



## **Pax Christi International on the Violent Conflict in Syria**

### **Ending the War and Saving Lives must be Top Priority**

Syria's popular uprising started in the city of Dara in March 2011. The merciless actions of the Syrian Government – whose campaign of violent repression against what were originally peaceful protestors began four long years ago – have now morphed into wave upon wave of pitiless assaults by all sides. The Syrian conflict has killed well in excess of 200.000 people, and continues to kill more every day. It has involved the torture and ill-treatment of countless others; forced millions to flee; and deprived even more of the basic conditions for a decent life, including the rights to education, food, healthcare and housing.

The conduct of an ever-increasing number of actors is characterised by a complete lack of adherence to the norms of international law. Human rights are being violated to a shocking degree. The State, which is responsible for the security of its citizens, has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity against its citizens; radical non-State armed groups are doing the same.

Humanitarian aid has been instrumentalised for military gain. In many cases, aid to civilians living in areas under the control of non-State armed groups is not delivered. The conditions imposed by the State and by some armed groups on the delivery of humanitarian assistance use civilian suffering as a retaliatory measure, which is immoral.

The United Nations Security Council, deadlocked by vetoes or threats of vetoes, has been powerless to alter this landscape of destruction and bloodshed. The Council has been able to issue resolutions on humanitarian access and barrel bombs, but they have not been adequately implemented.

Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 10 million Syrians have fled their homes. This amounts to nearly half of the country's population, who are now deprived of their basic rights to shelter and adequate housing, security and human dignity. More than 3 million people, most of them women and children, are staying in neighbouring countries, and a further 6.5 million people are believed to be internally displaced. An estimated 10.8 million are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, with 4.6 million living under siege or in hard-to-access areas. More than half a million Palestinian refugees in Syria have emerged as a particularly vulnerable group.

Prospects for a diplomatic solution have been further complicated by the multiplication and fragmentation of armed actors on the ground. Financial and military assistance injected by different States and non-State actors into the conflict has fuelled the warring parties' unwillingness to compromise as they continued to believe that they could prevail militarily. This is done to the advantage of hard-liners on all sides. Extremist groups are dominating

“moderates.” At the same time we see the spread of extreme ideologies – including religious –and an increased regionalisation of the conflict; however, a simplified analysis based on religious or ethnic factors is misleading and inadequate. Geopolitical interests of international actors are also playing an important role in this violent conflict.

Pax Christi International is appalled by the massive suffering of the Syrian people and it affirms again its conviction that this conflict must be resolved politically. Pax Christi appeals to the international community to take concrete steps to bring peace and to protect all those who are victims of war and persecution, driven from their homes and their homeland. The international community has a moral debt to Syria!

Pax Christi International supports the following policy lines:

- Ending the war and saving lives should be the top priority. To that end, a return to internationally-mediated negotiations is imperative in order to pursue a political transition to a free and democratic State. The Security Council should unequivocally call for and support the implementation of a well-defined and all-inclusive peace process.
- Stop all weapons deliveries to all parties involved in the conflict. End the use of land mines, cluster bombs, barrel bombs and other explosive weapons, most especially in populated areas.
- Cut sources of financial support enabling a continuation of violent conflict, gross human rights violations and war crimes.
- Support non-violent peace actors and human rights defenders. Strengthen the resilience of local civil society.
- End the impunity. Bring perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity to justice.
- Tackle the root causes and promote social inclusion and peaceful alternatives to violent narratives.
- Commit decidedly and effectively to protect and assist civilians, especially the most vulnerable. Share the burden and provide the humanitarian aid needed to respond to the growing needs of refugees and internally displaced persons.
- Guarantee the freedom of religion and belief. Protect the presence of minority communities and their cultural heritage. Support religious leaders who promote positive relationships among different religious groups.

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