FIVE YEARS OF CONFLICT IN SYRIA: WORKING FOR PEACE AND DIGNITY FOR SYRIANS
SUMMARY

Five years into the conflict in Syria, the crisis continues, and an alarming number of children, women and men have been displaced, and are struggling for access to humanitarian aid. On February 4, 2016, during the donors’ conference which took place in London, more than $10 billion was pledged to help the millions of Syrians exhausted by the conflict and to attempt to stem the refugee flow that threatens to destabilize host countries. The Government of Canada also recently announced its pledge to increase the amount allocated to humanitarian aid and long-term development in the next three years.

As we mark the fifth anniversary, Development and Peace has launched a national advocacy campaign to call on the Government and Canada to show leadership in contributing to the resolution of the conflict through political, diplomatic measures, rather than through a military solution. Through the mobilization of Canadians, media interviews, and direct lobbying, we urge the government to take concrete measures to respond to the many challenges facing Syrian civilians in their own country, as well as refugees exiled in neighbouring countries, specifically in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. In addition to welcoming refugees with dignity and respect in Canada and alleviating the suffering of Syrians in neighbouring countries, we must also:

- Contribute to the peace process by making the voices of Syrian civil society heard;
- Ensure access to humanitarian aid and the protection of civilians; and
- Promote social cohesion and self-sufficiency of refugees in neighbouring countries.

This advocacy campaign was developed with the close collaboration of our partners in Syria and in neighbouring countries. These recommendations were based on input from our partners on the most important problems they face and reflect the work being carried out to bring about peace and enable Syrians to live in dignity.
WHY SHOULD CANADA PROACTIVELY SUPPORT A PEACE PROCESS THAT INCLUDES SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY?

Faced with the suffering of millions of Syrians, Canada must ensure that Syrian civil society, as a whole, plays a clear role so that its voice is heard during the negotiations and also in view of an eventual reconciliation process. Canada should show leadership by creating parallel, secure avenues that would enable groups from Syrian civil society to express their priorities and to fuel the peace process currently led by the United Nations. Peace must come from within the region, taking into account the perspectives of representatives of Syrian civil society, rather than just from armed groups. A lasting peace cannot be imposed from the outside. A political process led by Syrians which includes the participation of women and marginalized ethnic and religious groups, must be the foundation of peace and reconciliation in Syria.

In addition, Canada must promote the roadmap established by Resolution 2254 of the UN Security Council, adopted in December 2015. Canada must ensure that the peace process is transparent, inclusive and conducted for the sole purpose of putting an end to military escalation and of negotiating a political solution. In fact, Development and Peace does not believe that there is a military solution to the crisis and favours a political and diplomatic solution.

As requested by thousands of Canadians in a petition launched by Development and Peace to mark the fourth anniversary of the conflict, Canada must encourage the creation of a pluralistic and inclusive society, whose different components, including vulnerable groups are respected, and strengthen the voice of all Syrians working for a free society without ethnic, religious and social discrimination.

House of Peace, a Development and Peace partner based in Lebanon, works to improve social cohesion within Syrian society. The organization organizes conflict resolution activities with local communities affected by the crisis as well as with NGOs working in Lebanon and Syria.

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<tr>
<th>Syrian civil society faced with the humanitarian crisis</th>
<th>18 organizations from Syrian civil society launched an appeal in Geneva to all actors in the conflict, which called for a Syrian independent commission of inquiry on violations of international law.</th>
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<td>A dynamic civil society</td>
<td>“The Syrian conflict has resulted in a multitude of civil initiatives, most of which are undertaken by young people between 16 and 30 years of age. Organizations from Syrian civil society also have a high ratio of women, who play a crucial role in providing assistance and basic services as well as in building a sustainable peace process.”</td>
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1 Rana Khalaf, Oula Ramadan and Friederike Stolleis. *Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria 2011 - 2014*
WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF BLOCKING ACCESS TO HUMANITARIAN AID ON CIVILIAN POPULATIONS?

According to the United Nations, 13.5 million people in Syria need humanitarian aid. In total, 6.5 million people have been internally displaced. It is estimated that over 470,000 people have died in the conflict and hundreds of thousands more have been injured. Nearly 4.4 million Syrians have found refuge in neighboring countries, mainly in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Thousands more have sought refuge in Europe.

More than 400,000 Syrians trapped in besieged areas do not have access to humanitarian aid. Water is in low supply and most public hospitals in the country have been destroyed or damaged by bombings, while those that are still functional are overcrowded. There are also severe shortages of medicine.

International humanitarian law must be respected by ensuring that humanitarian aid is provided to the most vulnerable people inside Syria. Civilians must be immediately protected by ceasefires, requiring the cessation of the bombing of civilian infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and water supply sources, as well as the immediate lifting of sieges in besieged areas in order to allow for full freedom of movement, in particular so that the thousands of civilians trapped in besieged areas.

Development and Peace is working with trusted partners in Syria to deliver vital humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable. Until a diplomatic solution is found, Canada must actively work to ensure that aid reaches those who need it most. Without access to assistance, more Syrians will be severely affected by the crisis, and an entire generation of children will grow up without the food or education that they need.

In Aleppo, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) attempts to make the daily lives of displaced families affected by the violence as normal as possible by meeting some of their basic needs. JRS distributes hygiene kits that include soap, shampoo, and diapers for babies and provides medical assistance to the most vulnerable people so that they can retain their health and their dignity.

| Growing humanitarian needs                                                                 | → Up to 4.5 million people in Syria live in difficult-to-reach areas, including 400,000 people in 15 besieged locations who do not have access to the humanitarian aid they desperately need. |
| Civilians are the main victims                                                               | → More than 200 people died of starvation or from lack of medical care in Eastern Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus (besieged since 2012 by the regime) according to the Syrian American Medical Society Foundation. |
| Decline in development                                                                      | → In 2015, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the deaths of 55,219 people. Among them, 20,977 were civilians, including 2,574 children and 1,944 women and 8,931 men. |
|                                                                                             | → The country’s development has regressed by four decades according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). |
|                                                                                             | → Life expectancy has shortened by almost 13 years and school attendance has fallen by over 50% (2.1 million school age children in Syria no longer receive an education). |
THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION BETWEEN SYRIAN REFUGEES AND THEIR ALREADY VULNERABLE HOST POPULATIONS

More than 4 million refugees from Syria, who make up 95% of all Syrian refugees, are in just five countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Lebanon, a country one-third the size of Vancouver Island, has taken in over 1.2 million Syrian refugees, so that now one in five people in the country are from Syria. Turkey has received 1.9 million Syrian refugees, which is more than any other country around the world.

The massive influx of Syrian refugees has severely strained the socioeconomic fabric and infrastructure of Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Tensions between Syrian refugees and local residents who are competing for the same resources and services are at a breaking point.

Job creation projects, as well as creation of schools and hospitals to provide services for those in need, will offer refugees and residents the opportunity to work side by side, and would reinforce positive relationships between them and would lessen the perception of injustice that Syrian refugees have been disproportionately benefiting from external humanitarian aid. By supporting projects that provide livelihoods for all refugees as well as local residents living in poverty, Canada can contribute to social cohesion among diverse communities during this challenging time.

Basmeh & Zeitooneh, a Development and Peace partner, offers professional training in sewing and embroidery as well as computer and literacy courses to Syrian women refugees in Lebanon to enable them to invest in their economic potential and provide them with the means to acquire the basic skills needed to find decent jobs. In Arabic basmeh means smile and zeitooneh means olive, symbolizing both peace and food.

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<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
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<td>In Lebanon, problems already affecting the labour market have been exacerbated by the crisis: the number of unemployed people has doubled and the country’s informal sector has grown by 10%.</td>
<td>In 2015, according to a study by the International Labour Organization, 90% of Syrian refugees in Jordan working outside the camps did not have work permits and therefore worked in the informal economy and were not subject to Jordan’s labour regulations.</td>
<td>Of the 2.4 million Syrians having found refuge in Turkey since 2011, only 7,351 have obtained a work permit. Only Syrians who had the means to start their own businesses could obtain them, while others have been illegally employed as cheap labour.</td>
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Recommendations by Development and Peace

Canada must absolutely:

- Strengthen its work on the international diplomatic front to find a lasting peace through political rather than military means, and bring the voice of Syrian civil society to the negotiating table;
- Ensure access to humanitarian aid so that it can reach those most vulnerable and ensure the protection of civilians; and
- Promote both social cohesion among Syrian refugees and their host populations and self-sufficiency of refugees through the implementation of inclusive projects to ensure livelihoods.

Development and Peace’s response to the Syrian crisis

Since the fall of 2012, Development and Peace has been taking action in response to the Syrian crisis. The organization has programming in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey where it has invested $24.2 million in humanitarian aid and in local peace initiatives that have assisted over 600,000 Syrians. Development and Peace works in conjunction with local partner organizations, including Caritas Lebanon, Caritas Jordan and the Jesuit Refugee Service. Since the Syrian matching fund was announced by the Canadian government in September 2015, Development and Peace has collected $2.2 million in eligible donations. As we approach the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Development and Peace wishes to remind everyone that the situation is increasingly more difficult for the Syrian population whose needs will continue to be keenly felt for a number of years to come. Dignity is at the heart of Development and Peace’s response. The organization is able to continue its ongoing efforts due to the solidarity of Canadians and the courage and resilience of its partners.

Notes

Information updated on February 26, 2016.

Pax Christi International declaration in support for the start of a political process in Syria: hopeforsyria.wordpress.com

A joint appeal to end the suffering in Syria, initiated by UNICEF: unicef.org/media

Syria: the UN Commission of Inquiry denounces the thousands of deaths in custody: ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents

International Labour Office report concerning the issuing of work permits to Syrian refugees in Jordan: ilo.org

The OECD and the UNHCR are calling on governments to step up their efforts to integrate Syrian refugees: unhcr.org.uk
Development and Peace

Development and Peace is one of the most established international development organizations in Canada. It was founded in 1967 by the Catholic bishops of Canada to inspire the solidarity of Canadians towards their sisters and brothers in the Global South suffering the injustice of poverty. In its 50 years of existence, Development and Peace has invested $600 million in over 15,000 projects in Africa, Asia, Latin American and the Middle East. It is a strong and diverse movement of Canadians from coast to coast acting for justice, so that the world’s poorest people can live in dignity and with respect. Development and Peace is the official Canadian member of Caritas Internationalis, a global confederation of over 160 Catholic development organizations. In pursuit of its objective to build a world of justice, Development and Peace also belongs to several other networks, including Kairos in Canada and CIDSE at the international level.

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Five years of conflict in Syria