

How Russia Can Help Bring Relief to Syrians

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The crisis in Syria is getting worse by the day. So far, 130,000 people have been killed, the overwhelming majority of whom are civilians caught in this bloody civil war. Recently, 50,000 photos were released to the media, showing gruesome evidence of torture used by the authorities against opposition forces.

This has turned the attention of the entire world toward Syria. As a result of the harsh winter conditions, aid is unable to get through to the people, particularly those living at checkpoints controlled by forces loyal to Damascus.

Russia can play a key role in getting aid through to Syrians in need by assisting international aid organizations. Syrian President Bashar Assad, who has consistently blocked humanitarian aid from reaching the Syrian people, announced on Dec. 10 that humanitarian aid could reach Syria by air so long as it did not come from Turkey. U.S. planes taking off from Iraq recently completed the first delivery of assistance to two cities in Syria, but much more needs to be

done. Several previous efforts by the United Nations to send humanitarian aid to Syria via Turkey were blocked by the Assad government.

Moscow, which has close relations with the Assad government and Iran, can help lift the blockade on humanitarian aid and secure a wide transportation corridor for more planes to get in to Syria.

A second vital matter is the evacuation of Syrians as they try to survive under such harsh conditions. It is an urgent matter for people living in heavily shelled regions in particular to be removed from the country, perhaps under Russian supervision. With supervision and organization by Russia, humanitarian assistance can be facilitated via Turkey, enabling the people in war zones to be brought to Turkey. It will also eliminate the unease felt by Assad about intervention by Turkey or the opposition.

Only Russia can carry out an initiative that will recognize equal rights to food, heat and shelter for people both in areas controlled by the opposition and in those controlled by the Assad government. For instance, the Yarmouk camp is an example of where the refugees are living in extremely harsh circumstances and require immediate humanitarian aid.

Since innocent people are in need of assistance, geopolitical interests must be set aside. I hope that Russia, as a leading nation, will display the sensitivity to take the initiatives required.

Harun Yahya is author of "Islam Denounces Terrorism."

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