

**Reduce Sanctions:
Take the Knee
Off the Neck of the Syrian People**



Syria-Lebanon Partnership
Network of PC(USA)
www.syria-lebanonpn.org

The Syria-Lebanon Partnership Network is a mission network of the Presbyterian Church (USA), a denomination of 1.4 million members. The Network partners with the Presbyterian Church in Syria and Lebanon and advocates for PC(USA) and U.S. policies that promote peace, justice, reconciliation, and development in the region. We are mindful that the Christian church began in Syria more than 2,000 years ago.

We call on the United States government to reduce the economic sanctions that are creating a humanitarian crisis for the people of Syria.

The current conditions in Syria cry out for help. Ten years of the Syrian conflict have led to a near-collapse of the Syrian economy and physical infrastructure. Additionally, U. S. government-led sanctions have created a shortage of a wide variety of essential goods, resulting in skyrocketing prices, erosion of purchasing power, and widespread unemployment. Estimates are that today 82% of the Syrian population live under the poverty line. **The continuation of U.S. sanctions on Syria will lead to more impoverishment and suffering for the population of the country.**

It is wrong to think that the only way forward for Syria is through the removal and replacement of the current government. The end-goal of both UN and U.S. policy has been to remove Assad from power. To this end, the U.S., the EU, and other countries have imposed economic sanctions designed to punish the Syrian ruling class. However, sanctions have instead bolstered the power of the ruling class, who have access to international networks that help them elude the worst impacts of the sanctions. In effect, the Syrian government does not need to yield to pressures from the UN, the U. S., or any other foreign interest. Sanctions are not the path for pursuing the goal of regime change.

In fact, the removal of the current government would almost certainly be followed by a renewal of the conflict and chaos which has ravaged Syria for 10 years. No agreement exists about a replacement government. Many different powers will contend for control of the country, and control could fall into the hands of groups seeking to impose even harsher rules than those in place today. Among these problem-filled scenarios, many Syrians have found support for the existing government to be the best option.

We do not excuse the fact that the current government has been accused of terrible human rights abuses. However, both realpolitik and humanitarian considerations dictate ending sanctions as the means of forcing a change of government or its behavior. **If Syria is to move beyond its current situation of conflict and humanitarian suffering, the U.S. must abandon its quest for regime change and reduce the economic sanctions that are strangling the Syrian people but that are not harming the ruling class.**

The surest path to move beyond the current suffering of the Syria people involves a diplomatic process in which specific negotiated changes in Syrian governmental policies are met with simultaneously negotiated relief from sanctions and the provision of international financial assistance for humanitarian purposes and for rebuilding the country's infrastructure. Recent media reports indicate that the Syrian government has recognized its urgent need for external financial assistance for both of these purposes: humanitarian relief for the people of Syria and for reconstruction. This suggests that the Assad regime could be open to negotiations. This is the surest possible path forward, to enable Syria to reclaim its rightful position among the nations of the world.

We call on the United States government to engage its full energies to support this approach through diplomacy and reduce the economic sanctions as a matter of humanitarian urgency.