

Bread is Life – Fast for a Just Peace in Syria

Bread is life, yet it is being used in Syria to deprive civilians of life.

Pax Christi International is launching a “bread is life” campaign during Lent 2013 to raise awareness about the suffering of civilian communities in Syria and to express solidarity with those who are trying to survive in Syria and as refugees in surrounding countries.

The Bread is Life campaign will take place from 13 February to 31 March 2013, to coincide with the Christian observance of Lent.

The acute suffering of civilian communities has been made immeasurably worse by a shortage of bread, Syrian's staple food, caused in part by the deliberate bombing¹ of bakeries. Syrian civilians believe that Syrian authorities are causing the food crisis as a form of collective punishment for demanding freedom.

We call on all Pax Christi members and friends worldwide to raise awareness about the plight of the Syrian civilian population, who feel abandoned by the rest of the world; to join in a global act of solidarity through prayer and fasting; to send the Syrian people messages of support; and to advocate for effective humanitarian assistance.²

A small Pax Christi International delegation will bring our expressions of solidarity to the Syrian people toward the end of Lent.

We invite all Pax Christi Member Organisations and people of good will to

1. **Leave a message of solidarity for the people of Syria** that we will pass to our contacts in Syria and those living abroad. You can forward your message via [email](#), through our [Facebook](#) page or via [Twitter](#).
2. **Fast for one day or more to show your solidarity with the Syrian people. Please also tell us when you are fasting so we can let our contacts in Syria know** (also via [email](#), [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#)). This can be done individually or as a group. Prayer services or fasting vigils in parishes and religious communities could be organised as opportunities to learn about the situation in Syria and to write solidarity messages. The power of fasting joins the political with the very personal.

¹ <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97036/SYRIA-Bread-shortages-rising>

² Pax Christi International, on 15 January 2013, wrote a letter on Syrian humanitarian aid to act as a call to ensure relief to the Syrian people. Pax Christi International called upon the UN, the EU, and other intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies to increase and diversify the aid to be given for the refugees and displaced people in and around Syria. The movement expressed its concern about the winter conditions that are adding to the hardships for more than 600.000 Syrian refugees. [Read](#) the full call to action.

Spirituality of Fasting

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” Isaiah 58:6

From the hunger strikes employed by suffragettes and activists for civil rights in the United States, South Africa and England to Mahatma Gandhi's fasts as a leader in the struggle to end British colonialism to the fasts employed by the peace movement in opposition to repression in Latin America and war in Iraq, fasting has long joined people of many religious traditions with the resolutely secular in a powerful response to oppression and injustice. Indeed, fasting is a part of many of the world's religious traditions. Moses fasted before receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert before beginning his public ministry. Observant Muslims fast every day during the month of Ramadan. Fasting accompanies many Hindu rituals and festivals.³

“When we fast in solidarity, we, in a sense, use our hunger as an engine for the desire for peace and justice for a particular group of people, whoever they may be. We are bringing the hunger of those for whom we fast into the body politic and we are calling for the body politic to respond.” Father Simon Harak, S.J.

“My religion teaches me that whenever there is distress which one cannot remove, one must fast and pray.” Mahatma Gandhi

Facts Sheet on the Bombing of Bakeries in Syria

1. During a three week period in August 2012, Syrian government forces dropped bombs and fired artillery at or near at least 10 bakeries in Aleppo province, killing and injuring dozens of civilians waiting for bread. The attacks were indiscriminate, and the pattern and number of attacks has made it clear that the government has been targeting civilians – both of these actions are war crimes. On 16 August, an attack killed approximately 60 people and wounded more than 70; on 21 August, another attack killed at least 23 and wounded 30. These attacks occurred in neighbourhoods where no fighting was taking place, and the government gave no warning.⁴
2. On 23 October, Syrian government forces killed at least 20 people after shelling a bakery in a rebel-controlled neighbourhood in Aleppo. The deceased included women and children. The attack came on the same day that President Bashar al-Assad issued a general amnesty that applied to all offenses committed before 23 October, except terrorist crimes. The attack also came at a time when the United Nations-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi was in Syria working to secure a temporary ceasefire between the government and opposition forces over the Muslim festival of al-Adha.
3. On 23 December 2012, over 100 people were killed when Syrian warplanes bombed a bakery in the western village of Halfaya. 69 people were identified

³ www.jubileeusa.org

⁴ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/30/syria-government-attacking-bread-lines>

and buried, while 15 others were unable to be identified. There were at least 25 additional bodies at the site, but roads were cut off and hospital workers were unable to gain access to the bakery. The hospitals were unequipped to handle all of the people who were wounded. Bodies were maimed while others laid in the street bleeding. Journalists have been restricted access, thus statistics were unable to be independently confirmed. The town had been waiting about a week for provisions to be delivered by an aid group, which finally arrived on Saturday leading to a queue of hundreds on Sunday.⁵ The motives of the attack were unclear, but it is believed that it was a government response to the arrival of Halfaya rebel fighters.⁶

4. On 15 January 2013, 44 people were provided emergency medical treatment at a field hospital operated by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) after several explosives were dropped on a village in north western Syria, one of which landed near a bakery. Most patients were men, women, and children injured by shrapnel and debris from the explosions. A little girl died en route to Turkey after suffering skull trauma. There was also a bombing of a market on 13 January in Aleppo governorate, from which 20 wounded patients, including 5 children, were treated by another MSF hospital.⁷
5. From Syria, humanitarian activists denounce that members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) have been selling flour reserves in some areas in order to buy arms. They have also witnessed how members of the official army and members of the FSA arrive to bakeries while shooting into the air so they can avoid waiting in line; moreover, they take the quantities of bread they want for their personal use or to sell in the black market.

Pax Christi International urges the end of violence and calls to respect the life of all Syrians without any distinction because of race, ethnic origin, creed, gender or others. Pax Christi International calls for a just peace in Syria.

Join us fasting in solidarity with the Syrian people!

⁵ <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/12/23/world/meast/syria-civil-war/index.html>

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/24/world/middleeast/syria.html>

⁷ <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/press/release.cfm?id=6565&cat=press-release>