



Dear friends,

Last month marked the fourth anniversary of the beginning of Syria's bloody civil war. When protests against President Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian regime first broke out in March 2011, few could have imagined that the situation would end up so catastrophically bleak for the Syrian people. My fellow Elder and our Chair, [Kofi Annan](#), and I have had first-hand experience of the crisis. We both tried to bring people to the negotiating table and put an end to the cost in human lives. And we failed.

The cost of the world's collective failure has been terribly high. More than 200,000 people have been killed in the past four years. The conflict has escalated with atrocities on all sides, from the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs to mass executions, kidnap and torture.

The war has had a devastating impact on Syria's social and economic fabric. Perhaps as many as 12 million people have fled their homes and many have left the country altogether, placing a heavy burden on neighbouring states such as Lebanon and Jordan; over 3 million children are no longer in school.



To make matters worse, the international community has been unable – and, to some extent, unwilling – to either stop the war or end Syria's humanitarian crisis.

This failure and inaction goes way beyond international diplomats and policymakers. It is shared by all of us. Too many of us have become numbed into despair and apathy over the past four years. Some international broadcasters even found their viewing figures went down when they presented a comprehensive package on Syria's ongoing agonies.

But however grim or upsetting the situation, it is never acceptable to switch off or turn the page. In the words of the Algerian-born French author Albert Camus, *"In such a world of conflict, victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people not to be on the side of the executioners."*

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the terrible spectacle of thousands of Syrian refugees crammed into

rickety vessels and attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

In the past year, some 4,000 men, women and children have lost their lives on this perilous crossing but this has not deterred thousands of others to risk the same journey and put their lives in the hands of people traffickers and criminal gangs.

Incredibly, the European Union's response to the drownings in the Mediterranean was to *cut* the budget for the naval response unit charged with monitoring refugee crossings and rescuing survivors from shipwrecks.

National governments across the EU are either too afraid of, or too beholden to xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment in their own electorates to show common humanity to refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict.

This not only flies in the face of morality, it is counter-productive. The current focus on border security has resulted in inadequate, uncoordinated and ill-thought-out policies that force migrants to resort to illegal and dangerous channels.

In a conflict as bitter, protracted and complex as Syria, it is all too easy to become overwhelmed by despair. If governments and international institutions have been unable to stop the war or protect refugees, then what can ordinary citizens achieve?

My message is this: across the world, but particularly in the comfortable, peaceful societies of developed countries, people should pressure their governments to do more to protect the Syrian refugees. I urge you to lobby your elected representatives for a more humane refugee policy which respects human rights and dignity. This would show the Syrian people that the world has not

forgotten them in their darkest hour.

At the same time, the international community took far too long to wake up to the global danger posed by Daesh (Islamic State) forces in Syria and Iraq, and now hopes to tackle it by a bombing campaign. But bombing cannot be an end in itself. A comprehensive resolution of the conflict is urgently needed. This can only be possible if the main regional players together with the international community collectively generate the political will to act in the face of such horror.

Best wishes,

Lakhdar Brahimi



We need to think differently about women

Graça Machel and Desmond Tutu urge all of us, men and women, to question what is preventing gender equality and to make a commitment to empowering women.



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Jimmy Carter argues that the housing shortage in Gaza is central to any future peace deal.



Israel and Palestine: the path to peace

The Elders call for all players regional and international to re-examine the two-state solution and to redouble efforts to find a path to peace for Israel and Palestine.



Women's rights in principle, women's rights in practice

Activist and award-winning filmmaker Deeyah Khan wants to see gender equality not just written into law, but part of everyday life.

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