



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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March 24, 2011

Mr. Thomas E. Donilon
National Security Advisor
National Security Council
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Donilon:

Recently our nation in coalition with others embarked on an internationally-sanctioned military mission to protect civilians in Libya from their own government. Our Conference of Bishops, in solidarity with our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, is “follow[ing] the latest events with great apprehension.”

In Catholic teaching the use of force must always be a last resort that serves a just cause. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* limits just cause to cases in which “the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations [is] lasting, grave and certain.” (#2309) The just cause articulated in UN Security Council Resolution 1973 to demand “a ceasefire and a complete end to violence and all attacks against, and abuses of, civilians” appears to meet this criterion in our judgment. Since the protection of civilians is paramount, a key question is: Will the coalition actions stay focused on this limited goal and mission?

In recent years, the Holy See has emphasized the role of international bodies in authorizing humanitarian interventions into sovereign nations. This has been done and international oversight remains important. The United Nations Security Council needs to continue to monitor carefully the mission and the use of force in Libya.

The just war tradition teaches that the use of force must have “serious prospects for success” and “must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated” (*Catechism*, #2309). Important questions include: How is the use of force protecting the civilian population of Libya? Is the force employed proportionate to the goal of protecting civilians? Is it producing evils graver than the evil it hopes to address? What are the implications of the use of force for the future welfare of the Libyan people and the stability of the region?

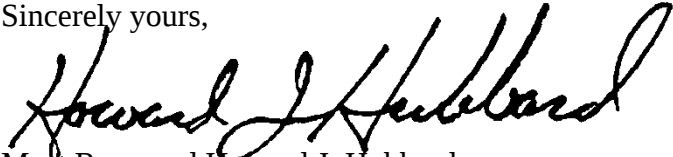
In addition, the use of force must be proportionate and discriminant. The justice of a cause does not lessen the moral responsibility to comply with the norms of civilian immunity and proportionality. We recognize serious efforts are being made to avoid directly targeting civilians. In fact, the just cause underlying the use of force is to protect civilians. This moral responsibility leads to continuing questions: Is force being used in ways that protect civilian lives? Are civilian casualties being avoided? Is the destruction of lives and property proportionate to the good being achieved in terms of saving civilian lives?

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Based on longstanding Church teaching and experience, we have offered moral guidance and asked key moral questions. As pastors and teachers, we have refrained from making definitive judgments because the situation on the ground remains complex and involves many prudential decisions beyond our expertise.

We know these are difficult questions to which there are few easy answers, but it is our moral responsibility as a nation to rigorously examine the use of military force in light of the need to protect human life and dignity.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Howard J. Hubbard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent "H" and "J".

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops