



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

April 12, 2013

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

For more than two years we have watched with growing concern and great sadness the horrible violence that has had such terrible consequences for the people of Syria. This unfolding tragedy and its tremendous human cost have gripped our attention. We are especially but not exclusively mindful of the suffering experienced by Christian communities in Syria. As Paul wrote to the Christian churches in Corinth, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it."

We have continued to communicate regularly and express our solidarity with Christian leaders of the churches in Syria as they have worked for peace and sought to respond to all in need regardless of their faith tradition over these many months. We have also responded through our international partners to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to all of those who have been affected -- inside and outside the country -- and we intend to continue that effort. We are steadfast in our support of immediate and unhindered access to assistance by all available means for victims of this war.

Finding ways to end the violence in Syria should remain a top priority of the United States and the international community. We give thanks for the tireless efforts of the several UN envoys and for the humanitarian assistance, including from the United States, provided through the United Nations system. Nonetheless, it is deeply regrettable that the international community has not yet been able to reach a consensus for how the civil war can be brought to a peaceful end. These efforts remain vital because so many innocent lives hang in the balance.

Our church recognizes that wars present "conflicting moral claims and agonizing decisions."¹ Therefore, we understand that our elected officials face difficult decisions about how to bring an end to wars once they have begun.

Thus, it is with heightened apprehension that we have heard louder calls in recent weeks for the United States to provide lethal military assistance to the Syrian opposition. Last year, in the face of escalating violence, increased human rights violations, particularly by the Assad regime, and growing sectarian tensions within Syria, we wrote a letter to Secretary of State Clinton agreeing with those who have been seeking "dialogue instead of further fighting."

We deeply appreciate that you have chosen that path of restraint and thus far have chosen to provide only non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition. As some appeal to you to take a different path, we are concerned about actions which could further endanger civilians and

¹ See "*For Peace in God's World*," a social statement adopted by the 1995 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. We urge your Administration and all others in the international community to continue and intensify your efforts to take steps to find new avenues toward peace and resolve the war through diplomatic means.

Our prayers continue to be with you and the people of Syria.

In God's grace,

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Murray D. Finck
Member, Middle East Caucus
Bishop, Pacifica Synod

The Rev. Gerald L. Mansholt
Member, Middle East Caucus
Bishop, Central States Synod

The Rev. Dean W. Nelson
Member, Middle East Caucus
Bishop, Southwest California Synod

The Rev. Harold L. Usgaard
Member, Middle East Caucus
Bishop, Southeastern Minnesota Synod

cc: The Honorable John F. Kerry, Secretary of State
H. E. Susan Rice, Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations
Mr. Denis McDonough, Chief of Staff, Executive Office of the President
Ambassador A. Elizabeth Jones, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs
Mr. Philip Gordon, Special Assistant to the President and Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Persian Gulf, National Security Council