

August 6, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

You and members of your administration have spoken eloquently about the war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Assad government in Syria and the need for a political solution to end the crisis. Your administration has also directed over \$4 billion in humanitarian aid to assist the people of Syria. But, despite the clarity of those statements and the American people's generosity with humanitarian aid under your leadership, the Syrian government has continued its campaign of mass homicide and terror against civilians.

We believe it is imperative for the United States to step up its diplomatic efforts and implement a strategy for protecting civilians in Syria that includes the potential for a limited use of force. The constant barrel bomb attacks by government forces and the displacement, death and dehumanization endured by millions of Syrians has created a miasma of human misery that is hard for those of us who have been in the field to describe adequately. Our inability to protect the vulnerable from four and a half years of barbarism is clearly fueling a growing tide of extremism around the world.

Your successful diplomacy negotiating a nuclear deal with Iran, will, we hope, serve as a catalyst for bringing Iran into regional peace talks. An agreement among the parties to the conflict in Syria remains the best long-term outcome for reversing extremist gains and the threat ISIL and other extremist groups pose there and elsewhere.

Months ago during a White House summit convened to explore why extremists were having such success in attracting young recruits from Western countries, the role of social media marketing was identified as a primary tool. While that is doubtless a factor, the root causes we believe are things we see every day in our Syria-related work: the unremitting violence against civilians – many of them children – and a generation growing up without even the possibility of education. They realize their economic future is as bleak as the ruins of their country.

If you travel among the refugee camps hosting millions of refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, you will see Syrians looking at their smart phones horrified by the latest videos available on social media detailing these brutal attacks.

Social media broadcasts their despair and it is picked up by Sunnis in Europe, Africa and the United States, some of whom may already feel disenfranchised by the societies where they reside. They view the carnage and see the Coalition planes trained only on ISIL as evidence that Coalition members are willing to pursue only their own narrow interests while people with whom they identify are being slaughtered.

We urge that the protection of Syrian civilians – both for humanitarian reasons and for the purpose of combatting extremism – become a centerpiece of your foreign policy. The barrel bombing of residential neighborhoods must be stopped. We support an all-out diplomatic effort to make it stop, focusing on the Syrian government’s external supporters. We recognize that military action to save innocent lives may be necessary if diplomacy fails.

The United States is already at war in Syria. We urge you to elevate the priority of effort accorded to civilian protection even as you work diligently with all sides to reach a political solution to the crisis.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Michel Gabaudan, President, Refugees International

Mr. Barry Andrews, CEO, GOAL Ireland

Mr. Mark Bartolini, CEO, GOAL USA

Dr. Zaher Sahloul, Syrian American Medical Society

Ambassador Frederic Hof, Resident Senior Fellow, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, Atlantic Council*

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Mr. Mouaz Moustafa, Executive Director, Syrian Emergency Task Force

Mr. Tyler Thompson, Policy Director, United for a Free Syria

Ms. Anna Nolan, Director, The Syria Campaign

Mr. Nick Kimbrell, Senior Campaigner, Avaaz

Ms. Diane Paul, former Senior Researcher, Human Rights Watch, Bosnia-Herzegovina and former Co-Lead, Protection Task Force for Cross-Border Operations in Syria

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