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U.S. Catholic Leaders Urge Inclusive Diplomacy and Dialogue for a Just Peace in Syria

Hearing the drumbeat of war and hoping to tamp it down before a wrong decision is made, U.S. Catholic leaders from a number of religious orders and peace and justice organizations call on President Trump and his advisors to listen to the voices of peace and take the path of diplomacy and dialogue.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best, 50 years ago shortly before his assassination, in his historic address at Riverside Church in New York when he publicly spoke out against the war in Vietnam: *"We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation ... The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history."*

Members of the Catholic Coalition are understandably and justifiably outraged "at the suspected use of chemical weapons" but this must not "serve as a rationale for expanding the war in Syria and causing further suffering."

The statement also reads that "[E]nding the war in Syria through the just peace norm of inclusive diplomacy and dialogue and saving lives must be the priority. War is not the answer. War is never the answer.

"To prevent further escalation and unsustainable solutions, as well as the real danger of a deepening spiral of violence becoming a regional or global conflict, we call on our own government to pursue all creative, courageous, peaceful paths and all channels of negotiation, including the U.N. Security Council."

And fundamental to our own democracy, it must be noted that it is Congress, not the President who authorizes the U.S. use of military force.

The statement concludes, "[T]he time is urgent – we must act now to prevent further suffering and a dangerous escalation of violence that threatens global peace."

Below are quotes from Catholic leaders and below that is a copy of the statement by the Catholic Coalition to the Trump Administration.

QUOTES FROM CATHOLIC LEADERS:

"The Franciscan Action Network is deeply disturbed by the crimes of President Assad against his own people, but military action is not the answer, so we insist the President not authorize military force, but must come to Congress first. One of the most famous things St. Francis is known for is his prayer for peace. The only people that benefit from ongoing war in Syria or any country are the shareholders that own stock in companies that profit from death and destruction.

As Franciscans and people of faith, we must be bold and speak out with a prophetic voice against further violence which only perpetuates more destruction of God's creation." - **Patrick Carolan, Executive Director, Franciscan Action Network**

"At this critical moment for the people of Syria and the people of the United States, we believe that love is more powerful than fear, dialogue more productive than rhetoric, and connection more transformative than threats of destruction. We call on President Trump to engage in constructive dialogue and negotiation with all the stakeholders to resolve the current crisis in Syria in a manner that guarantees the peace and security that all people seek and we commit ourselves to promote nonviolence and a compassionate response to the thirst of the world for integrity and communion." - **Ann Scholz, SSND, Associate Director for Social Mission, Leadership Conference of Women Religious**

"I have faith that the President and his advisers will make smart choices and heed the call to listen to our better angels. As creative as our Nation is, I believe that successful alternatives to military force can be found. War has no winners." - **Lawrence E. Couch, Director, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd**

"As horrific as the chemical attack against innocent civilians in Syria was, more U.S. bombs will do nothing to neither help those civilians nor stop the Assad regime's cruel war against his own people. Since 2011 numerous U.S. missile strikes and millions of dollars of arms to rebel forces have failed to bring a resolution to the conflict. President Trump can best help those innocent civilians by increasing humanitarian aid, accepting more Syrian refugees and pressing for a ceasefire. More bombing will only cause more civilian deaths." - **Gerry Lee, Executive Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**

"We strongly urge the United States to pursue a political solution to the war in Syria, rather than engage in military action that could ignite a more dangerous regional or even global conflict. More bombs and missiles will not alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people or put an end to the war, which has already displaced half the population and injured or killed a half million men, women and children. As Christians, and Columbans, dedicated to the Gospel of Jesus, we are called to heal, reconcile, build bridges, and create mutual understanding through justice and prophetic dialogue. What Syria needs now is peace, massive humanitarian assistance, and relief for millions of refugees throughout the world." - **Scott Wright, Director, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach**

"The war in Syria is one of the worst cases of war-mongering and war-criminality of our time. As Sisters of Mercy, we have witnessed the pain and suffering of victims of violence around the world, especially of women and children. We call on the US government to pursue peace by engaging both allies and adversaries in serious negotiations and diplomacy to end the war in Syria. This heinous war must stop immediately and we need to respond to the refugee crisis with humanitarian aid, not bombs and missiles. Peace is possible, we must seek peace and

pursue it!" - **Sister Áine O'Connor, RSM, Councilor, Leadership Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas**

