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June 19, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

The reported use of chemical weapons, the UN estimate of over 93,000 deaths, the displacement of millions from their homes, and the kidnapping of two Orthodox Archbishops on a mission of mercy all point to the devastation of the violent conflict in Syria and the urgent need for a negotiated ceasefire and political solution.

On Easter Sunday, Pope Francis prayed for peace “for dear Syria, for its people torn by conflict and for the many refugees who await help and comfort. How much blood has been shed! And how much suffering must there still be before a political solution to the crisis will be found?” We again echo the Holy Father’s poignant question: How much more suffering must Syrians endure before a political solution is found?

In a recent letter, Pope Francis urged the G8 “to address the situation in the Middle East, especially in Syria”. He expressed the hope that the G8 Summit will help to achieve “an immediate and lasting cease-fire and to bring all parties in the conflict to the negotiating table”. We appreciate your efforts to organize a peace summit in Geneva, urge you to persist in seeking a negotiated solution, and stand ready to help in any way we can.

Instead of arming both sides, the international community should be emphasizing the need for a negotiated solution to the conflict. The introduction of more arms simply increases the lethality of the violence and contributes to the suffering of the Syrian people.

The Syrian people urgently need a political solution that ends the fighting and creates a future for all Syrians, one that respects human rights and religious freedom. We ask the United States to work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious negotiations, provide impartial and neutral humanitarian assistance, and encourage building an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens, including Christians and other minorities.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice
and Peace

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Most Reverend Gerald F. Kicanas
Bishop of Tucson
Chair, Board of Catholic Relief Services