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British bishop: Libya coalition must have limits

by Simon Caldwell by Catholic News Service

LONDON -- The head of Britain's military diocese has urged restraint in the ongoing military action against Libya.

Bishop Richard Moth said it was vital that coalition forces did not lose sight of the limits of their mission to protect civilians in the North African country.

He said action against the armed services of Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi was only to defend civilians from attack.

In a March 23 statement released to Catholic News Service, Bishop Moth said: "The recent decision to enforce a no-fly zone over the country in order to protect the people of Libya sent a strong and clear message to the international community as a whole.

"Such action must serve only to provide defense for the defenseless," he said.

"It must be hoped that the necessity for the use of force is over as soon as possible and that international forces continue to make every effort to avoid loss of life and unnecessary damage to the country's infrastructure," the bishop said.

He added: "I would ask every parish community in these islands to continue to keep the people of Libya in prayer that a peaceful solution may soon be found, and to pray for those servicemen and women who are working to protect innocent civilians from harm."

British Prime Minister David Cameron was instrumental in securing U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973 to establish a "no-fly zone" and to authorize military intervention by member nations to protect Libya's civilian population at a time when Gadhafi's army was advancing on the rebel-held eastern city of

Benghazi.

Since the resolution was passed March 17, Western aircraft -- predominantly American, British and French -- have flown more than 300 sorties over Libya, and American and British warships and submarines have fired more than 160 Tomahawk cruise missiles at military targets in the country.

Bishop Moth's comments reflect mounting concerns among the British public of "mission creep" in the conflict, whereby their armed forces are drawn into an increasingly widening commitment without either clear objectives or exit strategy.

Although only 13 British members of Parliament opposed the airstrikes in a vote March 21, recent opinion polls have revealed public support to be shaky.

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A March 22 ComRes poll for ITV News found that 53 percent of people thought it was unacceptable for British forces to be put in danger by protecting Libyan rebels and civilians, with just 35 percent saying the government was right to commence military operations in the country.

YouGov survey results published March 22 in The Sun newspaper found that 45 percent of people interviewed were in favor of military action, while 36 percent opposed it.

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