



Pax Christi International

Support a just, negotiated, political solution to the war in Syria

Responding to the ongoing violence in Syria and the great suffering of the Syrian people, Pax Christi International appeals for full humanitarian access in the country and pleads for strong international support for Geneva 2 negotiations based on a framework that ensures justice.

Starvation cannot be used as a weapon

In addition to 2.2 million refugees, most of whom are in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, more than 5 million Syrians are displaced internally. Many have been displaced multiple times and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The military siege of areas, such as the Ghouta region, denies civilians in those regions access to food, water and health care. In this increasingly dire situation, humanitarian agencies must have unfettered access to populations in need.

Pax Christi International joins the United Nations, International Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations, and countless civil society organisations and faith-based institutions in calling for the full cooperation of the Syrian government and all actors involved in the civil war in opening cross-border and internal access for aid providers to all in need of assistance.

Starvation must never be used as a weapon. Russia and Iran, as allies of the Syrian government, and Arab and Western countries, supporting the Syrian opposition, should use their full diplomatic and political capacity to pressure the parties in Syria to respect the Geneva Convention¹ and refrain from using starvation as a weapon.

From border protection to protection of people

Further, Pax Christi International urges international donors to honour and even increase their commitments of foreign aid for countries in the region hosting millions of Syrian refugees.

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>

In particular, Pax Christi International is greatly concerned over reports² of some European Union countries placing barriers to entry or forcibly returning asylum-seekers including people who have fled the conflict in Syria.

Pax Christi International is calling, globally as well as in the European Union, for a shift away from border protection to protection of people guaranteeing refugee status to Syrians fleeing the country. By placing barriers of any kind to them, those Syrians may undertake more dangerous crossings and further place them at the mercy of smugglers. The responsibility to shelter Syrian refugees cannot be left only to the neighbouring countries that lack the capacity and means.

Towards Geneva 2, arms embargo and a ceasefire

Pax Christi International welcomes the statement made by Ban Ki Moon – UN Secretary General, on 25 November 2013, announcing that the Geneva 2 peace conference will be convened on 22 January 2014.

Pax Christi International believes that a negotiated political solution to the conflict in Syria is essential and urges the government of Syria and a broadly representative delegation from the Syrian opposition to move swiftly and with good will into that process.

The international community, primarily through the United Nations, should provide the necessary infrastructure, mediation and a timetable to facilitate such a process, but Syrians themselves should be the main actors. Syrian civil society actors committed to nonviolence and women in particular should be consulted prior to the negotiations. Civil society needs also to be consulted during the talks and should monitor the implementation of agreements.

A ceasefire and humanitarian access to the besieged areas will be an essential first item on the Geneva 2 agenda if one is not agreed before the negotiations begin.

A second conference on security cooperation and other critical issues in the region, including the creation of a Middle East weapons of mass destruction free zone³, follow Geneva 2 and should involve all nations affected by the Syrian conflict.

In the meantime, external actors such as the United States, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and many other countries should prioritise peace over their own geopolitical agendas; avoid fuelling the further escalation of the conflict; stop supplying weapons to the Syrian government or any other armed actor; support civil society organizations committed to peace; and vigorously back a political solution.

Pax Christi International fully endorses the call of Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, for implementation of a UN arms embargo. Such an embargo should cut supply lines to warring parties in Syria as a step to prevent further war crimes and to avoid pre-empting the outcome of the negotiations.

² International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, 22 October 2013.

³ <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/mewmdfz>

The Syrian people will have to choose their own future. It is not up to the international community to impose one.

Honouring ethnic and religious diversity, accountability for war crimes, trust-building

Pax Christi International further believes that the route to peace in Syria will require construction of a sustainable and inclusive political framework that upholds the rights and honours the diversity of all Syrians, regardless of ethnic or religious background or gender, and a just process to ascertain accountability for war crimes or crimes against humanity committed by any party to the conflict. In order to facilitate a process of post-war transitional justice, preparatory investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity should be conducted by the International Criminal Court or other appropriate legal institutions.

The international community also should be prepared to cooperate with the Syrian people in support of a vigorous peace-building agenda. Trust-building processes should begin soon on at least a small scale and on a larger scale in the longer term.

Advocate for a political solution and pray for peace in Syria

Pax Christi International calls its Member Organisations and all people of good will worldwide to

- share this statement with their own national authorities and ambassadors from countries involved in the Syrian conflict, urging them to actively support the Geneva 2 talks;
- support the efforts of Caritas Internationalis, Jesuit Refugee Services and other humanitarian organizations to provide urgent relief to the Syrian people;
- initiate public prayer services for peace in Syria and express solidarity with the people of Syria. The coming World Day of Peace⁴ of 1 January 2014 can be a moment for further reflection and prayers for peace in Syria.

Brussels, 26 November 2013

2013-0427-en-me-HS

⁴http://www.justpax.it/pls/pcgp/ext_pcgp_new.h_select_attivita?dicastero=2&tema=7&argomento=0&sottoargome nto=0&lingua=2&Classe=1 &operazione=ges_doc&rif=256&rif1=256 lunedì