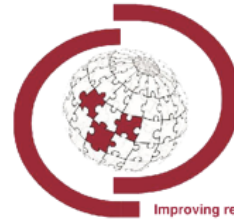


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Syria: A horror observed, but is this all the world can do?

By [George Carey](#), [Mustafa Ceric](#) and [Alistair Macdonald-Radcliff](#)



Members of the Free Syrian Army sit and mourn a comrade killed during fighting with government forces in Al Qusour neighbourhood, in central Homs July 7, 2012. (STRINGER - REUTERS)

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing” is a phrase attributed to the British statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke and it

is timely to recall it now as we see what is happening in Syria.

That people, including women and children are being killed in horrific ways in ever-growing numbers is a matter of record, with the evidence of atrocities growing daily. So far, the outside world is, quite literally, just there to observe and make notes. Almost the only practical action that the [United Nations](#) has been able to agree upon is the sending of official observers to catalogue the carnage. And as of the moment, while the UN force remains committed, the hostilities are so bad that even their work as monitors has had to be suspended.

A full report will no doubt be presented and perhaps one day it may help to secure the prosecution of some of the perpetrators. But would it not be better if there were fewer people killed in the first place? Must the rest of the world simply look on and deplore it? Are our international institutions still so hamstrung by petty perceptions of national interest that nothing more can be done?

Tragically, such a situation is not wholly unfamiliar to us – for [Grand Mufti Ceric](#) of Bosnia lived through a time and conflict with terrible parallels, namely that of Bosnia from 1992-1995. But while, through Providence, he was spared himself, more than 200,000 fellow Bosnians were not. Eventually, outside forces came to help but that help was sadly slow and late. Had it come earlier, would there have been the Srebrenica genocide of 1995, in which 8000 were murdered? Was it really necessary that the [siege of Sarajevo](#) be allowed to last from April 1992 until February 1996, a period three times longer than the [siege of Stalingrad](#) in [World War II](#)? Such questions are for historians to debate, but in Syria we can still do things differently and avoid the terrible cost of repeating past mistakes.

We speak as religious figures and so the matters of high politics and strategy are not for us to resolve. Nor are we seeking armed intervention, when there are other avenues that remain to be explored. And the Bosnian genocide may have a lesson very relevant to Syria in regard to the abuse of religion and the vital role that responsible religious leaders could be helped to play in confronting it.

In Syria, there are multiple religious groupings and minorities, many of whom live in growing fear for their lives. The unscrupulous are building upon these insecurities and fanning the flames of conflict, under an illegitimate cloak of religious cover. Given that religion is being so sadly -- but effectively -- misused to deepen conflict, it is astonishing that none of the international processes

currently underway have made provision for authentic religious leaders to participate and to seek support for the crucial moderating role they could play.

We urge that this omission be remedied and stand ready to help.

Specifically, we propose bringing together religious leaders of Syria and the adjoining region to ask how the authentic voices of moderation can best be amplified and helped to mitigate the strife now threatening the very country itself.

Internationally, almost everyone says that they support the Annan plan and yet few are actually acting that way, yet it remains the only internationally supported option.

Surely therefore, every avenue that might help it succeed deserves to be explored, before the conflict becomes a regional catastrophe that will generate a major refugee crisis as well.

We call, therefore, upon all interested parties and international leaders, who seek a future for Syria that is as peaceful as possible, to support our proposal and we are writing to Secretary General [Ban Ki-moon](#) and Dr. [Kofi Annan](#) directly to this end.

Our proposal may help avoid military intervention and can only have a positive impact on the people and leaders of Syria. It might even encourage the needed dialogue towards finding a solution allowing both popular representation and truly secure minority rights.

Peace is a goal upon which people of all faiths and none can agree. It is the most inclusive virtue and peace is certainly needed if we are truly to love God and our neighbour as we are all called to do.

Even if collective international action is not yet possible can we not at least empower those religious leaders on the ground who would promote peace and who may yet mitigate the effects of war?

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