



Mennonite World Conference

A Community of Anabaptist
related Churches

Congreso Mundial Menonita

Una Comunidad de
Iglesias Anabautistas

Conférence Mennonite Mondiale

Une Communauté
d'Eglises Anabaptistes

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To MWC Member and Associated Member Churches

Subject: Conflict in Syria

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

We greet you today in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we lament the horrendous and inhumane atrocities – reports of which fill our newspapers and dominate our television screens – as the world is again rightfully concerned about actual violence in Syria and a potentially expanded conflict.

*As he [Jesus] came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day **the things that make for peace!** But now they are **hidden from your eyes**" (Luke 19:41-42).*

It is not difficult to imagine Jesus still weeping today: over Damascus, Washington, D.C., Moscow, Paris, London, Jerusalem, Cairo, New York, Beijing, and many other places. The world is not the way it was meant to be. At Jesus' birth the angels proclaim "*peace on earth*" (Luke 2:14). Through him God hoped to "*reconcile the world,*" calling the church to be God's co-workers in the ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-19).

The Body of Christ weeps with Jesus today. We weep not only for Syria, but also for other situations affecting our brothers and sisters: the poisoning of crops and water supply in the Choco, Colombia; the land stolen by huge multi-national corporations in Panama; the historic and ongoing strife and war in Congo; the alienation and suffering in Egypt; and the millions of refugees displaced by human strife. We weep because the dominant patterns of confronting violence, protecting the vulnerable, and working for peace continue to be strategies of increased militarization, trust in revenge, and confidence in punishment. Our world continues to hope for peace by preparing for war.

The weeping Jesus chose a different path. He decided to trust in God's sovereignty over the nations. He affirms the prophet Isaiah's conviction that: "*The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but God will rebuke them...*" (Isaiah 17:13).

Above all, Jesus chooses suffering love to the point of death on the cross, rather than military options of terror, revolution, or the protection of national self-interest. God transforms this suffering love into Gospel. Through the power of the resurrection, God converts the weapon of Roman state-terror (the cross) into the "*power of God to save*" (I Corinthians 1:18).

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The Gospel is God's response to the sin of the world, and is given to a world not yet redeemed. The Gospel is Good News because of sin, not in spite of it. As followers of Jesus, the church too "*seeks peace and pursues it*" (Psalm 34:14). The Apostle James has a timely reminder for us about the inseparable bond between the pursuit of peace and the hope for justice:

*For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. **And a harvest of justice is sown in peace for those who make peace*** (James 3:16-18).

We invite you to express this vocation of peace through justice by:

- 1) **Praying:** Pray for all those who understand themselves and others as enemies. Pray for each other as sisters and brothers in Christ – in our Communion and beyond - as we seek to live out our vocation of suffering love amid the *roar of the nations*. (Please note that the World Council of Churches has also designated September 21 as the "International Day of Prayer for Peace" <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/events/international-day-of-prayer-for-peace>).
- 2) **Worshipping:** Mennonite World Conference has set aside the International Day of Peace (Sept. 22) as our time to express our vocation of peace in worship. Please do participate in this shared opportunity. Materials for this service can be found at http://www.mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/peace_sunday_2013_en.pdf
- 3) **Witnessing:** Please feel free to pass on this letter, as appropriate, to others: family, friends, other Christians, other denominations, government leaders, and media outlets.
- 4) **Sharing:** Please go to <http://www.mwc-cmm.org/article/peace-syria>, <https://www.facebook.com/MennoniteWorldConference> or email to rjsuderman@mwc-cmm.org and share actions of worship, prayers, and witness that you have done or are planning to do. This will be a source of encouragement and inspiration for others to become involved.

Multiple loyalties are calling for our commitment. We face a time of weeping, testing, and choosing. Our prayer is that:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you (II Corinthians 13:14).

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