Leinster House

Kildare Street

Dublin 2

October 2016

Dear

I am appealing to you to call on the Irish government to act immediately and effectively to demonstrate Ireland’s support for the people of Syria. After five years of brutal conflict, the war in Syria is now the world’s worst humanitarian catastrophe and a horror which Ireland cannot ignore.

In Eastern Aleppo, approximately 300,000 people, including up to 100,000 children, are under aerial attack by Syrian government and Russian forces. Médecins Sans Frontières report that ‘hundreds of civilians are being massacred’ in these air-strikes. The Assad regime and its Russian allies are dropping barrel bombs, incendiary munitions and ‘bunker-busting’ explosives on this part of the city. Hospitals are a prime target and few doctors are left to treat the victims of this onslaught. According to Amnesty International, such deliberate assaults on civilians and medical facilities ‘amount to war crimes’.

As a respected member of the international community, Ireland has a responsibility to advocate for the protection of civilians in Syria. Firstly, the Irish government must ensure that Ireland raises its voice in the UN to call for effective action to halt the atrocities in Aleppo and other parts of Syria and, more specifically, to stop Syrian regime and Russian air-strikes. Ireland must acknowledge that, as reported by many sources including the Violations Documentation Centre in Syria, President Bashar al-Assad and his allies are responsible for over 90% of civilian deaths in the Syrian conflict. The Irish government must therefore support any credible international efforts to end the war and to bring the perpetrators of war crimes – above all Assad and his henchmen – to justice.

Secondly, the allies of the Syrian government, primarily Russia and Iran, must be held accountable for their role in the killing of Syrian civilians. The Irish government should also take action on this issue. In relation to Russia, Ireland should support current EU initiatives to directly condemn Russia’s military involvement in the Syrian war. The Irish government should go further and insist that punitive sanctions are imposed by the EU, not only on Syrian government officials, but also on Russia. Regarding Iran, the Department of Agriculture and Bord Bia organised an agri-food trade mission to that country in April 2016. This has recently resulted in the opening of the Iranian market to Irish sheep meat. However, as long as Iranian forces are actively engaged in the slaughter of people in Syria, the government must refrain from allowing the export of Irish lamb, or any other Irish products, to Iran. Such steps would be clear messages to Russia and Iran that their intervention in Syria is unacceptable.

Finally, the Irish government must respond to the human consequences of the war in Syria, which has led to the displacement of at least 11 million Syrian people. Over 4.5 million Syrians are now refugees in other countries, most of them living in dire conditions in neighbouring states such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Thus far, the Irish government has only admitted a few hundred Syrian refugees, despite its pledge in 2015 to accept 4,000 people under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.

This slow response to the refugee crisis is having a direct impact on members of the Syrian community in Ireland and their families. Syrians in Ireland fear for the lives of their loved ones who are still in Syria or who are refugees in the overwhelmed surrounding countries. The government must urgently introduce flexible, fair, and fast-tracked procedures for family reunification to bring these at-risk relatives of Syrians in Ireland to safety in this country. This protection must be available to immediate and extended family members of both Syrian refugees and Syrians who have been living in Ireland for some time. These measures enabling family reunification should not be subject to unjust financial or time-related restrictions and applications should be processed without delay.

By responding effectively to these issues, Ireland could show real solidarity with the people of Syria. I ask you to call on the Irish government to take the action outlined above in support of Syrian civilians.

Yours sincerely,