

COMUNITÀ DI SANT'EGIDIO

Rome, Sant'Egidio, 2013, 3rd September

Excellency,

the war in Syria dramatically questions the international community. With more than 100,000 deaths, 4 million internally displaced persons and 2 million refugees, it represents a political and humanitarian crisis that threatens the stability of the whole Middle East and beyond.

We address an urgent appeal to you so that we may come out of a state of impasse in front of the continuation of this tragic situation. We cannot wait any longer. The more this situation of conflict lasts, the more any hope for peace is consumed.

We should soon find the way for a reasonable negotiation. The solutions are not simple. Syria is a mosaic of unique and fragile interpenetration of religious and ethnic minorities. It is located on the threshold of the ancient Middle Eastern fracture, made of old conflicts and open wounds. The war is likely to infect the whole region and especially it may easily overwhelm Lebanon. In addition to the legitimate interests of international security and those of neighboring countries, in Syria we witness the intertwining of delicate aspects of religious struggle and defense of minorities. The result is a complex geopolitical scenario, apparently uncompromising with the settlements designed in recent decades. Faced with a so deadly and geopolitically dense conflict, the temptation to powerlessness or to military shortcuts is strong.

As Community of Sant'Egidio, strong with a long experience of dialogue and commitment in the work for peace, we believe it is necessary to take decisive action to drive all the players on the road to a negotiated solution. Even in front of a disaster of similar proportions it is always possible to do something. We must defend the space of coexistence that - for better or worse - existed in the area. Gimmicks that lead to separate the various entities that make up the country today are not credible.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the peaceful and dialogical positions were silenced. In their place, from both sides, the choice for armed confrontation prevailed. But it is now clear that there is no military solution. No winner will emerge from the current conflict, while the different positions will be ever more radicalized. It will be worse for everyone and especially for the Syrians who are suffering in such an unspeakable way.

We must build a consensus in the international community: it does have sufficient power and authority to impose an immediate ceasefire. Only a truce may lead the parties to talk to each other, both Syrian and their respective allies. Well aware of the gravity of the situation, due to the extermination of innocent civilians and the use of prohibited weapons, the Community of Sant'Egidio with its experience in many conflicts and paths of peace, feels the need to reiterate that no one is able to win on the ground. To add violence to violence, by anyone, is a trap even for the best of intentions. To say that the solution in Syria is in negotiation does not express weakness, but political audacity. We are furthermore sure that a political settlement, and not a military solution, is the only one that history will not blame upon today's leaders. Every international actor, in taking an intelligent and generous step towards the negotiation, will show both strength and credibility.

We ask the G20 to express itself so that a people that is now hostage may find its future, so that the Syrians may speak to one another. Today, this possibility seems remote. International intervention should reopen the space for dialogue is the only possible solution before being all swept away in an even worse crisis. We appeal to you so that these arguments are firmly put on the agenda at the next G20 meeting in St. Petersburg.

While sharing with you those concerns, receive the assurance of my highest consideration

Prof. Andrea Riccardi
Founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio