

Secretary of State John Kerry
Department of State
Washington, D.C.

January 26, 2016

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write you as leaders of the Syrian American community to express our deep outrage at the current American stance toward the Higher Negotiations Committee (HNC). The Syrian American community stands behind the HNC. We regard it as a tremendous achievement that all Syrian opposition factions, including all of the top Syrian rebel groups, have been united under one banner in support of a democratic Syria for all Syrians. We urge you not to squander this achievement.

We are in full agreement with the HNC and its leader, Prime Minister Dr. Riyad Hijab, that diplomatic talks cannot proceed before the Assad regime allows full humanitarian access, ends its starvation sieges, halts bombardments on civilian areas, and releases political prisoners—steps which have already been mandated in UN Security Council resolutions, but have not been enforced.

We further support Prime Minister Hijab in his demand that the HNC must be the sole representative of the opposition at upcoming talks. The Assad regime and its primary backers, Russia and Iran, must not have a say in who represents the opposition. United Nations Special Envoy Steffan de Mistura must not introduce “neutral” participants who serve pro-Assad interests. The International Syrian Support Group (ISSG) must not deviate from the Geneva I Communique goal of a transition in governance.

As American citizens, we call on the United States to take all steps possible to increase the opposition’s leverage and position in the negotiations. The United States has never been a neutral party to this conflict, and it must not become one now. The ISSG includes powerful countries like Iran and Russia who have taken bold steps to increase Assad’s leverage. The United States must match and surpass these efforts in support of the opposition. Syria’s children, the region, and American national security interests depend on it.

Secretary Kerry, you know that Russia, Iran, and the Assad regime have created the most significant obstacles to a settlement. Syrian opposition groups have fought hard against ISIS for two years and are America's best partners against terrorism on the ground. Russia, Iran and Assad might use the rhetoric of anti-terrorism, but, as you are

well aware, they largely spare ISIS to focus their attacks on innocent civilians and on the most moderate rebel groups. If the United States does not counter Russian and Iranian aggression in Syria, instability will persist and terrorists will maintain their regional safe haven.

We urge you to avoid taking steps that reward their intransigence, that exclude the legitimate opposition, and that endanger Syrian civilians. The Syrian American community is ready and waiting to support a peace process conducive to a comprehensive and long-lasting political settlement that meets the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people. We look forward to hosting Prime Minister Hijab in the U.S. and helping him to meet with U.S. officials so that differences in position can be narrowed.

Sincerely,

Syrian American Council

Coalition for a Democratic Syria

United for a Free Syria

Syrian Emergency Task Force

Syrian Christians for Peace