

Statement of Support for Immediate Humanitarian Assistance for Syrian Children

We add our voice to [the call published in the premier medical journal *The Lancet*](#) (March 3) for the world to urgently intervene to rescue civilians and especially children from what has become the world's most searing humanitarian catastrophe, which is playing out with such monstrous impunity in Syria. Hundreds have been killed and more than 1,550 civilians injured, many deliberately, since February 21. Twenty-five hospitals and health centers have been hit, reducing capacity to 50 percent when patients most need care. Physicians for Human Rights found that the "[unspeakable suffering was deliberately planned and meticulously implemented](#)." The Syrian American Medical Society estimates that [more than 1000 critically ill patients now need medical evacuation](#) but the Syrian Government has allowed only 37 evacuations.

Children have paid the heaviest price in the conflict. Their suffering has deteriorated to such a degree that [UNICEF published a statement](#) bereft of words, because there are none left to describe the horror of the catastrophe. Five years ago the people of Damascus's Ghouta endured a deadly Sarin chemical attack that killed 1,466 people of whom 426 were children. In the current round of the conflict, Syrian forces with Russian support have relentlessly bombarded Eastern Ghouta and killed hundreds of civilians, half of whom we believe were children, many deliberately targeted. Since the war began, nearly [6 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance](#), with almost half having been forced to flee their homes. The UN Security Council has failed the people of Syria, and world leaders seem paralyzed by inaction in the face of, what is by anyone's reckoning, an epic crime against humanity. For almost 100 years since Eglantyne Jebb wrote the *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child* in 1924, there has been a recognition that nations have an obligation to protect children. The 189 nations who are signatories on the 2002 United Nation's resolution S-27/2, *A World Fit for Children*, have committed "to spare no effort in continuing with the creation of a world fit for children."

UNICEF, to its everlasting credit, has done everything in its power and gone to the frontlines of conflict to protect children's lives. The UN High Commission for Refugees has stretched its limited resources to look after millions of refugees. The International Red Cross and Medicins Sans Frontiers put their employees and volunteers at peril in order to save lives of those under siege. But this is nowhere near enough. Convoys bringing humanitarian relief reached 22,000 trapped individuals a month compared to 175,000 during 2017, summarizing the scale of the disaster to which the world, led by a bold and resolute UN Security Council, must respond proportionately.

What is to be done? The *Lancet* editorial outlines three courses of action, to which we add two more:

1. Citizens and health professionals must rise up and press government officials to act now, end the UN Security Council paralysis, and impose severe sanctions on the aggressors;
2. All those with influence small and large must join hands in mounting an unremitting call for an end to attacks on health facilities, personnel, and patients, and for the protection of civilians;

3. The UN Secretariat must become much more deliberate and strategic in its effort to ensure that medical evacuations take place and the flow of aid receives the highest priority;
4. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council must surrender their power of veto for resolutions dealing with genocide and crimes against humanity; and
5. Every country must surely open or re-open their borders to Syrian families with children under siege.

Children have the same moral standing as adults, but they lack the legal and resource capacity to act in their own interests. The school children of Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida have been able to exercise moral agency in demanding change in the face of adult handwringing and equivocation following the recent mass murder of their classmates. But the children of Ghouta have no such equivalent capacity to act in their interests to stop the relentless murder of their playmates and families. The handwringing and equivocation must stop.

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