

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

With the brutal Syrian conflict entering its fifth year, the Syrian people are facing a humanitarian nightmare of unspeakable proportions. The staggering human displacement, killing, and destruction are an affront to the civilized world and must be stopped. As such, we urge that the United States work with key allies to establish and enforce one or more humanitarian safe zones in Syria without delay. These zones would provide essential protection for displaced Syrian civilians and a safe transit route for desperately needed humanitarian supplies.

What started in March 2011 as peaceful protests by Syrian people aspiring for greater political freedom has shamefully turned into an ongoing civil war that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis in recent times. More than 200,000 Syrians have been killed in the past four years, many of them children, and more than 12 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance. Nine million Syrians, almost half the total population, have been displaced from their homes and are now internally displaced or living in permanent exile as refugees in neighboring countries. Jordan alone is currently hosting more than 1.3 million refugees, swelling its population by more than 10 percent. Sadly, resettlement abroad has become even more difficult as neighboring states have closed their borders. Resettlement has also gone slowly here at home, and we are disappointed the United States has taken in fewer than 800 Syrians since the beginning of the conflict.

Those Syrians who do not find safe haven abroad are exposed daily to the atrocities of President Assad and extremist groups, as well as hunger and disease. War crimes of unspeakable horror have been inflicted on the Syrian population, from devastating barrel bombs to the ongoing use of chlorine gas. Nearly 2,000 barrel bombs were dropped in this past year alone, killing more than 6,000 people. The use of torture, rape, and disappearances in Syria is well-documented by the UN and other humanitarian organizations. Entire areas have been deliberately blocked from access to food, water, and medical services. Protected humanitarian zones would provide safe haven to Syrians fleeing from these unacceptable conditions.

While we may have disagreements on the broader policy toward the Syrian conflict, we all agree that this crisis is far from over and it is time for the United States and our partners to more aggressively address the terrible human suffering in Syria. Accordingly, we urge the rapid establishment of one or more humanitarian safe zones with the necessary enforcement mechanisms, including the potential use of air assets, so that civilians can be protected and

receive unfettered humanitarian aid. Any such actions should also include the long-overdue securing of the border area by Turkey, where too many extremists continue to easily flow into Syria. The humanitarian safe zones would be fully consistent with UN Security Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191 that call for the aggressive delivery of humanitarian aid within Syria.

These important steps would help alleviate some of the terrible human suffering occurring in Syria. As such, we request an update on progress toward this goal, including the Administration's planning and diplomatic efforts to negotiate and enforce one or more humanitarian safe zones with our partners.

Sincerely,



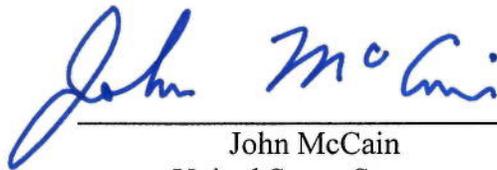
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Lindsey Graham
United States Senator



John McCain
United States Senator