"In recent days the war in Syria has reached a dangerous turning point with violence-inciting rhetoric. Pax Christi International calls upon world leaders to stop immediately any further steps toward military action. A fully inclusive and nonviolent political process through diplomacy and dialogue is the only way to end this brutal conflict. We strongly affirm Pope Francis's condemnation of the latest chemical weapons attack in Douma and his insistence that 'there is not a good or a bad war, and nothing can justify such instruments that exterminate defenseless people and populations.' With him we pray that responsible politicians and military leaders will choose the only path that can bring peace: negotiations." - **Marie Dennis, Co-President, Pax Christi International**

STATEMENT AGAINST MILITARY ACTION IN SYRIA:

U.S. Catholic Leaders Urge Inclusive Diplomacy and Dialogue for a Just Peace in Syria We Must Stop the Potential for Further Violence in Syria: War Is Not the Answer

On Tuesday, April 10, President Trump and his advisers weighed a more robust retaliatory strike against [Syria](#) than last year's missile attack, reasoning that only an escalation of armed force would look credible and possibly serve as a deterrent against further alleged use of chemical weapons on Syrian civilians (NYT).

Under the Constitution and the War Powers Resolution, Congress, not the President, decides when the U.S. will use military force.

President Trump is threatening to use military force to attack the government of Syria without Congressional authorization. Such action would not only be ill-advised; it would be unconstitutional.

As the Congressional Progressive Caucus has [stated](#), "President Trump does not have the power to authorize military force in Syria – he must come to Congress first."

We must not let our justified outrage at the suspected use of chemical weapons serve as a rationale for expanding the war in Syria and causing further suffering.

Pope Francis, no stranger to the challenges of abolishing war and promoting peace, in his 2017 World Day of Peace message called on all nations and peoples of the world "to make active nonviolence our way of life." This is not a naïve or sentimental wish. It is based on a realistic judgment that human life is being crushed by war in Syria, and that the fate of future generations and world peace is at stake. Pope Francis went on to say, "Countering violence with violence leads at best to forced migrations and enormous suffering."

Years of a brutal dictatorship bombing its own people, non-state violence, and armed intervention by global powers taking sides in the civil war has only added fuel to the fire, and

turned the civil war into a proxy war among non-state groups and regional and global powers, including Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. If we expect to achieve peace, then we need to use peaceful means.

After more than seven years of war, millions of Syrians displaced from their homes or in exile, and nearly a half a million people dead, the tragedy of the Syrian people cries out for an inclusive diplomatic, negotiated solution to the conflict. We need to break the vicious cycle of violence with transforming initiatives that will lead to a just and lasting peace.

Ending the war in Syria through the just peace norm of inclusive diplomacy and dialogue and saving lives must be the priority. War is not the answer. War is never the answer.

To prevent further escalation and unsustainable solutions, as well as the real danger of a deepening spiral of violence becoming a regional or global conflict, we call on our own government to pursue all creative, courageous, peaceful paths and all channels of negotiation, including the U.N. Security Council. For peace negotiations to be successful, all stakeholders need to be at the table, including civil society leaders and all willing armed actors

Such creative and inclusive initiatives must focus attention on the actual, genuine, human needs of all stakeholders rather than primarily on national “interests” and geo-political power. Such attentiveness lifts up the role of trauma in fueling this violence, and points to the need to incorporate trauma-healing in any inclusive, sustainable dialogue process.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said it best, 50 years ago, in his historic address at Riverside Church in New York when he publicly spoke out against the war in Vietnam: **“We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation ... The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.”**

We invite people of all faith traditions to join us in prayer and action for peace, as we call upon our nation’s leaders to work for a negotiated solution to the war in Syria, and for a humanitarian solution to the tragedy of the millions of Syrian families displaced by the war or seeking refuge in other countries, including our own.

The time is urgent – we must act now to prevent further suffering and a dangerous escalation of violence that threatens global peace.

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