

His Excellency Ban Ki-moon
UN Secretary-General
United Nations Room S-3800
New York, NY 10017, U.S.A

Brussels, 28 September 2012

Your Excellency,

Pax Christi, the worldwide Catholic Peace Movement, has approached you on several occasions about the tragic events in Syria.

Since March 2011, Pax Christi International and many of its member organisations have been politically and morally supporting the non-violent opposition in their struggle for freedom, democracy, and human rights. Unfortunately, the peaceful activists have been overwhelmed and silenced by enormously brutal army and security forces that eventually led to the cycle of violence they aimed to prevent. Yet, even after 18 months of repression and despite a growing role of armed resistance groups, civil and peaceful resistance in Syria is still an integral part of opposition.

Many sources of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic document all too well the results of months of violence during which government troops attacked civilian areas and collectively punished the most revolutionary communities. The devastating effects of this violence are widespread: tens of thousands have lost their lives or have been wounded; tens of thousands are still missing, which indicates that the figure of casualties might even be a conservative estimation; city neighbourhoods have been destroyed; more than a quarter of a million individuals have become refugees, living in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and many more are expected to flee the country; 1.2 million people have been internally displaced; and classes have been cancelled indefinitely for tens of thousands of children. Above all, social trust and civil conviviality have been fragmented. This violent conflict undoubtedly demonstrates the savagery of using war as a means to resolve disagreements.

Pax Christi International has been following the deteriorating conflict in Syria with great attention and deep concerns given the risk of destabilization in the entire region, thus subsequently the world, and the complete disregard of the civilian population. The Movement has reiterated its rejection of violence, regardless of the source it originates from, and regrets the loss and disruption of so many innocent human lives. Even though it seems hard to find solutions to the various problems that affect the region, we cannot resign ourselves to violence and to the aggravation of tensions. The commitment to dialogue and diplomacy must be a priority for all the parties concerned and must be supported by the international community. That is why international diplomacy needs to be strengthened and the mandate of Lakhdar Brahimi needs to be enforced.

It is appropriate that the General Assembly of the United Nations should adopt the perspective of the victims in its resolve to promote human rights and to uphold humanitarian law. Respect for the fundamental rights of the victims of this conflict is the primary path that can lead to healing human relations and to peace; both of which are indispensable prerequisites for negotiations and effective responses to the expectations of the people for a new democratic state.

Sustainable peace in the Middle East is crucial goal for countries around the globe. Local people will have the ability to employ their talents for the development and progress of their countries, enjoy their right to a decent life, and avoid the misery of forced uprooting and exile.

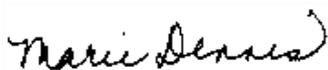
Solidarity with the people of Syria and, by extension, with the whole of the Middle East, implies that the international community should put aside selfish interests. Support of the political process for a cessation of violence and political transition towards an inclusive political system in which citizens are viewed to be of equal dignity is essential. Humanitarian assistance should be given to all displaced people, as well as other victims of bombardments and indiscriminate destruction, specifically children. If the international community cannot protect civilians inside Syria, it should at least do everything possible to protect them when they are outside. Refugees in the neighbouring countries are in need of security, food and shelter. The hosting countries should not be left alone in the responsibility to take care of security and needs of the refugees.

Furthermore, journalists should report on this situation with fairness and indiscriminate detail so that public opinion may more readily grasp the futility of violence, as well as learn that it ultimately benefits no one. Media is an indispensable outlet that can assist in building a culture of peace and making the benefits of it clear.

The waves of protests, which have been predominantly peaceful, have characterized what has been termed the Arab Spring. They stemmed from the deep desire, especially of the younger generation, for human dignity, greater freedom, improved employment opportunities, and enhanced participation in public life. To frustrate these aspirations through the manipulation of power and control will have an enduring demoralising impact and a historical opportunity for progress will be missed. The people of Syria and the Middle East deserve support and solidarity in their moment of need. The promotion of all human rights is an effective and indispensable strategy for the success of their struggle for peace and social conviviality. We do hope that the United Nations General Assembly can improve the humanitarian situation in Syria, and the region.

Pax Christi International is planning a consultation with partners from the region in Amman and hopes to contribute towards a peaceful transformative process of the conflicts in the region, specifically in Syria.

Yours Sincerely,



Marie Dennis
Co-President



+ Bishop Kevin Dowling
Co-President



José Henríquez
Secretary General