

January 17, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As Christian communions and organizations throughout the United States, we write to you once again about the ongoing violence in Syria and the great suffering of the Syrian people. As the negotiations known as Geneva II approach, we appeal in particular for the United States and other involved countries to prioritize peace over their own geopolitical agendas; to stop supplying weapons to any armed actor; to press for a cease-fire; to support civil society organizations committed to peace; and to work vigorously towards a political solution.

Churches and Christian organizations within the region and many of our own churches, congregations and organizations have responded generously to the needs of millions of Syrians who are suffering as a result of the war. We remain grateful for the humanitarian assistance thus far provided by the United States government and encourage an ongoing, robust and impartial response. However, the needs are enormous and they continue to grow. In this increasingly dire situation, humanitarian agencies must have unfettered access to populations in need and the responsibility to support and shelter Syrian refugees cannot be left to neighboring countries that lack adequate capacity and means.

We are convinced that a negotiated political solution to the conflict in Syria is essential. We urge the government of Syria and the Syrian opposition delegation to move swiftly and with goodwill into that process. A political agreement will require compromise on the part of all parties involved. As negotiations begin we strongly affirm the call of the United Nations for an immediate end to the violence and all forms of human rights abuses. We believe that Syrians themselves should be the main negotiators of peace and that Syrian civil society actors committed to nonviolence, and women in particular, should be engaged in the process.

We further believe that the route to a just peace in Syria will require construction of a sustainable and inclusive political framework that upholds the rights and honors the diversity of all Syrians, regardless of ethnic or religious background or gender. This route also requires a just process, including smart restorative justice approaches, to ascertain accountability for war crimes or crimes against humanity committed by any party to the conflict.

The international community should be prepared to work with the Syrian people in support of a vigorous peace-building agenda. A second conference on security cooperation and other critical issues in the region, including the creation of a Middle

East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, should follow Geneva II and involve all nations affected by the Syrian conflict.

As people of faith we will accompany the people of Syria as they seek a way out of the horrific cycle of violence in which they are caught. We will pray for wisdom and courage for you and your Administration as you seek to respond to the crisis.

Sincerely,

American Baptist Churches

American Friends Service Committee

Christian Reformed Church in North America

Church of the Brethren

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Pax Christi International

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

World Renew