views on important issues that should be addressed in U.S. policy toward Afghanistan.

First let me acknowledge that in the wake of 9/11, the U.S. bishops offered criteria for moral discernment and a call to solidarity in response to the terrorist attacks and military action in Afghanistan. The bishops called for a response that combines the resolve to do what is necessary, the restraint to ensure that we act justly, and the vision to focus on broader issues of poverty and injustice that often motivate conflicts and are exploited by extremists to gain recruits.

Our Conference of Bishops offers some principles that we hope would guide U.S. actions. We bishops understand that there are no easy answers to resolving the problems in Afghanistan, but we hope that the principles offered will be useful in guiding U.S. actions as the Administration seeks to implement its strategy in Afghanistan:

- Support inclusive governance to create a more stable, secure and accountable Afghanistan.
- Encourage international partnerships and collaboration to provide humanitarian and development assistance.
- Ensure that much of this assistance is provided through civilian channels, including faith-based development agencies such as Catholic Relief Services, who have considerable experience in working with communities to strengthen local capacity and create inclusive, sustainable solutions to meet local needs.
- Encourage dialogue among the different political, ethnic and religious factions to the conflict in order to find some areas of basic cooperation that might lead to confidence-building measures, a gradual diminishing of armed conflict, increased accountability, and enhanced and equitable economic development.
- Restrain use of military force and ensure that civilians are not targeted; otherwise our nation risks losing Afghan popular support for the mission. Periodically review the use of military force to ensure that it is proportionate and develop criteria for when to end military action in Afghanistan.
- Address the root causes of terrorism/extremism rather than rely solely on military means to solve conflict. Those causes include poverty, injustice, and inequality of access to education, employment, and opportunity.
- Promote the protection of human rights and religious freedom as ways to build a more stable and resilient society.

- Work toward durable solutions regarding Afghan refugees and those internally displaced as well as other refugees currently in Afghanistan.

USCCB values the dedication, duty, and the ultimate sacrifice made by many American and Afghan military in the struggle against extremist forces in Afghanistan. We are also saddened by the large numbers of Afghan civilians, including many women and children, who have lost their lives, homes, and livelihoods amid the violence. Any action taken by the United States must simultaneously honor these meaningful sacrifices while striving to end this long-standing conflict and counter extremists who threaten the security of peoples and nations.

Pope Francis, in speaking about conflicts, commented, “War brings destruction and multiplies the sufferings of peoples. Hope and progress come only from choices for peace.” We will continue to do what we can to work for peace.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oscar Cantú". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "O" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee of International Justice and Peace