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CANADA

## **RESPONDING TO THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA**

### **Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

**Dean Allison  
Chair**

**MAY 2014**

**41st PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION**

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## **Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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has the honour to present its

## **FIFTH REPORT**

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied the situation in Syria and has agreed to report the following:



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# RESPONDING TO THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA

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## INTRODUCTION

Beginning in December 2013, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (“the Committee”) held a number of hearings on the situation in Syria, the last of which was held on 5 March 2014. It heard from Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), academics, and representatives of civil society and humanitarian relief organizations. The overall context of the armed conflict afflicting that country, and the humanitarian crisis it has generated, were described to Committee members in very bleak terms.

Syria has been affected by violence and unrest for the past three years. Beginning in March 2011, the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad arbitrarily and violently repressed peaceful demonstrators who were seeking respect for their human rights and greater democracy. In this way, the Assad regime transformed peaceful demands for change into an insurgency. Since that time, the intensity of violence in Syria steadily increased to the point that it became a full-fledged armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> This crisis has caused immense human suffering. It was estimated at the time of the Committee’s last meeting on Syria that more than 140,000 people had been killed, including over 10,000 children. Many more are living with injuries and in destitution inside Syria and beyond.

This report provides an overview of some of the key elements of the conflict in Syria, based on the situation at the time of the Committee’s meetings. The report summarizes the testimony received by the Committee at that time in relation to: the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict; the trajectory of the military conflict within Syria; the international attempts to advance a political transition for Syria; and, the implementation of the international agreement to eliminate Syria’s chemical weapons. Based on this testimony, the report concludes with observations and recommendations.

## A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS OF HISTORIC PROPORTIONS

The United Nations (UN) estimates that — of a population of 21.4 million — 9.3 million Syrians are in need of assistance.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the displacement from the fighting has reached historic levels: the crisis has generated approximately 2.6 million

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1 International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], [“Syria: ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent maintain aid effort amid increased fighting,”](#) Operational Update, 17 July 2012; Stephanie Nebehay, [“Exclusive: Red Cross ruling raises questions of Syrian war crimes,”](#) *Reuters*, 14 July 2012; British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), [“Syria in state of war, says Bashar al-Assad,”](#) 27 June 2012; Stuart Casey-Maslen, ed., *The War Report 2012*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 165.

2 United Nations [UN] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], [Humanitarian Bulletin: Syrian Arab Republic](#), Issue 43, 13–26 February 2014.

refugees<sup>3</sup> in neighbouring countries — primarily Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq — and displaced 6.5 million persons within Syria, where humanitarian needs remain acute.<sup>4</sup> Conrad Sauvé, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Red Cross, informed the Committee that “public services have broken down” in Syria. In addition to the needs of those who have been displaced, “there are growing needs among civilians who are still in their homes but without any means of support.”<sup>5</sup>

On a regional level, Jessie Thomson, Director of CARE Canada’s Humanitarian Assistance and Emergency Team, stated: “The Syrian crisis represents the largest and most devastating humanitarian crisis of its kind in recent years with refugee numbers surpassing those at the peak of the Rwandan genocide.”<sup>6</sup> According to Leslie Norton, Director General of the International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate in DFATD, the UN “estimates that the number of refugees could reach 4.1 million by December of 2014.”<sup>7</sup> The current UN appeal for funding to address humanitarian needs associated with the Syrian crisis is “the largest request” in response to “a single situation in the UN’s history.”<sup>8</sup>

The pressures on Syria’s neighbours resulting from the refugee crisis have been significant, as available shelter, food, water, health care, educational facilities, and employment opportunities have become stretched and scarce, affecting the refugees as well as already vulnerable populations within the host countries. Ms. Thomson indicated that “an estimated 83% of Syrian refugees are currently living outside of refugee camps, dispersed across cities and smaller communities throughout the region and mostly living in host communities.”<sup>9</sup> While the absolute number of refugees is itself a revealing indicator of the magnitude of the regional crisis, the relative burden on specific host communities must also be recognized if the impact of the refugee numbers on neighbouring countries is to be understood. As Ms. Thomson informed the Committee: “In some areas, refugees represent as much as 50% of the local community.”<sup>10</sup>

With respect to protection needs and vulnerabilities, the Committee heard some testimony about women and girls who have been forced to cross Syria’s borders and their exposure to an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, including the threat of

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3 At the time of the Committee’s finalization of this report, the United Nations Refugee Agency [UNHCR] estimated that there were 2,734,616 “persons of concern” in the region. This figure included 2,667,033 registered Syrian refugees, and 67,583 persons awaiting registration. See UNHCR, “[Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal](#),” accessed 1 May 2014.

4 OCHA, [Humanitarian Bulletin: Syrian Arab Republic](#), Issue 43, 13–26 February 2014.

5 House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development [FAAE], [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

6 Ibid.

7 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 February 2014.

8 Ibid.

9 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

10 Ibid.

early or forced marriage. Concerns were also expressed by witnesses regarding the exploitation of displaced children more generally.

Witnesses raised the troubling specter of a Syrian “lost generation”. Children have suffered directly as a result of the violence. In addition, millions are out of school and many are without adequate protection, separated from their families and cut off from necessary medical care and other support. The international community is trying to respond to this situation through the recently established “No Lost Generation” initiative, which is led by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and supported by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Save the Children, World Vision, and other non-governmental organizations. Ms. Norton told the Committee that this initiative “aims to address the hidden impact this long conflict has had on children, with practical investments to expand access to learning and psychosocial support, strengthen social cohesion and peace-building, and restore hope for the future to millions of children.”<sup>11</sup>

Ensuring humanitarian access<sup>12</sup> — a key factor that determines whether the international community is able to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people — has been one of the most significant challenges of the Syrian conflict. This problem was highlighted during the Committee’s meetings in early 2014, notwithstanding the fact that the UN Security Council had issued a presidential statement<sup>13</sup> in October 2013 calling for “immediate action to facilitate safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance in the whole country, including in areas and districts where humanitarian needs are especially urgent.”<sup>14</sup>

In speaking about the situation, Mr. Sauv  noted: “The Red Cross movement has access, but not at all times because of constraints such as intensified fighting in urban and rural areas, the deteriorating security situation, and the growing number of administrative and bureaucratic obstacles.”<sup>15</sup> DFATD officials explained that obstacles to access within Syria have included checkpoints along delivery routes and other restrictions on the movement of aid, as well as delays experienced by humanitarian actors in receiving necessary visas and registration from the Syrian authorities. Disturbingly, humanitarian access has also been impeded as a result of the insecurity faced by aid workers.

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11 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 February 2014.

12 According to the OCHA, humanitarian access is a “two-pronged concept” that includes “humanitarian actors’ ability to reach populations in need” and “affected populations’ access to assistance and services”. See: OCHA, “[Thematic Areas: Humanitarian Access](#).” See also: UN General Assembly, “[Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations](#),” A/RES/46/182, 19 December 1991.

13 According to the website of the UN Security Council: “A presidential statement is a statement made by the President of the Security Council on behalf of the Council, adopted at a formal meeting of the Council and issued as an official document of the Council.” See UN Security Council, “[Presidential Statements](#).”

14 UN Security Council, “[Statement by the President of the Security Council](#),” S/PRST/2013/15, 2 October 2013.

15 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

Mr. Sauvé underlined that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent — the primary distributor of, and coordinating mechanism for, humanitarian assistance within Syria — has lost more than 34 volunteers and staff, who “have been killed in the conflict in providing humanitarian assistance.”<sup>16</sup> Stephen Salewicz, Director of DFATD’s Humanitarian Assistance Division, also told the Committee that a number of UN staff have been killed or abducted, while others are missing.<sup>17</sup>

In a potential sign of progress, on 22 February 2014, the UN Security Council was finally able to reach unanimous agreement on a resolution focused on humanitarian access. Among other action items, the resolution:

*Demands* that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders, in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches people in need through the most direct routes[.]<sup>18</sup>

It also:

... *underscores* the need for the parties to agree on humanitarian pauses, days of tranquillity, localized ceasefires and truces to allow humanitarian agencies safe and unhindered access to all affected areas in Syria, recalling that starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited by international humanitarian law[.]<sup>19</sup>

It concludes by expressing the Security Council’s “intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance with [the] resolution.”<sup>20</sup>

At the time of the Committee’s final meeting on this issue on 5 March 2014, it remained to be seen whether the Security Council’s adoption of this resolution would lead to consistent and widespread improvements to humanitarian access and the enlargement of safe humanitarian space within Syria. At that time, Nigel Fisher, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), provided his assessment to the Committee, stating: “We don’t expect the regime to suddenly stop impeding access and creating blockages, but we will assertively report any progress and all impediments.”<sup>21</sup> He noted that the

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16 Ibid.

17 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 December 2013.

18 UN Security Council, [S/RES/2139 \(2014\)](#), para. 6.

19 Ibid., para. 5.

20 Ibid., para. 17.

21 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 March 2014.

resolution requires the UN Secretary-General to report monthly to the Security Council on its implementation.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the February 2014 UN-coordinated evacuation of some 1,400 people from the besieged city of Homs — an operation that saw humanitarian workers come under fire — there were at that time an estimated 250,000 people still living in areas under siege in the country.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the Homs evacuation itself required nine months of negotiation. Mr. Fisher also pointed to a disturbing specific incident that took place during the Homs evacuation: “Young men leaving the besieged areas, under [the UN’s] protection, were promptly arrested by the Syrian army and pro-regime militia.”<sup>24</sup> When speaking more generally about humanitarian access and the issue of cross-border convoys, Mr. Fisher noted that convoys have been given better access to Syria when they “have been taking supplies to government-controlled areas.” He emphasized that humanitarian assistance must reach people “on the basis of need, not on the basis of location.”<sup>25</sup>

## A STALEMATED MILITARY CONFLICT

The armed conflict itself has been characterized by its complexity, its fluidity, its fragmentation and its multi-dimensional nature. In general terms, the Assad regime — which is dominated by the Alawite (Shiite) minority and supported to a certain degree by other Syrian minority groups — is backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, that is itself backed by Iran. The opposition forces fighting against the Assad regime are predominantly Sunni Arabs, the religious and ethnic majority of the Syrian population. They have received varying degrees and forms of support from Sunni governments in the region, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar, as well as — to a lesser degree — from certain western governments.

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22 The Secretary-General’s first report to the UN Security Council on the implementation of Resolution 2139 was provided to the Council on 24 March 2014. See [Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2139 \(2014\)](#), UN Security Council, S/2014/208, 24 March 2014. The Secretary General’s second report to the Council was provided on 23 April 2014. In its observations section, the report states: “Two months since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), none of the parties to the conflict have adhered to the demands of the Council. Civilians are not being protected. The security situation is deteriorating and humanitarian access to those most in need is not improving. It remains an extremely challenging environment in which to work. Thousands of people are not getting the medical care that they need, including life-saving medicines.” With respect to humanitarian access, the report estimates that “3.5 million people reside in areas that are difficult or impossible for humanitarian actors to reach owing to a number of factors ...” Regarding the number of people who are still in besieged areas, the report states: “It is estimated that approximately 197,000 people live in areas that are besieged by Government forces in the Old City of Homs, Moadamiyet al-Sham, eastern Ghouta, Darayya and Yarmouk, while approximately 45,000 people live in areas besieged by opposition forces in Nubul and Zahra.” See: [Implementation of Security Council resolution 2139 \(2014\): Report of the Secretary-General](#), UN Security Council, S/2014/295, 23 April 2014.

23 OCHA, “[Syria: Valerie Amos on aid convoy to Homs](#),” 10 February 2014.

24 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 March 2014.

25 Ibid.

In its early days, the opposition was composed largely of groups and activists characterized by moderate ideologies and aims, including defectors from the Syrian army. However, as the crisis has continued and the atrocities committed against Syria's population have mounted, groups of a more extremist — and, in certain cases, jihadist — nature have emerged.<sup>26</sup> These groups have proliferated in number, territorial influence and battlefield successes. In addition, Kurdish fighters now dominate parts of Syria's northeast, having recently announced the establishment of a provincial government in that area of the country. Andrew Tabler, Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, framed the broader context of Syria's conflict as follows:

Sectarianism has grown with the help of each group's regional backers, with Shiite-dominated Iran supporting the Assad regime and Shiite-based forces on the one side, and the Sunni Arab Gulf and North African countries standing on the side of the opposition. Assistance has included donations from governments as well as individuals in these countries and the flow of assistance has been haphazard, which has helped fuel extremism on both sides.

In many ways, the battle for the future of the Middle East between Iran and the Arab countries is being waged in the streets, mountains, and fields of Syria, but these are not the only regional interests at stake. Turkey and the Kurds are also vying for power and influence in Syria. Globally, Russia continues to support the Assad regime with weapons and the west supports moderate factions of the opposition overtly with non-lethal assistance and covertly with small weapons and training.<sup>27</sup>

In describing Syria's crisis as a "tragedy", Mark Green, President of the International Republican Institute, said: "With a bitter sectarian war now in its third year, jihadist fighters in the ascendancy, and no end to the killing in sight, the conditions could hardly be worse."<sup>28</sup>

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26 When he appeared on 5 December 2013, Mark Gwozdecky, Director General of DFATD's Middle East and Maghreb Bureau, told the Committee: "The armed opposition is a collection of actors existing along a wide spectrum, from the secular elements of defected Syrian security services personnel, through domestic Islamist groups, to al-Qaeda affiliated militia with significant foreign membership and support." See: FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 December 2013.

27 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 12 February 2014.

28 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

A number of witnesses noted that the Assad regime has a military firepower advantage. The regime has relied heavily on indiscriminate<sup>29</sup> bombardments — including through the recent use of “barrel bombs”<sup>30</sup> — and the shelling of rebel-held and populated areas. Its tactical effectiveness on the battlefield has also been bolstered in recent months with support from Hezbollah militia fighters, who have crossed over from Lebanon, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. In the absence of a UN Security Council resolution imposing an arms embargo on the country, the Assad regime is able to have its weaponry replenished, including with supplies from Russia.

Divisions within the opposition have contributed to the complexity of the conflict. The different groups have cooperated, but also have competed for territory, leadership, supplies and influence with the population; at times, they have clashed violently. Dennis Horak, Director of DFATD’s Middle East and Maghreb Political Relations Division, stated: “While the opposition fighters have never really managed to produce a united front, the war is now evolving into a series of different conflicts involving a variety of actors with different goals and shifting allegiances.”<sup>31</sup> The testimony provided to the Committee indicated that the opposition movement was not cohesive or unified.

Some witnesses noted that there are also broader divisions and a general disconnect between the political opposition in exile — which has established greater linkages with western governments — and the opposition on the ground in Syria fighting the Assad regime. Mark Gwozdecky, Director General of DFATD’s Middle East and Maghreb Bureau, told the Committee:

Canada has not recognized the Syrian Opposition Coalition, or the SOC, as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people, as we are not persuaded that the SOC is sufficiently representative, has reassured Syria’s minority communities that their rights will be protected or has unequivocally condemned extremism. We have gone to great lengths to ensure that any support provided to opposition actors is directed at the

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29 Indiscriminate attacks are those:

“(a) which are not directed at a specific military objective;

(b) which employ a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective; or

(c) which employ a method or means of combat the effects of which cannot be limited as required by international humanitarian law;

and consequently, in each such case, are of a nature to strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without discrimination.”

See International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], “[Rule 12: Definition of Indiscriminate Attacks](#),” Customary IHL [International Humanitarian Law] database.

30 Barrel bombs are “oil drums or cylinders packed with explosives and shrapnel.” See Stephen Kalin, “[Syrian forces kill 83 in barrel bomb attacks in Aleppo: activists](#),” Reuters, 2 February 2014. The Committee was told by Nigel Fisher (OCHA) on 5 March 2014 that: “The Syrian regime drops highly destructive barrel bombs on residential areas from Aleppo to Yabrud on the Lebanese border, to Daraa in the south, with impunity.” See FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 March 2014.

31 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 February 2014.

democratic, secular, progressive elements of the opposition and is not diverted to extremist groups.<sup>32</sup>

Mr. Gwozdecky also indicated that the ability to make determinations and receive assurances regarding which opposition elements could be provided with support is complicated by the reality that Canada does not, at present, “have eyes and ears on the ground.”<sup>33</sup>

While forces loyal to the Assad regime appear to be taking advantage of the above factors and circumstances to make gains militarily, the conflict remains — in the larger picture — stalemated. Mr. Horak summarized the situation as of February 2014 as follows:

The regime retains the military momentum in the conflict, but overall, neither the Assad regime nor opposition groups are in a position to militarily defeat the other in the medium term. It is not clear, however, that either side realizes that reality.<sup>34</sup>

Joshua Landis, Associate Professor and Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma, indicated his view that there is, in Syria, “a recipe for a very long, grinding, sectarian battle.”<sup>35</sup>

Estimates of the breakdown of religious groups within Syria vary. Some estimates indicate that about 70% of the population is Sunni, with religious minorities — including Alawite and other Shiite Muslims and Christians — comprising the remainder.<sup>36</sup> The Committee was briefed by Canada’s Ambassador for Religious Freedom, Dr. Andrew Bennett. He noted that “religious divides in Syria have been manifested in a litany of attacks and counterattacks on religious communities and holy sites.”<sup>37</sup> Since the conflict began, these attacks have included the destruction of more than “1,000 mosques and 90 Christian churches, monasteries, shrines, and buildings around the country,” with many more being vandalized.<sup>38</sup>

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32 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 December 2013.

33 Ibid.

34 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 February 2014.

35 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 12 February 2014.

36 Presentation provided to FAAE by Professor Joshua Landis, received on 12 February 2014. In a written response to a question that had been raised during the Committee’s meeting on 10 February 2014, DFATD indicated that Sunni Muslims comprise 74% of Syria’s population of approximately 22 million people, Alawites 12%, Christians 10%, and Shi’a Muslims, Ismailis and Druze 4%. DFATD, “House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development: February 10, 2014,” received on 24 April 2014.

37 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 10 February 2014.

38 Ibid.

Beyond the human suffering that it has caused, there are two broader concerns associated with the conflict's endurance. The first is regional spillover. As Bessma Momani, Associate Professor at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, told the Committee: "Syria is not just imploding, it's exploding."<sup>39</sup> Mr. Tabler similarly argued that the conflict "has not only metastasized, but has also been spreading to neighbouring countries."<sup>40</sup> While these regional dynamics are arguably as complex as those within Syria, key concerns have been raised regarding the stability of Lebanon and Jordan. The former country has a long and complicated history with its larger neighbour, Syria, and suffered from its own protracted and sectarian civil war (1975–1990). Professor Momani noted the "fault lines of sectarianism" in Lebanon, which has seen "tit-for-tat bombing" attributed to different groups in recent months.<sup>41</sup> With respect to Jordan, it has received significant numbers of refugees from Syria in the last few years.<sup>42</sup> The country had already been supporting many refugees from Iraq — which itself remains fragile and prone to violence — in addition to Palestinian refugees who have resided there for decades.

The second broader concern relates to international security: the prospect that Syria could export its conflict dynamics. Mr. Green told the Committee that:

The [U.S.] intelligence community estimates there are between 75,000 and 115,000 fighters in Syria, including more than 20,000 affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, an al-Qaeda affiliate. All told, there are up to 11,000 individuals from 74 outside nations fighting in Syria. Most of these extremists come from elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. We haven't even begun to understand the long-term impact of their eventual return home and the destabilizing effect they may well have on their countries of origin.<sup>43</sup>

Given Syria's long-standing geographic importance at the heart of the Middle East and the reality that its increasingly sectarian and ethnic conflict is currently drawing in extremist groups and individuals from neighbouring countries and beyond, the festering conflict in Syria presents risks for regional stability and, potentially, international security.

## A STALLED POLITICAL PROCESS

The search for a political solution to the conflict in Syria has centered on the "Geneva Communiqué". It was adopted on 30 June 2012 following discussions — known

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39 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

40 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 12 February 2014.

41 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

42 As of 30 April 2014, the UNHCR estimated that there were 594,258 "persons of concern" in Jordan. As of 28 April 2014, the UNHCR estimated that there were 1,040,322 "persons of concern" in Lebanon, including 990,458 "Registered Syrian Refugees." See UNHCR, "[Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal](#)," accessed 1 May 2014.

43 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

as “Geneva I” — among the Action Group for Syria.<sup>44</sup> It was endorsed in late September 2013 by the UN Security Council. The communiqué establishes key principles and a framework for a “Syrian-led political process leading to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and enables them independently and democratically to determine their own future.”<sup>45</sup> The communiqué states that one of the key steps for any transition in Syria would be “the establishment of a transitional governing body that can establish a neutral environment in which the transition can take place, with the transitional governing body exercising full executive powers.”<sup>46</sup> That body “could include members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups and shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent.”<sup>47</sup>

A long-awaited international conference on Syria began on 22 January 2014 in Switzerland, under the sponsorship of the UN, with the intention of implementing the provisions of the Geneva Communiqué. These “Geneva II” talks included — for the first time since the conflict began in March 2011 — direct talks between the two sides to the Syrian conflict under the mediation of the Joint Special Representative of the UN and Arab League, Lakhdar Brahimi. The first round of talks began on 25 January and ended on 31 January; the second round began on 10 February and ended on 15 February. No date has yet been agreed for the resumption of talks.

The “Geneva II” talks have produced few — if any — political results. In remarks following the conclusion of the first round, Joint Special Representative Brahimi indicated that “the gaps between the sides remain wide.”<sup>48</sup> The situation seemed to have become more intractable following the second round. By 15 February 2014, it appeared that the parties had reached an impasse.<sup>49</sup>

Particularly during the second round of talks, the divergent premises informing the two sides’ negotiating positions hindered the process. While the opposition’s delegation focused on the need to negotiate a political transition, the delegation from the Syrian government would not engage meaningfully on this key issue, instead prioritizing the need for action to combat terrorism and extremism in the country, which it equates with the

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44 The Action Group for Syria includes: the Secretaries General of the UN and Arab League, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Turkey, Iraq (Chair of the Arab League Summit), Kuwait (Chair of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Arab League), Qatar (Chair of the Arab Follow-up Committee on Syria of the Arab League), and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

45 “Annex II: Action Group for Syria Final Communiqué, 30 June 2012,” in UN Security Council, [S/RES/2118](#) (2013).

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 UN News Centre, “[Full transcript of press conference by Joint Special Representative for Syria Lakhdar Brahimi – Geneva](#),” 31 January 2014.

49 UN News Centre, “[UN-Arab League envoy apologizes to Syrian people over stalemate in peace talks](#),” 15 February 2014.

opposition. The Syrian government's delegation took this approach, even though the goal of the Geneva II talks was to further the implementation of the Geneva Communiqué. As Mr. Horak had underscored in his remarks to the Committee in early February: "The question of a transitional governing body was and remains the most contentious. It is the fundamental point of division."<sup>50</sup> The disappointment associated with the Geneva II talks was captured by Mr. Green, who noted that "they have failed to reduce the violence, let alone produce a political solution."<sup>51</sup>

## THE ELIMINATION OF SYRIA'S CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Concerns had also emerged during the Committee's hearings in February 2014 over delays in Syria's implementation of the agreed timetable for the destruction of its chemical weapons arsenal and related facilities. This plan was agreed to by Syria and the international community in late September 2013.

Sabine Nolke, Director General of DFATD's Non-Proliferation and Security Threat Reduction Bureau, told the Committee that Syria had "openly admitted" its possession of chemical weapons in July 2012.<sup>52</sup> Following reports in spring 2013 of "small-scale attacks against opposition areas, with minimal casualties," the deadliest chemical weapons attack of the conflict took place on 21 August 2013 in Ghouta, which is in the outskirts of the capital city of Damascus. Ms. Nolke cited estimates published by the U.S. government that "this attack took the lives of over 1,400 people, including many women and children."<sup>53</sup>

In response to this horrific attack, and following "a chain reaction of unprecedented diplomatic activity,"<sup>54</sup> the governments of the United States and Russia reached agreement — on 14 September 2013 — on a Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, the Syrian government deposited its instrument of accession to the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction*. The Syrian government subsequently submitted a report detailing its chemical weapons stockpiles, and related information on storage, production and research facilities. Building on the U.S.–Russia Framework agreement, the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) agreed — on 27 September 2013 — that Syria would "complete the elimination of all chemical weapons material and equipment",

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50 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 February 2014.

51 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

52 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 December 2013.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons [OPCW] Executive Council, "[Joint National Paper by the Russian Federation and the United States of America: Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons](#)," 33<sup>rd</sup> Meeting, 20 September 2013, EC-M-33/NAT.1, 17 September 2013.

according to established phases and timetables.<sup>56</sup> The UN Security Council endorsed this decision, and called “for its full implementation in the most expedient and safest manner.”<sup>57</sup> A joint UN-OPCW mission was deployed to oversee this process.

The process of eliminating Syria’s chemical weapons and related equipment is to be completed by 30 June 2014. As Ms. Nolke told the Committee in early December 2013: “The ambition but also the risks associated with this initiative cannot be overstated. Never has the OPCW or any other body attempted to verify and inspect the destruction of chemical weapons in a conflict zone.”<sup>58</sup> Progress with respect to the initial two phases of the process was positive. Ms. Nolke commented that the agreed inspections of Syria’s chemical weapons sites, as declared by the Syrian government, had taken place by 1 November 2013, as had “the destruction of all critical equipment in the production of chemical weapons at declared mixing and filling facilities...”<sup>59</sup>

The third and final phase of the process involves the removal of Syria’s deadliest chemical agents from the Syrian port of Latakia for destruction, including aboard a specially modified U.S. vessel. Speaking in early December 2013, Ms. Nolke indicated that the “more critical” agents were to have been removed from Syria by 31 December 2013, with a “second wave of chemical precursors of a less sensitive nature” to have been removed by 5 February 2014.<sup>60</sup> However, when Isabelle Roy, Acting Director General of DFATD’s Non-proliferation and Security Threat Reduction Bureau, subsequently appeared before the Committee on 5 February 2014, she said that, due to a number of challenges that had been encountered — including insecurity related to the ongoing armed conflict — and the Syrian government’s obfuscation, the deadlines for this phase had not been met. Two deliveries of chemical agents were “finally”<sup>61</sup> made to designated vessels, the first on 7 January 2014, the second on 27 January 2014. Based on those shipments, however, Ms. Roy noted that “less than 5%”<sup>62</sup> of the chemical agents that were supposed to have been removed from Syria as of 5 February 2014 had in fact been removed. Furthermore, in his appearance before the Committee one week later, Mr. Tabler stated that the Syrian government “is now demanding its chemical weapons sites be inactivated instead of physically destroyed as is required under the convention for the prohibition of chemical weapons.”<sup>63</sup>

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56 “Annex I: OPCW Executive Council Decision: Decision on destruction of Syrian chemical weapons,” in UN Security Council, [S/RES/2118 \(2013\)](#).

57 UN Security Council, [S/RES/2118 \(2013\)](#).

58 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 December 2013.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 February 2014.

62 Ibid.

63 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 12 February 2014.

On 4 March 2014, the OPCW announced that Syria had submitted a “revised proposal” in which it committed to “complete the removal of all chemicals from Syria before the end of April 2014.”<sup>64</sup> While important progress<sup>65</sup> has been made in the removal of Syria’s declared stockpile, the commitments undertaken by Syria have yet to be fully realized.<sup>66</sup>

## OBSERVATIONS

There are many possible scenarios for Syria’s future if the conflict continues along its current trajectory. While a protracted, large-scale humanitarian and refugee crisis is already a certainty, other possible scenarios include state collapse or a fragmentation of the country into regime and militia-controlled areas. At the same time, it appears that there are no “quick fixes” with respect to foreign policy options that could be employed by western governments to resolve the conflict. As Mr. Tabler argued: “The days of easy foreign policy options in Syria are over.”<sup>67</sup>

That said, witnesses put forward a number of observations and recommendations for steps that could be taken by the international community and Canada to mitigate the suffering of the Syrian people in the immediate term, and to try to encourage a democratic transition and national reconciliation in the longer term. The reasons for doing so are compelling. The conflict not only has had a horrendous human toll, but it also has been characterized by a flagrant disregard for international law and standards. There are also geopolitical interests at stake. As noted previously, among many regional considerations is the need to support Jordan and to ensure political stability and security in Lebanon — which has sectarian tensions similar to those found in Syria.

In his address to the international conference on Syria, which was convened at the opening of the Geneva II process in January 2014, Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs,

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64 OPCW, “[Syria Submits Revised Proposal to OPCW for Removal of Chemicals and Accelerates Pace of Deliveries to Latakia](#),” 4 March 2014.

65 By [20 March](#), the OPCW-UN Joint Mission reported that more than 49% of Syria’s chemical stockpile had been removed for destruction, including 34.8% of the most dangerous “Priority 1” chemicals. On [14 April](#), the Joint Mission reported that the overall portion of chemicals removed from Syria was 65.1%. On [20 April](#), the Joint Mission reported “that approximately 80 per cent of Syria’s chemical weapons material has been removed or destroyed in-country.” By [22 April](#) that total had reached 86.5%, including 88.7% of all Priority 1 chemicals. On [24 April](#), the Joint Mission reported that the total portion of chemical material removed from Syria and destroyed in country was 92.5%.

66 On 29 April 2014, Ambassador Robert P. Mikulak, United States Delegation to the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, stated: “While we recognize the accomplishment reflected in the removal of 92 percent of the declared stockpile, this job is not done until it’s fully done.” He also stated: “Despite the destruction deadlines established in this Council by consensus, twelve chemical weapons production facilities declared by Syria remain structurally intact.” He further stated, among other points, that “additional attention will need to be focused on verifying the accuracy and completeness of Syria’s submissions.” See: United States Department of State, “[Statement to the Fortieth Meeting of the Executive Council](#),” The Hague, Netherlands, 29 April 2014.

67 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 12 February 2014.

John Baird, framed the stakes of the Syrian conflict and its repercussions. He said: “Until the dignity and freedom demanded by the Syrian people are enshrined in a peaceful settlement and the institutions that will uphold it, this war will not end, the terrorist threat will increase, the human nightmare will continue, and the violence will threaten all of Syria’s neighbours.”<sup>68</sup>

## A. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

It was clear from the Committee’s meetings that the international community needs to push for full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Syria. The UN Security Council, in Resolution 2139 (2014), has called upon all parties to the conflict to “immediately lift the sieges of populated areas”.<sup>69</sup> It has condemned violence and threats against humanitarian actors and demanded that all parties allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In addition, the Council has also demanded that all parties to the conflict cease attacks against civilians and respect the neutrality of medical personnel, equipment, transport and supplies.<sup>70</sup> Now that the UN Security Council has adopted this resolution on humanitarian access, it is imperative that the international community continually monitor its implementation and insist that the Syrian authorities in particular, but also the opposition groups, comply fully and expeditiously with its terms.

In general, witnesses drew attention to the serious violations of international law that have taken place in the Syrian conflict.<sup>71</sup> Canada has consistently, and in the strongest possible language, condemned these violations. Mr. Fisher expressed his shock to the Committee in stating: “I’ve been in many crises, and this is the crisis where I find there is the most single-minded disregard for all the norms and international standards that have been developed.”<sup>72</sup> More specifically, speaking on 5 March 2014, he said that in the months following the 2 October 2013 Statement by the President of the UN Security Council (S/PRST/2013/15),

[...] the conflict has in fact intensified. Sieges continue to be used as a weapon of war. Systematic targeting of communities on the basis of religious affiliation continues. There has been no sign of a reduction of the indiscriminate nature of violence: aerial bombardment, especially the regime’s use of barrel bombs, as well mortars and car

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68 Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development [DFATD], “[Address by Minister Baird at Geneva II Talks on Syria](#),” Montreux, Switzerland, 22 January 2014.

69 UN Security Council, [S/RES/2139](#) (2014), para. 5.

70 Ibid., Preamble and paras 3, 5, 8.

71 For further information on the human rights situation in Syria, see: [Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic](#), United Nations Security Council, S/2014/31, 27 January 2014; and, [Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#), United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Human Rights Council, 7<sup>th</sup> Report, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February 2014 (published on 5 March 2014).

72 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 March 2014.

bombs in populated areas. Syrian government forces and allied militia have been responsible for countless killings, disappearances, maimings, and torture. Civilian institutions have been attacked, including [UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — UNRWA] schools.

Opposition forces, especially extremist elements, have been responsible for summary executions, recruitment of children for combat, sexual abuse, and use of terror tactics in civilian areas. The Secretary-General of the United Nations recently submitted to the Security Council his report on children and armed conflict in Syria, depicting what he called “unspeakable” suffering of civilians.<sup>73</sup>

With respect to accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, as well as violations and abuses of human rights in Syria, Ms. Nolke (DFATD) told the Committee: “Minister Baird has made it very clear that accountability for the crimes committed in Syria against the civilian population need to be accounted for and that the perpetrators need to be brought to justice.”<sup>74</sup> In response to a question on this issue, she also said:

The Security Council would have the power to refer the situation in Syria, as they did with the situation in Libya, to the [International Criminal Court — ICC] and to the prosecutor for consideration, so that is an option. Whether or not that will happen is obviously a matter for the Security Council to determine.<sup>75</sup>

The need “to end impunity for violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights” is stressed in UN Security Council Resolution 2139 (2014).<sup>76</sup> The resolution “*reaffirms* that those who have committed or are otherwise responsible for such violations and abuses in Syria must be brought to justice”.<sup>77</sup>

The international community also needs to continue to push for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013), including the complete elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons and physical destruction of related facilities by the end of June 2014. A key tool in this regard is the joint UN-OPCW mission. Canada is providing \$15 million to this mission. Ms. Roy (DFATD) told the Committee: “Of this, \$10 million will be allocated to the OPCW trust fund, and the remaining \$5 million will be provided to the U.S. Department of Defense in support of their destruction efforts aboard the MV *Cape Ray*. This places Canada among the top five donors.”<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, pressure must be maintained on the parties to engage constructively in direct negotiations and to implement the principles of the Geneva Communiqué. The latter point is particularly germane in the case of the representatives of the Syrian

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73 Ibid.

74 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 December 2013.

75 Ibid.

76 UN Security Council, [S/RES/2139](#) (2014), para. 13.

77 Ibid.

78 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 February 2014.

government, who refused to engage in a serious way on the issue of a political transition — the very objective of the Geneva Communiqué — during the last round of the Geneva II talks, deciding instead to include all of the opposition delegates on the government’s list of “terrorists”.

The limited outcomes from the Geneva II talks have contributed to the sense of the conflict’s intractability. Nevertheless, the Geneva Communiqué remains the blueprint for a political transition in Syria. As Mr. Gwozdecky told the Committee: “Canada continues to believe that the only way to end the crisis is through a Syrian-led political transition leading to the emergence of a free, democratic, and pluralist Syria.”<sup>79</sup> The international community’s emphasis, therefore, should remain on the need for implementation of the Communiqué, an outcome that must ultimately emerge from political negotiations and decisions.

A final point related to the international community pertains to funding. The Committee was told of the significant contributions that donor governments have made to the appeals for assistance issued by the UN System and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. That said, at the time of the Committee’s hearings, the UN’s current appeal for humanitarian assistance inside Syria was 8% funded; its request for the Regional Refugee Response Plan was 14% funded.<sup>80</sup> As several witnesses reminded the Committee, the needs within Syria and in neighbouring countries are pronounced. Mr. Salewicz (DFATD) stated: “As the conflict drags on, the importance of humanitarian development assistance will remain imperative to sustain lives and mitigate the impact of the influx of refugees on host communities in neighbouring countries.”<sup>81</sup>

## **B. CANADA’S ROLE**

A number of witnesses discussed Canada’s significant contributions to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria and in neighbouring countries. To date, Canada has committed \$353.5 million in humanitarian assistance, \$210.6 million in development assistance, and \$67.6 in security and stabilization assistance.<sup>82</sup> Canada’s total funding includes a \$50 million contribution to the “No Lost Generation” initiative. Canada should continue to carefully assess the humanitarian situation and provide support as appropriate.

With respect to more specific observations, in the immediate term, the Canadian government’s decisions on humanitarian assistance projects should be timely and flexible.

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79 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 December 2013.

80 OCHA, [Humanitarian Bulletin: Syrian Arab Republic](#), Issue 43, 13–26 February 2014, 26 February 2014. According to information available on the OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service as of 30 April 2014, the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) was 19% funded; the Syria Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) was 25% funded. See: Financial Tracking Service, “[Total Funding to the Syrian Crisis 2014](#).”

81 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 December 2013.

82 DFATD, “[Canada’s Response to the Situation in Syria](#).”

Witnesses underscored the fluidity of the situation in Syria and in neighbouring countries, including with respect to needs and vulnerabilities, security conditions, and access. In his appearance, Bruce Guenther, Director of Disaster Response for the Mennonite Central Committee Canada, commented: “With an average of two to three months in the decision-making time, the situation changes on the ground.”<sup>83</sup>

Regarding the longer term, the Committee heard testimony that funding priorities must take into account the real possibility that Syria’s conflict could be protracted and, therefore, the need for associated regional humanitarian assistance prolonged. With this context in mind, Ms. Thomson of CARE Canada argued that there is an increasing need to focus on building self-reliance. She put forward her organization’s belief that:

[...] we must ensure that our interventions are increasingly focused on promoting livelihoods, education, and training. The goal is to empower those affected by the crisis and ensure that families continue to develop and maintain skills while in exile to prepare them for solutions, be it voluntary return, be it resettlement to third countries like Canada, or be it local integration where they currently live. This will need to take place alongside programs to address the concerns of host communities regarding the impact of refugees on the local labour market and the local economy.<sup>84</sup>

The Committee was told that there is also a need to build the resiliency of local humanitarian actors so as to empower them both to manage this protracted crisis from a programming perspective and to respond effectively to future needs. In referencing the work being done by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Lebanese Red Cross, Mr. Sauv  noted the importance of providing institutional and training support for “their core capacity.”<sup>85</sup>

As well, the Committee was reminded of the importance of continuing to find ways to support democratic actors within Syria, despite the sustained and fragmented nature of the military conflict. Paul Heidebrecht, Director of the Ottawa Office of the Mennonite Central Committee Canada, noted the “tremendous capacity for peace-building initiatives among religious leaders and civil society organizations in Syria and in the surrounding countries.” He commented: “This capacity has not been widely recognized, nor has it been receiving much support from the international community.”<sup>86</sup> Mr. Green of the International Republican Institute similarly told the Committee: “We have found that there’s a strong constituency for democracy inside Syria, but one that is under extreme pressure and deserving of more support.”<sup>87</sup> He said there is a need “to help emerging leaders represent the needs of Syria’s moderate middle, the plurality that subscribes neither to the regime’s

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83 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 12 February 2014.

84 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

85 Ibid.

86 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 12 February 2014.

87 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

propaganda, nor radical Islamism.”<sup>88</sup> Mr. Green also commented: “The international community provides extensive humanitarian assistance, but it must do more to recognize the importance of the day after.”<sup>89</sup>

Testimony indicated that Canada can support democratic development and longer-term peacebuilding in Syria, notwithstanding the stalemated military conflict. In order for any political transition to be effective and to lead to a democratic, inclusive and pluralist country that is grounded in respect for international human rights and the rule of law, those who are working on the ground for positive change must be supported, empowered and equipped. The Committee was told that there is a need to help build political capacity and civic awareness within Syria, and that — in particular — women and youth leaders need to be encouraged and supported. Mr. Green noted that such work can be done in “those areas that are free from Assad's control”, where dialogue can be fostered “about the decisions that have to be made and the basic provision of day-to-day items.”<sup>90</sup> Witnesses specifically highlighted the importance of working with local and provincial councils. Mr. Fisher commented that those local organizations “are going to be there long after we have left, so we have to support their capacity from now.”<sup>91</sup> Mr. Green stated: “These councils can serve as working models of democratic governance in areas outside the regime's control.”<sup>92</sup>

Overall, Syria's conflict is having a tremendous toll on the country's institutions and social fabric. Peacebuilding efforts targeting inter-communal reconciliation, therefore, must also be prioritized.

Regarding refugee resettlement, the Committee was informed that Canada has committed to accepting up to 1,300 Syrian refugees, in response to the appeal from the UNHCR.<sup>93</sup> This number includes up to 1,100 private sponsorships for 2013 and 2014, for

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88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 FAAE, [Evidence](#) 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 5 March 2014.

92 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

93 With respect to its appeals for 2013 and 2014, according to the UNHCR: “UNHCR is proposing that countries admit up to 30,000 Syrian refugees on resettlement, humanitarian admission, or other programmes by the end of 2014, with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable.” The UNHCR also notes: “States are encouraged to offer places for Syrian refugees *in addition to their current resettlement quotas* to ensure that resettlement opportunities also continue to be available for refugees from the rest of the world.” See UNHCR, “[Finding Solutions for Syrian Refugees: Resettlement, Humanitarian Admission, and Family Reunification](#),” 11 February 2014. Further information on the 20 countries that have pledged to receive refugees on resettlement or humanitarian admission for 2013/2014 is provided in the following source: European Resettlement Network, “[The Crisis in Syria](#),” accessed 1 April 2014.

which there were still 325 unallocated spaces as of early March 2014, and the resettlement of 200 “extremely vulnerable, urgent cases”.<sup>94</sup>

The Canadian government has also committed to expedite the processing of family class applications “to the extent possible, given the difficult circumstances.”<sup>95</sup> In her testimony to the Committee, Professor Momani strongly urged Canada to increase its resettlement commitments.<sup>96</sup> She also argued for greater efforts to facilitate scholarships for Syrian students to study at Canadian universities, noting that “it’s the best form of public diplomacy you could ever invest in.”<sup>97</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of its study of the armed conflict in Syria, the Committee puts forward the following recommendations to the Government of Canada:

### RECOMMENDATION 1

**The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to support the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, which requires the expeditious destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons program and Syria’s compliance with all aspects of the 27 September 2013 decision of the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, in accordance with the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction*, to which Syria has acceded.**

### RECOMMENDATION 2

**The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to support the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2139 demanding, *inter alia*:**

- **full, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access and the delivery of emergency relief to those in need;**
- **the cessation of all attacks against civilians;**

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94 “Response from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to a request for information made by members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development,” received on 4 March 2014.

95 Ibid.

96 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 24 February 2014.

97 Ibid.

- an end to sieges preventing civilian access to food and medicine; and
- an end to violations and abuses of international human rights and all violations of international humanitarian law.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada support the negotiation of a United Nations Security Council resolution that would impose international sanctions on the Assad regime, while also enforcing an arms embargo on Syria.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to follow events at the United Nations Security Council and work with our international partners.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to encourage a Syrian-led political transition leading to the emergence of a free, democratic and pluralist Syria.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada fully participate in and support the Geneva process.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to respond to the increasing humanitarian needs in Syria and neighbouring countries as appropriate.

### **RECOMMENDATION 8**

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada disburse its pledged humanitarian funds as efficiently and immediately as possible, while giving its partner organizations as much flexibility as possible to respond to rapidly changing circumstances. The Government of Canada should also encourage its development assistance partners to demonstrate similar timeliness and flexibility in making and fulfilling their assistance commitments.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 9**

**The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to assist local humanitarian and democratic actors in Syria by providing institutional and training support, and by providing support for long-term peacebuilding, including projects with a focus on women and youth, resiliency, and intercommunity reconciliation in Syria.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 10**

**The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to work with civil society organizations to document violations of international law and human rights abuses in Syria.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 11**

**The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada work with civil society, international allies and international organizations to actively support prevention, treatment and documentation of sexual violence stemming from the conflict in Syria.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 12**

**The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to work with the UNHCR on resettlement and other refugee issues in Syria.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 13**

**The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada examine its current and future commitments to resettle Syrian refugees.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 14**

**The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada look at the feasibility of working with community and academic partners on a scholarships program to support Syrian students.**



# REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the Government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 24-27](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Dean Allison

Chair



## APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p><b>Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development</b></p> <p>Mark Gwozdecky, Director General Middle East and Maghreb Bureau</p> <p>Sabine Nolke, Director General Non-Proliferation and Security Threat Reduction Bureau</p> <p>Stephen Salewicz, Director Humanitarian Assistance Division</p>	2013/12/05	7
<p><b>Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development</b></p> <p>Dennis Horak, Director Middle East and Maghreb Political Relations Division</p> <p>Leslie Norton, Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate</p> <p>Isabelle Roy, Acting Director General Non-proliferation and Security Threat Reduction Bureau</p>	2014/02/05	10
<p><b>As individuals</b></p> <p>Joshua Landis, Director, Center for Middle East Studies, University of Oklahoma</p> <p>Heba Sawan, Teacher and Student</p> <p>Ameenah Sawan, Teacher and Student</p> <p>Jason Hunt, Officer, Government Affairs, National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces</p>	2014/02/12	12
<p><b>Mennonite Central Committee Canada</b></p> <p>Bruce Guenther, Director Disaster Response</p> <p>Paul Heidebrecht, Director Ottawa Office</p>		
<p><b>Washington Institute for Near East Policy</b></p> <p>Andrew Tabler, Senior Fellow</p>		
<p><b>As an individual</b></p> <p>Bessma Momani, Associate Professor Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo</p>	2014/02/24	13
<p><b>Canadian Red Cross</b></p> <p>Hossam Elsharkawi, Director Emergencies and Recovery, International Operations</p>		

<b>Canadian Red Cross</b>	2014/02/24	13
Conrad Sauvé, Chief Executive Officer		
Robert M. Young, Senior Delegate International Committee of the Red Cross		
<b>CARE Canada</b>		
Jessie Thomson, Director Humanitarian Assistance and Emergency Team		
<b>International Republican Institute</b>		
Mark Green, President		
<b>Doctors Without Borders</b>	2014/03/05	16
Stephen Cornish, Executive Director		
<b>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</b>		
Nigel Fisher, Assistant Secretary General Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis		

# **APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS**

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## **Organizations and Individuals**

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**International Republican Institute**

**Landis, Joshua**



## **Supplementary Opinion – New Democratic Party**

The New Democratic Party wholeheartedly agrees with the present report.

However, we feel the need to add the following further recommendations to those already agreed upon:

1. The Government of Canada should significantly increase its commitment to Syrian refugee resettlement beyond the current pledge of up to 1,300, accelerate processing of Syrian refugees coming to Canada, and expedite family reunification for Syrian refugees who have relatives in Canada.
2. The Government of Canada should ensure that its humanitarian assistance for the conflict in Syria reaches the most vulnerable people. Canada should show leadership in targeting its assistance to help those most at risk from the devastating physical, social, and economic impacts of the Syrian conflict.
3. The Government of Canada should match financial donations made by individual Canadian citizens to support the work of registered Canadian charities in response to the conflict in Syria.



## **SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT – Liberal Party of Canada**

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1. The Liberal Party is in agreement with the vast majority of the report on Syria but differs with the report on the issue of refugees.
2. The Syrian refugee crisis is now recognized as the largest refugee crisis in modern times with over 2.7 million refugees spread over 5 countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt) not to mention millions more displaced internally.
3. Canada has a long standing tradition of accepting a sizeable number of refugees from many regions where conflict has occurred: Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Vietnam, Uganda, Bosnia, and Kosovo. These refugees have been welcomed to Canada and have gone on to contribute to the prosperity and cultural richness of our country.
4. We believe that the report on Syria should make mention of one part of the verbal testimony given by Professor Momani, one of the witnesses who appeared before the Committee. That testimony dealt with the issue of Syrian refugees. Professor Momani argued the need for a “global resettlement” plan for Syrian refugees. Quoting her, she stated, “20,000 is very reasonable” with respect to the total number of Syrians that Canada could accept.
5. We believe that the report should have included an additional recommendation to the effect that Canada should increase the number of refugees that it will accept to a level well above the current level of 1300.

