



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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April 13, 2012

Mr. Thomas Donilon
National Security Advisor
National Security Council
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Donilon:

The situation in Syria remains volatile and violent despite efforts by the United States, allies, the Arab League and the United Nations to stop unacceptable brutality, especially against civilians. We have watched with growing concern over the past year as the violence has escalated and as reports have come in that an estimated 9,000 Syrians have been killed and thousands more displaced, some internally but many fleeing to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. Some of those displaced are Christians who may have been targeted by Islamic extremist groups. According to the international Catholic charity, Aid to the Church in Need, about 50,000 Christians have left Homs, traditionally home to one of the largest Christian communities in Syria.

Last year Pope Benedict XVI expressed his deep concern over the rising violence and appealed “to the authorities and people of Syria to re-establish peace as soon as possible and that the legitimate demands of the country’s people be adequately met, respecting their dignity and to the benefit of regional stability.” In his Easter message this year, Pope Benedict reiterated his call that “in Syria, may there be an end to bloodshed and an immediate commitment to the path of respect, dialogue and reconciliation, as called for by the international community. May the many refugees from that country who are in need of humanitarian assistance find the acceptance and solidarity capable of relieving their dreadful sufferings.” The U.S. bishops are in solidarity with Pope Benedict’s call for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Syria.

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to recognize and express our appreciation for the role that the United States has played in working with other members of the international community to resolve this crisis and stop the violence. We also support U.S. efforts to provide humanitarian relief, especially food and medical supplies, to Syrians displaced within the country and those in surrounding countries.

As the current crisis could be protracted, we ask that the United States assess the situations of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, including Iraqis previously based in Syria, for possible durable solutions, including resettlement. We also ask that the United States continue to provide humanitarian relief and assistance to Syrians and that the U.S. government continue to work through multilateral channels, to restore stability in the region, while protecting the human rights of all people, including Christians.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace