

21 April 2016

Dear Prime Minister Cameron and President Obama,

As faith leaders, we write to urge you to use what could be your final meeting in the UK as heads of your governments to urgently address the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Syria. This is an opportunity to define the special relationship as a global force for good.

The 'special relationship' between the United Kingdom and the United States was forged in the wake of the Second World War. We now see the largest forced displacement of people since those dark days, and the long-awaited peace talks and ceasefire are on the brink of collapse. Millions have fled their homes in Syria to escape the horrors of a war that has claimed the lives of almost half a million men, women and children. Entire communities remain under siege, on the verge of starvation.

Our respective faith traditions teach that compassion, mercy, love and hospitality are for everyone: the native born and the foreign born, the member of our own community and the newcomer. We hear the pleas of the mothers of Daraya forced to resort to feeding their children grass in a desperate attempt to survive. We hear the cries of anguish as families are torn apart. As heads of two of the most generous humanitarian donors, you have done a great deal to answer these calls. As leaders of two of the world's most powerful nations, together you can do more. And you have a moral duty to do so.

You have both led the world in mobilising support for Syria's neighbours that are sheltering the vast majority of those who've fled the country. Alongside this, we urge you to set out the steps to ensure more Syrian refugees can find sanctuary outside the region. Welcoming the stranger sometimes takes courage, but the joys and the hopes of doing so outweigh the challenges. As faith leaders we will encourage our respective communities to work together to support Syrian refugees in the UK and USA.

Secondly, we call on you to agree how you will engage personally in the diplomatic efforts needed to secure sustained access to humanitarian support for the millions who need it inside Syria, and to work harder towards a lasting peace.

Extend the hand of compassion to people caught up in war, be true to the best our special relationship can be, and your meeting today will be historic for the difference it will make to millions of lives.

Signed,

Imam Abdullah Hasan, founder of Imams Against Domestic Abuse

Rabbi Adam Kligfeld, Temple Beth Am of Los Angeles, CA

Rt Rev Andy John, Bishop of Bangor

HG Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church

Most Rev Barry Morgan, Archbishop of Wales

Rt Rev Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry

Dilowar Hussain Khan, Executive Director, East London Mosque Trust

Rabbi David Mason, Muswell Hill Synagogue, United Synagogue Rabbinical Council Executive

Rt Rev Gregory Llanelwy, Bishop of St Asaph

Honor Hania, On behalf of the Scottish Catholic Justice and Peace Commission

Ian D Buchanan, Convener, Church & Society Committee, United Free Church of Scotland

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain
Rabbi Jennie Rosenn, HIAS
Dr Jill Barber, Vice-President of the Conference of the Methodist Church
Rt Rev John Davies, Bishop of Swansea and Brecon
Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, New North London Synagogue and Senior Rabbi to Masorti Judaism
Rt Revd Jonathan Clark, Bishop of Croydon and Chair of the Churches Refugee Network
Rabbi Laura Geller, Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, CA
Rabbi Lee S. Paskind
Rt Rev Patrick Lynch, Bishop of Southwark and Chair of the Office for Migration Policy at Catholic Bishops Conference
Rt Revd Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham
Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, Convener of the Church and Society Council, Church of Scotland
Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in New York City
Rev Steve Wild, President of the Conference of the Methodist Church
Tom Smolich SJ, International Director, Jesuit Refugee Service
Rt Rev Tony Robinson, Bishop of Wakefield
Mr Umesh C Sharma, Chairman, Hindu Council UK
Imam Yunus Dudhwala, Head of Chaplaincy and Bereavement Services, Barts Health NHS Trust