

## **Human Catastrophe in Syria.**

### **How Much Longer?**

*As violence continuously intensifies in Syria, sectarian tensions and violence are deepening. The death toll has increased by 36 % (from 100.000 to a conservative estimate of 136.000, including 11.000 children). Responding to the ongoing violence in Syria and the great suffering of the Syrian people, full humanitarian access in the country should be guaranteed and strong international support for renewed negotiations be given. The human catastrophe must come to an end. How much longer have the Syrians to suffer?*

### Largest refugee crisis for years!

According to UN sources, refugee numbers have risen by almost 14 % - from 2.2 million to nearly 2.5 million - most of whom are in Lebanon (932.000), Jordan (574.000), Turkey (613.000), Iraq (223.000) and Egypt (134.000) - while internally displaced persons have dramatically increased by almost 55 % (from 4.2 million to 6.5 million). 1 of 3 Syrians has been forced to leave their homes. About 1 million children are living as refugees; most of them stay in camps in Jordan. Inside Syria, there are almost 9.3 million in need of humanitarian assistance with almost 250.000 living in besieged areas and a further 2.5 million in areas rarely accessed by humanitarian workers.

Many have been displaced multiple times and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The military siege of areas denies civilians in those regions access to food, water and health care. Especially children and women are the first victims of illnesses because of the lack of food and medicines. In this increasingly dire situation, humanitarian agencies must have unfettered access to

populations in need.

International bodies such as the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations, and countless civil society organisations and faith-based institutions are 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. On 22 February 2014, the UN Security Council adopted unanimously a resolution in favour of humanitarian access to the Syrian people.<sup>1</sup>

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 Convention<sup>2</sup> and refrain from using starvation as a weapon.

Further, international donors should honour and even increase their commitments of foreign aid for countries in the region hosting millions of Syrian refugees.

### From border protection to burden sharing

In particular, there is great concern over reports<sup>3</sup> of some European Union countries placing barriers to entry or forcibly returning asylum-seekers including people who have fled the conflict in Syria. In Bulgaria for instance, which is the border between Turkey and the EU, the building of a fence will be completed by mid-March 2014. There are indications about families who are separated and are unable to reunite because of these measures.

All EU member states must go for a firmer and consistent policy of burden sharing and to facilitate and improve the reception

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<sup>1</sup> [http://twitdoc.com/view.asp?id=125953&sid=2P6P&ext=PDF&lcl=SC-reso-on-Syria-E-feb.pdf&usr=whitney\\_hurst&doc=208570770&key=key-2lde9wq869m0v9xijrh2](http://twitdoc.com/view.asp?id=125953&sid=2P6P&ext=PDF&lcl=SC-reso-on-Syria-E-feb.pdf&usr=whitney_hurst&doc=208570770&key=key-2lde9wq869m0v9xijrh2)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>

<sup>3</sup> International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, 22 October 2013.

conditions of Syrian refugees; access to services should be given and asylum-seekers have access to the territory and to fair and effective asylum procedures.

The European Union, as well as other countries, should 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.

The EU and its member states, as part of the international community, have a moral responsibility to resettle a significant number of refugees flying Syria. We must extend our hospitality and welcome individuals. We expect governments to make a responsible response to the present crisis.

There is no military solution to this conflict. Those who supply arms create but an illusion of victory.<sup>4</sup>

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

The international community, primarily through the United Nations, should continue providing the necessary infrastructure, mediation and a timetable to facilitate such a process. Syrians themselves should be the main actors in the process. Syrian civil society actors committed to nonviolence and women in particular should be consulted, if not part of the official delegation, for the duration of the negotiations. Civil society needs also to be consulted throughout the talks and should monitor the implementation of agreements.

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<sup>4</sup> UN Report Commission of Inquiry, A/HRC/24/46, 16 August 2013, at p.1.

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

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