

One year of popular uprising in Syria

Statement of Pax Christi International

One year after the popular uprising began in Syria, the regime of Bashar al-Assad remains in charge. The uprising is being countered with extreme violence by the regime, which remains unmoved by economic and diplomatic pressure. International law is being systematically and brutally violated. There is no simple solution to halt the violations of international law and to protect civilians.

The aspirations of the Syrian opposition are identical to those of protesters in other states in the region: freedom, dignity and an end to oppression. A year after the start of the revolution, human rights violations and economic difficulties have reached unprecedented levels. The divide and rule strategy of the regime aims to provoke sectarian conflicts and increases the risk of a civil war. For the protesters, there is no way back: the Assad regime cannot survive.

Frustrated about the impotence of the international community and the absence of a political solution, more voices are being raised in favour of arming the rebels. For Pax Christi International a further militarization of the conflict must be avoided as it will intensify armed confrontations and undermine diplomacy. Observers also point to the military capacities of the regime and the risk of a regional escalation. If the international community seeks to protect civilians, UN negotiator Kofi Annan should be granted all the possible opportunities to achieve a negotiated solution.

The use of military force is always a defeat for humanity. The international community needs to protect Syrian civilians. Thus it must try to support and strengthen local civil society in its non-violent resistance. The militarization of the conflict marginalises the role of non-violent protesters and civil society. Hundreds of organizations, activists, religious leaders and associations of doctors and businessmen, along with the Local Coordination Committees, are the basis of the protest movement. However, they are increasingly challenged to survive in the face of the enormous violence around them.

At this moment, there is no alternative to a negotiated solution. Therefore, it is crucial that the international community focus on achieving this, with the involvement of China and Russia. In addition, the international community must increase its support to civil society actors. At the same time, it must take all possible measures to ensure that the ruling regime allows the necessary humanitarian aid into all parts of Syria.