



## **Negotiations should end the conflict and bring political transition in Syria**

In March 2016, we mark the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the popular uprising in Syria. The first cessation of hostilities after five years of war in Syria began on 27 February 2016. Although there have been dozens of violations of the ceasefire daily, many communities have, for the first time in years, witnessed a period of calm and respite from bombardments. This fragile ceasefire follows UN Security Council Resolution 2268.<sup>1</sup>

Despite renewed diplomatic efforts, there is little hope for an early end to the fighting in Syria. This ongoing war presents one of the greatest political and moral challenges of our time. Now an international conflict, it has the potential for additional destabilisation at the regional and international levels.

The World Council of Churches and Pax Christi International urgently appeal to all involved parties to demonstrate good will and to take part in negotiations in Geneva. A fundamental ingredient for peace, political will, has been lacking in Syria. We call upon those governments with influence in this conflict to address the root causes of so much death and destruction that has driven so many people from their homes and continues to do so.

Hundreds of thousands of victims have been claimed by the violence in Syria, which has left many millions more without a home or means of sustenance. We urge the international community to seek an end to the violence and, at the same time, to engage in dialogue toward a political

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12261.doc.htm>

transition that enables the country to return swiftly to peace. The intra-Syrian talks which begin on 15 March in Geneva must create the conditions for such a political transition. The Syrian people must be at the centre of the resolution of the conflict. Other states (in particular the members of the International Syria Support Group) and non-state actors must support a Syrian-led process.

Large-scale humanitarian aid to the afflicted populations throughout Syria and to the many refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries also must be assured. Increased aid to besieged areas and a lull in the violence could show the Syrian people that a political process could lead to results, thus contributing to public support for the necessary revival of the Geneva peace talks.

In recent weeks we have seen a new wave of peaceful demonstrations in Syria.<sup>2</sup> The Syrian people are clear about what they want: a united, democratic Syria where all citizens enjoy equal rights. The demonstrations spoke out clearly against dividing the country. That political momentum should not be lost. All parties must support civil society in its critical role in the process of ceasefire and human rights monitoring, violence reduction, trust building, facilitating public debate and conflict transformation.

The massive call for freedom and democracy in Syria underlines the urgency of prioritizing political transition to an inclusive and democratic state. That should be a primary goal in Geneva. A "Syria First" strategy is needed, instead of an "ISIS First" strategy. We are supporting the democratic platform in Syria. We believe that's the only way ISIS can be defeated.

A large-scale reconstruction programme which includes the reform of state institutions should be started and supervised by the United Nations.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ActivistHive/videos/1671451539759645/>

In the long term, a transparent process of transitional justice and reconciliation in which all ethnic, political and religious groups are included should be initiated and include active participation from the different sectors of civil society.

Our hearts break for the suffering experienced by people from all religious traditions who have become victims of civil war, chaos and terrorist violence. The diversity of the region must be preserved and the rights of all regardless of religion, ethnicity or gender must be secured. The religious and social values of the Syrian people, including freedom, dignity and tolerance, in addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are essential references in the protection of the rights of all citizens.

As Christian organisations we stand with our brothers and sisters in the region and will support them in their efforts to restore peace in their countries and make sure they and other religions and ethnic groups will all be active participants in the future of the region.

Geneva/Brussels, 15 March 2016