

A Hopeful Cry for Peace

In light of recent events of these past several weeks, and the ongoing six-year crisis in Syria, we of the Syria-Lebanon Partnership Network (SLPN) feel compelled to issue a response regarding the current state of affairs. The continuing loss of life and displacement of innocent people speak to the dark and destructive evil behind the use of chemical weapons and any military responses, whether by accident or by intention.

Such responses must be deemed as unacceptable going forward in the Syrian crisis. Prior to these events, negotiations were going on near Homs to begin working toward some shared resolution. After these attacks, negotiations between local parties inside Syria have ceased and a wider polarization has resulted. It appears to us that military responses such as these will always bring even more violence and quash efforts at resolution through discussion and negotiation.

The military response taken by the Trump administration has been called by some a “measured” action. This has been said even though it was one that was unilateral and immediate and took lives on the airstrip in Al Shayrat. The repercussions of that action are now emerging and show the likelihood of an escalation of hostilities and yet more carnage to be inflicted on the Syrian people.

The question of responsibility for the chemical attack remains but, as more time passes, it becomes harder and harder to find the truth. In the “fog of war” it is frequently said that “the first casualty of war is the truth.” Yet we must always be committed to understand as much of the truth as we can identify in order to help us respond truthfully going forward. Responses devoid of such truth in the end will show no effect at bringing about lasting resolution. To achieve this kind of understanding requires time and a fuller understanding of the far-reaching implications of what our actions may be.

It has seemed to us irresponsible and unjust to follow the bandwagon created by government officials and the western news media in immediately casting blame on one side or the other for such deplorable behavior. It seems any rush to judgment allows guilty parties to take refuge in the “fog” and make plans for other such uses of chemical weapons.

Therefore, as the Steering Committee of the SLPN, and having spoken with our partners on the ground in the region and those who are part of our network here in the United States, we call on all parties to view and portray this crisis not as a “civil war” amongst the Syrian people, but much more a “proxy war” that admittedly involves many forces within the country, and one that has been seized upon and escalated by the outside influence of warriors from more than 90 countries. These outside combatants have been allowed open access through bordering countries in the region who have a stake in the outcome and who clearly desire a government change in Syria.

We also call for any influence of “super powers” to be used in a just manner for the cause of peace in this troubled country. Such influence clearly means the cessation of providing military resources and actual hardware that bring a continuance of this deadly conflict. The vast expansion of military force in the region provides an economic boon for countries around the world. No civilized country should be complicit in advancing the spread of this war. Violence only creates more violence and not lasting peace. All parties must use their power to help rebuild this country in the post-war period and to create an incentive for those who have fled to return to a peaceful homeland.

Today is the open window to do something new, something prophetic in the cause of peace. It must be done thoughtfully and prayerfully. In this season as we continue to celebrate the great

sacrifice and resurrection of the Prince of Peace, we are committed to peace in real terms. May we too give our lives for the cause of peace in the world.

To that end we offer a prayer given to us by our PCUSA General Assembly co-moderator Jan Edmiston.

“God of hope and peace, we pray for your healing of our world. We mourn for the children, women and men who have been killed by today’s swords and spears. We give thanks for those who seek to heal rather than harm. We pray for peace that seems so far away, yet that through you, we know is possible. We pray that the communities of nations will practice wisdom and restraint in this vulnerable and broken part of your creation. May we be part of a resurrection to life and peace in Syria and embrace a future where no one will learn war anymore. Amen.”

Looking Ahead with Hope,
The Syria Lebanon Partnership Network