



ORDO FRATRUM MINORUM



Message Concerning Syria

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Dear men and women of good will,

May the Lord give you peace!

On our own behalf, and that of our confrères who live in the Middle East, especially in Syria, in a region which is experiencing terrible warfare and violent conflicts, we wish to express our gratitude to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for his unwavering closeness to the Syrian people at a time when they are undergoing unspeakable suffering, particularly both in the east and west of the city of Aleppo.

We wish to associate ourselves with the words of the Holy Father: “We must note with great sadness that since our last meeting a year ago, despite extensive efforts made in a variety of areas, the logic of arms and oppression, hidden interests and violence continues to wreak devastation on these countries and that, even now, we have not been able to put an end to the exasperating suffering and repeated violations of human rights. [...] Violence begets violence, and we have the impression of being caught up in a spiral of arrogance and inertia from which there is no escape. (*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Members of Catholic Organizations Serving in Iraq, Syria and Neighboring Territories, Rome, 29th September 2016*).

Led by the example and teaching of our seraphic Holy Founder, Francis of Assisi, prophet of peace, we want to make our own the appeal made by Pope Francis, committing ourselves with all our might to his call: “Putting an end to the conflict is also in the hands of men and women: each of us can and must become a peacemaker, because every situation of violence and injustice is a wound to the body of the whole human family” (*Ibidem*).

Therefore, we appeal to all forces involved, and to all those who hold political responsibility, to put the good of the defenseless population of Syria, and the city of Aleppo, above and before anything else. We call on you to immediately silence your weapons; to put an end to hatred and every kind of violence, so that all may find and walk the path of peace, reconciliation and forgiveness.

We ask that the entire International Community take concrete steps to designate Aleppo a Safe Zone, using lessons and solutions acquired in previous conflicts, in order to ensure maximum cooperation, and the consequent success of such an initiative. A Safe Zone surrounding Aleppo would allow the whole population, worn down by the terrible effects of the conflict, to receive essential humanitarian aid without discrimination, to find safety and security, and to recover some trust and hope in a speedy solution, which would be motivated by peace alone.

Other Safe Zones should be created in Syria as part of a comprehensive plan to ensure the safety of all, and finally achieve peace. These areas should be placed under the control of UN peacekeepers, which would operate under a Security Council mandate and with the full cooperation of the various parties involved in the war.

We also urge countries world-wide to be as generous as possible in accepting Syrian refugees, while fully respecting national and local laws, and to offer all the assistance necessary to meet the urgent humanitarian and security needs of Syria.

It is only in this way, by setting aside all partisan interests, that an end may be brought to this devastating conflict, and that a real path towards rebuilding people's lives, dignity and hope may open up.

We pledge our prayers and our support to all those who suffer so terribly in this war, as well as to our confrères who courageously continue to live in Syria. Through their closeness and practical service to all those weighed down by the harrowing consequences of the conflict, the friars have shown themselves to be true "good Samaritans".

We renew our own commitment, and we also invite all of you, men and women of good will, to become true peacemakers. May the thirst for peace, which is found in the heart of every person but especially in the hearts of our brothers and sisters in Syria, be satisfied.

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