



Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner  
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September 29, 2016

The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Democratic Leader Pelosi,

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose over 900 congregations across North America encompass more than 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis, I urge you to bring the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2016 (H.R. 5732) to the House floor for an immediate vote.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year and the holiest time on the Jewish calendar, our call to right the wrongs in our world is especially urgent. We cannot embark on another year in which the Syrian people are forced to endure nightmarish suffering and loss. During this season, we are reminded of the words of the Babylonian Talmud, which teach "Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions of the entire world and does not do so is punished for the transgressions of the entire world," (Shabbat, 54b). On the upcoming Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement, we will be forced to account for these transgressions and answer for the continued affliction of the Syrian people.

For five years, Syrian civilians have faced air strikes, gas attacks, and mass starvation at the hands of the Assad regime. Just last weekend, an attack on Aleppo killed over 300 civilians. These attacks have caused over 50% of Syrians to flee their homes and has contributed to an immense global refugee crisis surpassing that of World War II. It is especially troubling that the Assad regime has targeted attacks on hospitals, schools and supermarkets in an attempt to use civilian lives as leverage against armed rebels. The U.S. has a moral obligation to address this security and humanitarian crisis and these atrocities that offend our shared humanity.

We recognize the incalculable human suffering that can result from our silence, and it is in the spirit of this moral obligation that we urge Congress to take urgent action on Syria.

The Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act would provide for future investigation into potential war crimes and crimes against humanity, and subsequently implement sanctions against actors and entities that have enabled the Syrian government to commit such acts. This bill is a great nonmilitary tool with which we can protect Syrian lives. It would also grant the U.S. the diplomatic leverage needed to negotiate an end to the Syrian conflict and finally bring peace to this war-ravaged people. By bringing the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act to the House



*The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.*



floor for an immediate vote, the U.S. will reaffirm its position as a global leader on human rights and a defender of vulnerable peoples.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jonah Dov Pesner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner

Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism