

July 31, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As leaders of Christian communions and organizations throughout the United States, we are compelled to write to you out of our grief for the crisis within Syria. We feel deeply the pain of all who are caught in the midst of war. We pay heed to the reminder of our Christian brothers and sisters that they are part of the fabric of Syrian history and society, with a desire to live in peace with all their neighbors. The rich religious and ethnic tapestry that has characterized Syria for centuries is at risk of fraying beyond repair.

Already more than 100,000 Syrians have been killed as a result of the war. More than 4 million people have been displaced from their homes within Syria, and an additional 1.7 million Syrians have sought refuge in neighboring countries, placing a great strain upon local economies.

Churches within the region and many of our own churches, congregations and organizations have responded generously to the needs of Syrians who are suffering as a result of the war. But the needs are enormous and they continue to grow.

We are grateful for the humanitarian assistance provided thus far by the U.S. government and encourage an ongoing and robust response. These funds must be used in an impartial manner, in keeping with international standards. Furthermore, these monies must be in addition to, and not instead of, funding for the ongoing needs of refugees and internally displaced people in other countries. In addition, all parties to the conflict must allow immediate access to all persons in need.

But responding to humanitarian needs, important as this task is, is no substitute for addressing the root causes of the violence. For this reason we urge you to direct your Administration's full diplomatic energies toward an inclusive, negotiated, political solution that provides a foundation for an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens and for implementing substantive strategies for healing social-psychological and physical wounds. Such a political agreement will, no doubt, require compromise on the part of all parties involved. The United Nations has appealed for an immediate end to the violence and all forms of human rights abuses, and we strongly affirm this call.

We urge you to refrain from the provision of military assistance to forces involved in the conflict in Syria. Military involvement will only further escalate an already brutal war and will, in fact, undermine the prospect of negotiations to ensure a just and sustainable future for all Syrians. Rather, the U.S. should call for all parties to cease all military activities in Syria and work urgently to de-escalate the crisis, together with other actors in the region and beyond.

We harbor no illusions as to the difficulties such a process will entail. But we believe it is the path the United States, along with the international community, must pursue if we seek the welfare of all Syrians. We pray for wisdom for you and for all of us as we seek to respond to this difficult and heartbreaking crisis.

Sincerely,

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General Secretary
American Baptist Churches USA

Shan Cretin
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Bishop Richard E. Pates
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins
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Stanley J. Noffsinger
General Secretary
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Very Rev. John Edmunds, ST
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Mark S. Hanson
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Adam Estle
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Florence Deacon, OSF
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Paul Alexander, PhD
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