OMNI SYRIA NEWSLETTER #8, January, 2014.
Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace and Justice.

My blog: The War Department and Peace Heroes
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/
Newsletters:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/
Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

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Comments on #6

What a great set of articles on Syria! Just outstanding! I really hope the newsletter reaches A LOT of people.
I see that Arkansas’ reps in Congress, with the exception of Cotton, are being deluged with calls/emails from
their constituents decrying any plan to attack Syria. Thank goodness! Now those in DC need to listen to the
public!

sam
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Call for Immediate Aid to Syrians Dying of Starvation Due to Siege

Doctors, Faith and Human Rights Leaders Gather at UN to Announce International Solidarity Hunger Strike for Syria, Demand Lifting of Military "Starvation Siege"

This Friday, January 10, at 10:00 a.m. a working group of leaders representing the Syrian American Medical Society, the Syrian Nonviolence Movement and the Minnesota-based Friends for a NonViolent World will hold a press conference in the United Nations Plaza to announce an International Solidarity Hunger Strike for Syria, a major global campaign, and to demand the lifting of the starvation sieges of dozens of Syrian towns that are preventing hundreds of thousands of Syrians from eating or getting medical treatment.

WHEN: Friday, January 10, at 10:00 a.m.

WHAT: Press Conference about the International Solidarity Hunger Strike for Syria

WHO: Doctors, Faith and Human Rights Leaders Representing the Syrian American Medical Society, the Syrian Nonviolence Movement, Friends for a NonViolent World and Other Organizations

WHERE: Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office, 866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120. The entrance is on East 48th Street, just off of 1st Avenue, on the same side of 1st Avenue as the UN. It's the first building north of the UN gardens.

The speakers at the press conference will include:

- **Kenneth Roth**, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch
- **Zaher Sahloul**, President of the Syrian American Medical Society
- **Mohja Kahf**, Member of the Syrian Nonviolence Movement & Professor of Middle East Studies at the University of Arkansas
- **Dr. Annie Sparrow**, Pediatrician, Teacher in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies, Professor at Mount Sinai Global Health Center
• Haris Tarin, Director of the Washington, DC office of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
• Rev. Chloe Breyer, Executive Director of the Interfaith Center of New York (ICNY)
• Leila Zand, Fellowship of Reconciliation

The working group demands the following:

• a binding resolution from the United Nations Security Council to require unhampere
d access, across borders and military lines, for international humanitarian agencies to bring food and medicine to besieged populations in Syria, with neither preconditions nor discrimination based on sect, ethnicity, gender, or political views, with a monitoring provision to ensure compliance

• the lifting of the starvation sieges in Syria as a trust-building prelude to the Geneva Conference on Syria scheduled to convene on January 22

• solidarity for starving Syrians, inviting people of conscience to join the International Hunger Strike on any day until January 22

An estimated million and a half Syrian civilians are dying of malnutrition and treatable diseases in an entirely preventable humanitarian crisis. Children have died in malnutrition and starvation around Damascus in the same areas that were hit with chemical weapons attacks. Military forces blockade dozens of Syrian towns, barring entry of food and medicine, while chemical weapons inspectors are allowed unfettered access by UNSC mandate. The siege violates international laws prohibiting the use of starvation as a war weapon.

Soad Nofal, a schoolteacher from the Syrian city of Raqqa who has protested both Assad and Islamist authoritarianism, launched a hunger strike on November 4 with dozens of Syrians, to protest the siege. Qusai Zakarya, a Palestinian Syrian besieged in Moadamiya, Syria, recently conducted a 33-day hunger strike. The International Solidarity Strike is inspired by the civil resistance of Soad and Qusai.

Rev. Kristin Stoneking and Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, co-founder of the Shalom Shomer Network for Jewish Nonviolence, led the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the oldest interfaith peace and justice organization in North America, into the Strike.

The International Solidarity Hunger Strike for Syria has been endorsed by prominent philosophers, poets, faith leaders, peace activists, public figures and global civil society voices, including:

• Philosophers Jürgen Habermas, Slavoj Žižek, Seyla Benhabib and Simon Critchley
• Celebrated poets Andrei Codrescu, Carolyn Forché, Martín Espada, and Marilyn Hacker
• Rep. Keith Ellison of Minnesota’s 5th District and Muhammed Sacirbey, former Bosnian Ambassador to the United Nations
• Jawdat Said, Syrian nonviolence teacher; Yassin al-Haj Saleh, Syrian writer and former political prisoner; Razan Ghazzawi, Syrian blogger-activist and former political prisoner; Taysir Alkarim, Syrian field doctor and former prisoner of conscience; Afra Jalabi, writer and member of the Syrian Nonviolence Movement
• Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODEPINK and Global Exchange; Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence; Gail Daneker, Director of Peace Education Advocacy for Friends for a NonViolent World; Michael Nagler, President of the Metta Center for Nonviolence
• Noam Chomsky, internationally renowned author; Huwaida Arraf, Palestinian-American co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement; Bill Fletcher Jr, labor activist and former president of the TransAfrica Forum; Maryam al-Khawaja, Bahraini human rights activist

• Imam Dr. Abdul Malik Mujahid, Chair of the Board of Trustees, Parliament of the World’s Religions; Rabbi Michael Lerner, co-founder of the Network of Spiritual Progressives; Rami Nashashibi, Executive Director of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN); Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Founder and Director of The Shalom Center

See the full list of signatories and the full text of the call.

For more information about the press conference, contact Katrina Jørgensen, Media & Communications Coordinator for the Syrian American Medical Society, at katrinalj@sams-usa.net or 817-881-8199.

BREAKING: Activist Begins HUNGER STRIKE in Moadamiya, Syria: Food and Medicine Now

Mohja Kahf

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Hunger Striking Activist Calls for Food to Starved Syrian Towns
MOADAMIYA, SYRIA. Nov. 26, 2013: Qusai Zakarya, spokesperson for the civilian Local Council of Moadamiya, Syria began a hunger strike to build pressure on the Assad regime to let food and medicine into his town and all besieged areas.

“I declare a hunger strike beginning on Tuesday, November 26, until the siege against the townsfolk of Moadamiya is lifted.

I call on people of conscience everywhere to pressure their governments to act to break Assad’s siege and let humanitarian agencies bring food and medicine into besieged areas.

Your support is my only weapon,” said Zakarya.

Qusai Zakarya is a Palestinian Syrian born in Damascus who has lived since infancy in the town of Moadamiya.
October, 2012. Zakarya, a 28-year-old who has advocated tirelessly for his hometown, is now witnessing his townspeople starve to death. Zakarya cannot bring himself to eat cats, as some desperate residents are doing. “Not a chance. I used to raise three beautiful cats,” he says, before regime bombing destroyed his home on top of them.

Please follow Qusai’s daily hunger strike updates at: http://stopthesiege.wordpress.com/
Like the Facebook page for Solidarity with Qusai’s Hunger Strike:: https://www.facebook.com/qusaihungerstrike
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International Solidarity Hunger Strike for Syria
Mohja Kahf  Jan 1, 2014
f.y.i., Dick.

attached are 3 press releases associated with the strike--in reverse chronological order.

-mohja

http://pulsem.org/2013/12/19/stop-starvation-in-syria-end-the-blockades/

Stop Starvation in Syria | End the Blockades

Call to Join the International Hunger Strike

Syrians are slowly dying of malnutrition – but not for lack of food. A military blockade surrounds dozens of Syrian towns. This starvation siege prevents 1.5 million Syrians from receiving food or medicine.
Qusai Zakarya is one of them. He is 28 years old. Qusai declared a hunger strike on November 26, to demand food and medicine be allowed to reach civilians across military lines in Syria. “We are all hungry anyway. Let me be hungry for a purpose,” Qusai says.

We are starting the first phase of a “rolling” solidarity hunger strike on Friday, December 20, where we do a hunger strike every day in support of the hunger strikers in Syria through the rest of December.

We are also working on putting together a list of supporters for launching a larger campaign leading up to the Geneva Conference in January. We are asking that you commit to one day of a symbolic hunger strike and you give us permission to put your name on the materials to publicize the hunger strikes more broadly. We also ask, if you are able, to send in a photo of yourself or group to stopthesiege@gmail.com, maybe with a sign illustrating your participation.

Our goals:

To call for food and medicine now to all besieged towns in Syria.

- To call for a binding resolution from the UN Security Council requiring the regime and all armed parties to allow humanitarian organizations immediate unfettered access to aid the civilian population without discrimination, including cross-border access and cross-line access (from regime-controlled areas into rebel-controlled areas).

- To alert media and political representatives to this situation.

- To support this act of civil resistance in Syria.

Can you join us this holiday season in standing in solidarity with Syrians? People of conscience everywhere must act to break the siege that is affecting over a million people.
In Solidarity and Hope,

- Gilbert Achcar, Professor, SOAS, University of London
- Noam Chomsky, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Simon Critchley, Professor of Philosophy, The New School (New York)
- Jürgen Habermas, German philosopher
- And many more

(organizations listed for identification only)

Join us! Please sign up by sending your information to stopthesiege@gmail.com

Name:
Affiliation:
Country:
E-mail:

Date you will participate in hunger strike (December 2– through January 22):

BREAKING: Activist Begins HUNGER STRIKE in Moadamiya, Syria: Food and Medicine
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Your support is my only weapon,” said Zakarya.

Qusai Zakarya is a Palestinian Syrian born in Damascus who has lived since infancy in the town of Moadamiya, Syria. Moadamiya has been under siege by Assad forces since October, 2012. Zakarya, a 28-year-old who has advocated tirelessly for his hometown, is now witnessing his townspeople starve to death. Zakarya cannot bring himself to eat cats, as some desperate residents are doing. “Not a chance. I used to raise three beautiful cats,” he says, before regime bombing destroyed his home on top of them . . .

Please follow Qusai’s daily hunger strike updates at: http://stopthesiege.wordpress.com/
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-mohja

http://pulsemedia.org/2013/12/19/stop-starvation-in-syria-end-the-blockades/

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• And many more
Join us! Please sign up by sending your information to stopthesiege@gmail.com

Name:
Affiliation:
Country:
E-mail:

Date you will participate in hunger strike (December 2- through January 22):

Dick, our **solidarity hunger strike with Syria hunger striker Qusai** has already become huge.

Norman Finkelstein, Medea Benjamin, Andrei Codrescu, and just today JURGEN HABERMAS have signed on, among other big figures.

See Qusai’s hunger strike blog at:
stopthesiege.wordpress.com

you can see coverage of the hunger strike on the websites of, among others,

Fellowship of Reconciliation,
Veterans for Peace,
on NBC news
and our solidarity Facebook page. Moḥja

-------- Forwarded message --------
From: Terry&Andy <terryandy87@gmail.com>
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, FIRST DAY
of an International Hunger Strike for Syria

Congressman Keith Ellison, Syrian-American Mazen Halabi, Gail Daneker from Friends for a Nonviolent World and 15 other Minnesotans are preparing for a day long hunger strike in solidarity with Qusai Zakary, a Syrian who is in the 25th day of his hunger strike to protest the siege of over 30 towns in Syria. They are the first phase of an action that is gathering international support (see attached list).

Syrians are dying of malnutrition because military blockades have prevented food and medicine from coming into their areas - approximately 1 million people are affected. The goal of the strike is to break the siege.

It's a "rolling" strike where at least one person participates in the hunger strike each day. Congressman Ellison is fasting on Monday, December 23. Mazen Halabi, Gail Daneker, Wendy Tuck, Terry Irish, and Ava Dale Johnson are the Minnesotans fasting on Friday, December 20.

The Minnesota Syrian-American community has been extremely active - sending doctors to help in the refugee camps, making speeches around the state, and raising money for refugees and medical aid.

Mazen Halabi is one of the local Syrian-Americans whose friends and family in Syria are caught in a crisis that has been described as the worst humanitarian catastrophe since World War II. Halabi expressed his appreciation for Ellison's responsiveness. "Congressman Ellison has always been there for us - to listen and to try and find a way to resolve the Syrian conflict. We are grateful to have a compassionate, involved representative in Congress."

Qusai Zakary, who is in Moadamiya, Syria, pleads with the world to help the "starving and frozen Syrian people". "Starvation is a much worse weapon of war than sarin gas," he points out. "Dozens of women and children have died from malnutrition in the last few months. The world has to raise their voices together and say 'Stop using food as a weapon of war'. My hunger strike will continue until the siege is broken and aid convoys enter the besieged towns of Syria."

The solidarity hunger strike has gotten support from U.S. academics and nonviolence advocates around the world, including American poet Marilyn Hacker. Here in Minnesota, Gail Daneker, director at Friends for a Nonviolent World and a peace activist for 30 years, says, "We live in an era where we have ample resources so that no one on the planet should be hungry and yet thousands are being deliberately deprived of food and medicine. We should be beyond using food and medicine as weapons of war."
A petition supporting Zakarya's strike was created by the human rights advocacy group Avaaz last month. The petition calls for a binding resolution from the U.N. Security Council requiring the regime in Syria and all armed parties to allow humanitarian organizations immediate unfettered access to aid the civilian population without discrimination, including cross-border access and access across military lines.

3 Attachments

Hunger Strike Logo.png

GailDaneker-SolidarityHungerStrike2013.JPG

List of Hunger Strikers.pdf
The Syria Dilemma (Boston Review Books)

Ed. by Nader Hashemi, Danny Postel. 2013. 2 customer reviews

The United States is on the brink of intervention in Syria, but the effect of any eventual American action is impossible to predict. The Syrian conflict has killed more than 100,000 people and displaced millions, yet most observers warn that the worst is still to come. And the international community cannot agree how respond to this humanitarian catastrophe. World leaders have repeatedly resolved not to let atrocities happen in plain view, but the legacy of the bloody and costly intervention in Iraq has left policymakers with little appetite for more military operations. So we find ourselves in the grip of a double burden: the urge to stop the bleeding in Syria, and the fear that attempting to do so would be Iraq redux.

What should be done about the apparently intractable Syrian conflict? This book focuses on the ethical and political dilemmas at the heart of the debate about Syria and the possibility of humanitarian intervention in today's world. The contributors--Syria experts, international relations theorists, human rights activists, and scholars of humanitarian intervention--don't always agree, but together they represent the best political thinking on the issue. The Syria Dilemma includes original pieces from Michael Ignatieff, Mary Kaldor, Radwan Ziadeh, Thomas Pierret, Afra Jalabi, and others. Contributors: Asli Bâli, Richard Falk, Tom Farer, Charles Glass, Shadi Hamid, Nader Hashemi, Christopher Hill, Michael Ignatieff, Afra Jalabi, Rafif Jouejati, Mary Kaldor, Marc Lynch, Vali Nasr, Thomas Pierret, Danny Postel, Aziz Rana, Christoph Reuter, Kenneth Roth, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Fareed Zakaria, Radwan Ziadeh, Stephen Zunes

Syria Crisis: 40% of Population Need Humanitarian Assistance, Says UN. Reuters, RSN, Nov. 4, 2013

Excerpt: "Around 9.3 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance due to the country's conflict, the UN was told on Monday. 'The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate rapidly and inexorably,' UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos told the security council ...."

READ MOR

UN Wire un_wire@smartbrief.com via uark.edu
Final 2 Syria chemical-weapons sites are in conflict zones

The United Nations-Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons team has visited 21 chemical-weapons sites in Syria, but two sites remain and both are in conflict areas. OPCW's Ahmet Uzumcu told the Security Council on Monday that Syria provided information on 41 chemical-weapons facilities located at the 23 sites, with the team confirming information at 37 of the facilities. ABC News/The Associated Press (10/29), The New York Times (tiered subscription model) (10/29), BBC (10/28)

Conflicts of interest in the Syria debate

An analysis of the defense industry ties of experts and think tanks who commented on military intervention

October 11, 2013

"This report details these ties, in addition to documenting the industry backing of think tanks that played a prominent role in the Syria debate. It reveals the extent to which the **public discourse around Syria was corrupted by the pervasive influence of the defense industry**, to the point where many of the so-called experts appearing on American television screens were actually representatives of companies that profit from heightened US military activity abroad. The threat of war with Syria may or may not have passed, but the threat that these conflicts of interest pose to our public discourse – and our democracy – is still very real."

From David D.

MOHJA KAHF, Lack of Solidarity from U.S. Peace Groups and the "No Good Guys" Excuse, November 8, 2013


Lack of U.S. Peace Movement Solidarity with Syrian Uprising and the “No Good Guys Excuse”

By Mohja Kahf, Friday, November 8, 2013, 3:43pm

I marched (er, clothed) with CODEPINK women when they stood butt-naked across the main strip in my Arkansas hometown protesting the U.S. military invasion of Iraq. As a longtime anti-interventionist, I am on U.S. peace group mailing lists out the wazoo. To my
best knowledge, I received no mass emails about Syria—until U.S. strikes became imminent.

As someone attentive to protesters in Syria since February 2011, I noticed that U.S. peace organizations expressed little early interest in Syria’s uprising—with caveats. Syrians approached most of the groups that were supportive, not vice versa, except for the Palestinian–founded Nonviolence International. In September 2011, I approached the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and they were responsive. A Syrian Canadian activist friend, long active in nonviolence work, approached Minnesota–based Friends for a Non–violent World; they were responsive. Waging Nonviolence editors have been responsive.

This is not a complete list. But where is the majority of the U.S. peace movement? Maybe I just don’t know; I’m only one person, seeing part of the picture. I would like a list of solidarity actions U.S. peace organizations have held for Syrians since March 18, 2011, demanding the regime stop massacring civilians, or petitions they circulated for the release of prisoners of conscience. How have U.S. peace organizations shown solidarity with nonviolent resistance to a brutal regime in Syria?

Neglected by the global community is how Syrian civil resistance people felt in the first phase of the uprising, lasting till midsummer 2011, characterized—despite isolated incidents of violence—by consensus around nonviolence. I realize that’s subjective, but it’s useful to examine what that feeling could mean. It could mean that Syrian uprising folk indeed experienced little solidarity from peace movements abroad.

There was a palpable difference in the U.S. peace scene’s interest in Syria before U.S. strikes became a possibility vs. after, as Danny Postel has pointed out. Those Saturdays in September 2013 when U.S. peace groups rallied—without much presence of Syrians, or worse, in some cases with pro–Assadists involved—against imminent strikes, I thought, “Where were such demonstrators when nonviolent protesters began getting killed by lethal regime fire? Where was the ‘human shield’ movement before 2013?” (That “human shield” business, given the context of Syrians falling dead under regime airstrikes for over two years, was the single most ludicrous moment of U.S. anti–war stirrings.)

The “No Good Guys” Excuse

One reason that’s been given in some of the responses to Postel is that there are “no good guys” to support. Not true; the Syrian protest movement was and is unified. All the blather about a “divided Syrian opposition” comes from focusing on traditional political actors. It
ignores the grassroots protest structures that sprang up, in the form of local protest organizing committees, unified in vision.

The Syrian Revolution’s civilian grassroots base organized into hundreds of local protest organizing committees beginning in April 2011. Since then, the grassroots have organized at higher levels to form 128 local councils. Geographically spread across Syria, drawn mostly from populations unseasoned in established oppositional parties, from diverse sects and religions, heavily small-town and rural, and non-ideological, they are unified around regime change, human rights, and freedoms, and secular pluralistic democracy. They express those values clearly, in statement after statement, and in democratic self-governance. Leaders have emerged, horizontally rather than hierarchically or centrifugally.

A community-based uprising existed in Syria for six months before the Syrian National Council formed abroad in August 2011. The SNC marginalized the grassroots, giving only eight of some 279 seats to representatives of grassroots coalitions while the exiled Muslim Brotherhood opposition group finagled blocs of seats. When a grassroots activist fresh out of Syria, Moaz Khatib, became head of the SNC, he could not long tolerate its preoccupations with internal rivalries and external agendas, and soon resigned. To bring the grassroots Syrian Revolution to the table, let the diasporic body currently claiming to represent the uprising re-form from local councils inside Syria, transcending its de facto nature as a grazing-ground for U.S. and other foreign agendas.

The notion that there is no unity on the Revolution side comes also from focus on armed actors, such as the Joint Military Command, which did not form until 2012. Protesters organized themselves for nearly five months before the (secular) Free Syrian Army began on July 29, 2011, after which independent armed brigades began declaring themselves, using the FSA name. In January 2012, armed groups of Syrian extremists became active, and by 2013, foreign jihadist cadres were entering Syria to “help” the Revolution. Jihadists played to Islamophobic tendencies alive in the U.S. Left as on the Right, and global media gave them the spotlight they sought.

Insisting that the Syrian Revolution lacks unity, leaders, and values ignores the grassroots uprising. That’s why this charge baffles Syrian uprising folk. I can understand the White House, and even the Syrian opposition’s politicians and military leaders, ignoring the grassroots movement—but peace activists have no excuse. The Syrian Revolution’s grassroots civilian base still exists, and is still unified around democratic values. Its cadres have been killed and imprisoned by the Assad regime’s ongoing repression; marginalized by diasporic political bodies; and face increasing repression by extremist armed forces.
But after the non-Syrian jihadists go home, and the contentious foreign agendas rearrange themselves, the people power of the civilian resistance will still be there, if its participants have not all been killed or imprisoned by then. They are not Islamists, and they are not “ fractious”; they are nobody’s proxy, and they are the only hope for building a democratic post-Assad Syria.

**Solidarity: Do It Now**

The broadbased, unified, secular, civilian resistance is still the core of this Revolution. Under fire from both the Assad regime and armed jihadists now, it experiences little solidarity activity from peace groups around the world. If members of the world peace community want to see a pluralistic democratic alternative to Assad state, let them support the civilian resistance and its emerging leaderships in Syria, such as those embodied by the Local Councils, instead of amplifying Johnny-come-lately armed extremists, or promoting regime narratives such as that touted by the Lebanese-born nun, Mother Agnes-Mariam. Demand the release from prison of civilian resistance activists; protest when they are killed. Find and know the civilian resistance in Syria; support them.

_Born in Syria, Professor Mohja Kahf teaches Middle Eastern studies and Arabic literature at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. A poet, book author, and activist, she tweets for the Syrian revolution @profkahf._


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**Human Rights Watch Accuses Syria Rebels of 'War Crimes'**

_Al Jazeera America_, RSN, Oct. 11, 2013

Al Jazeera America reports: "Human Rights Watch said Friday that Syrian opposition fighters committed 'war crimes' and 'crimes against humanity' in an Aug. 4 assault." [from Joanie via David D]


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**Doctors Without Borders: Humanitarian Aid to Syria**

ZACK BADDORF, “Practicing Nonviolence in Syria.”  

“Even here, against great odds, it can be done.”

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Dick Bennett

_Newsletters_

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

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http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

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