



Pax Christi International

Encountering Peace: In Solidarity with Syria

As Lent 2014 begins, Pax Christi International is launching a worldwide campaign, "Encountering Peace," to express solidarity with the people of Syria and to promote a negotiated solution to the extreme crisis gripping that country.

As Pax Christi members around the world "encounter" in solidarity the people of Syria who are devastated by ongoing violence, we will fast and pray and advocate for an end to the violence and for a successful "encounter for peace" at the negotiations table.

The **Encountering Peace Campaign** will take place from 5 March to 20 April 2014, to coincide with the Christian observance of Lent. In addition to prayer and fasting by individuals, Pax Christi member organisations are encouraged to organise opportunities for prayer, education, fasting and action in parishes, schools and religious communities.

After three years of violent conflict in Syria, well over 100,000 people have been killed and an estimated 9 million others driven from their homes. More than 2.4 million refugees are registered in the region: some 932,000 in Lebanon; 574,000 in Jordan; some 613,000 in Turkey; 223,000 in Iraq; and about 134,000 in Egypt.

In a recent, unanimous resolution (UNSC 2139), the UN Security Council demanded "that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders." The Security Council also emphasized that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution.

We call on all Pax Christi members and friends worldwide to raise awareness about the plight of the Syrian civilian population whose great agony continues:

1. **With others or in community - perhaps during a public prayer service for peace in Syria during Lent - prepare a message of solidarity for the people of Syria.**

Pax Christi International will work with Syrian partners to broadcast these messages via radio programmes that can be heard by people in Syria and by many Syrian refugees in the region. Please send us your messages via our [website](#), [email](#), [Facebook](#) and/or [Twitter](#) (for social media, please use hashtag #EncounteringPeace).

2. **Fast for one day or more to show your solidarity with the Syrian people.**

Please let us know when you are fasting so we can let our contacts in Syria know. This can be done individually or as a group. Contact us via our [website](#), [email](#), [Facebook](#) and/or [Twitter](#) (for social media, please use hashtag #Fasting4Syria).

3. **Share the most recent statement of Pax Christi International** (below) with your own national authorities and with embassies in your country of the United States, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the European Union, urging them to support renewed peace talks that include the full participation of representative Syrian women and to stop fuelling the violence by sending arms and ammunition into Syria.

Pax Christi International: For How Much Longer Will the Syrian People Suffer?

Responding to the ongoing violence in Syria and the great suffering of the Syrian people, Pax Christi International appeals again for full humanitarian access in the country and pleads for robust international backing for renewed negotiations that include the explicit participation of delegations representing Syrian women and members of nonviolent civil society.

To help move forward a more vigorous Syrian peace process, Pax Christi International calls all nations, particularly Russia, Iran, the United States and Saudi Arabia, as well as the European Union, to support:

- an immediate end to the delivery of arms, ammunition and weapons parts to all combatants in Syria
- an immediate end to international support for foreign fighters operating in Syria
- international backing for the efforts of Syrian communities to negotiate local ceasefires and to create durable zones of peace
- increased humanitarian assistance for the Syrian people displaced within Syria and for those seeking refuge in neighbouring countries
- guaranteed refugee or temporary protected status for Syrians in flight from the violence, most especially women and children

Background to Pax Christi International Statement

Stop Fuelling the Violence

To stop the carnage in Syria, a ceasefire is urgently needed. The first step is to stop enabling the fighting. Negotiations are repeatedly undercut by the continued supply of weapons to all sides, permitting those who refuse to negotiate to keep fighting. The international community must agree to end the delivery of arms, ammunition and weapons parts to all combatants in Syria.

Bring an End to the Suffering of the Children

According to the United Nations more than 5 million Syrian children are war-traumatised – both inside and outside the country. About 1 million children are living as refugees; most of them stay in camps in Jordan. The suffering of these children should come to an end and their future should be safeguard.

Support Nonviolent Civil Society in Syria

Pax Christi International believes that a just and peaceful future for the people of Syria is possible and will be shaped most effectively by organised nonviolent civil society and women. As efforts falter to move negotiations forward for an end to the horrific violence, it is

time to respect the demands of Syrian women for full engagement in the peace process, honouring the commitment expressed in UNSC Resolution 1325 and subsequent declarations that reaffirm the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. The explicit participation in resumed negotiations of delegations representing Syrian women and nonviolent Syrian civil society is crucial to their success.

Address the Urgent Humanitarian Crises

Many local communities in Syria have been displaced multiple times and are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, but the unrelenting military siege of their neighbourhoods denies civilians access to food, water and health care. Humanitarian agencies must have unfettered access to populations in need. Starvation can no longer be used as a weapon of war! Pax Christi International calls again 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. We urge international donors to honour and even increase their commitments of foreign aid for countries in the region hosting millions of Syrian refugees.

Furthermore, Pax Christi International decries the practice anywhere of placing barriers to entry or forcibly returning asylum-seekers, including people who have fled the conflict in Syria. We again call all EU member states and other nations to facilitate and improve conditions for the reception of Syrian refugees. Refugees should be given a safe way into Europe. Refugees arriving at Europe's borders should be protected and families torn apart by this crisis should be reunited.

Diversity as the Basis of a Just Society

Pax Christi International appeals to all religious leaders in Syria to continue an open dialogue with one another as a way to move the peace process forward and echo the shared societal and religious values that can form the basis of a just society. Pax Christi International believes that religious and ethnic diversity is one of Syria's strengths. Difference should be depoliticised. 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.

Pax Christi International supports the projects of its member organisations and other partners in helping to form a new generation of community leaders and encouraging community based organisations and civic leaders to address sectarian thinking and freedom of religion in an inclusive and rights-based manner. The rights of all citizens should be guaranteed and responsible citizens should play an active role in protecting freedoms and rights of other citizens and communities.

Peacebuilding and Transitional Justice

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 as soon as possible. In order to facilitate a process of post-war reconciliation, a just process must be established to ascertain accountability for war crimes or crimes against humanity committed by any party to the conflict. Preparatory investigations should be initiated by the International Criminal Court or other appropriate legal institutions.

Brussels, 5 March 2014