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Statement Regarding the Proposed Military Action in Syria from the Leaders of the English Speaking Conference of Franciscan Friars (OFM)

As Franciscans, we react with horror when we look at the recent images coming out of Syria of gassed and mutilated children. We anguish when confronted by pictures of so much death and so much destruction. We deeply deplore the disregard for human life that marks this conflict in Syria. We join with others to condemn the use of chemical weapons as well as the killing of civilians by means of "conventional weapons." The killing of hundreds of thousands of children, women and men, and the plight of thousands of refugees fleeing violence and death demand a response from all nations and all peoples. We understand that to remain silent is both irresponsible and immoral. Silence creates only accomplices.

Yet, the response to this crisis must not be one that fosters violence or tolerates further bloodshed. Those who would supply weapons to the government or any of the combatting sides work against the cause of peace. Worse yet, if outside nations intervene militarily, we fear the crisis and suffering will only escalate. Instead of violence, the U.S. in conjunction with the international community must pursue robust, multilateral negotiations to achieve the peace that the Syrian people so desire.

No one should be surprised that Franciscans, with a long tradition of peacemaking, call for a nonviolent response to the tragic situation. But, ours is not a naive hope about nonviolent conflict resolution, rather, it reflects the wisdom that war and violence cannot achieve peace. Our experience affirms Pope Francis's words, "Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake. War begets war, violence begets violence." In no uncertain terms, military action by the U.S. or any other nation will not resolve the crisis in Syria. Worse yet, we fear that, not only will more children, women and men die, it will further harden the hearts of those on all sides of the conflict, making a permanent resolution increasingly remote.

What is needed is a clear, prophetic call for a stop to the violence. Pope Francis issued that call when he proclaimed a day for prayer and fasting on September 7, 2013. Our friars and our ministries joined other people of faith in the call for peace and a turning away from violence.

To this end, we have committed ourselves to the following actions:

- At the invitation of our Minister General Michael Perry, OFM, we will continue praying and fasting for peace in Syria and all places of conflict.
- We will petition to our elected officials to:
 - Vote against the use of military force in Syria.
 - Seek to de-escalate the violence by stopping the flow of arms to all sides.
 - Pursue an immediate ceasefire, as the first step in the peace process.
 - Increase the flow of humanitarian assistance to Syria and to its citizens who are now refugees in other nations.

- Work with the international community to pursue a just political settlement with all the stakeholders.

In light of the fact that any military action likely would only exacerbate the crisis, we have a particular responsibility to call for restraint and an approach that reflects Gospel values. Dropping bombs and declaring “we have done our part” is not an adequate response to this crisis. We believe that nations must work to repair relationships which are broken through a dialogue which ultimately leads to reconciliation and a just peace. Only then will we fulfill our responsibility to one another to be “instruments of peace.”

We pray that the Spirit of God that embodies Wisdom itself will guide our thinking and prompt our actions as we set about the task of bringing peace to a troubled world.

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