Letter to Mass Peace Action and Peace Action NY State

written by Syria Solidarity NYC | January 11, 2021

Update: Peace Action New York State withdrew their co-sponsorship. Their statement has been added below.

"Remembering Syria's Children," New York City vigil sign

Dear Massachusetts Peace Action and Peace Action New York State,

We the undersigned are Syrians and non-Syrians who support the Syrian people and their right to life, freedom and self-determination. We oppose all forms of violence against the Syrian people, including refugee and Muslim bans, military attacks on civilians, the dissemination of false narratives about their just aspirations for freedom, and attacks on their heroes, martyrs and rescue workers.

Syria has suffered under two generations of dictatorship, passed down from father to son; attacks on freedom of speech and assembly; imprisonment and torture for political beliefs; and a crisis of displaced populations who are unwanted and abused where they seek refuge. This is the reality of Syrians today, under fifty years of the dictatorship of one family that is holding the country hostage, first under Hafez Assad and currently under Bashar Al Assad. The current war in Syria has resulted in 13 million refugees and displaced persons, half a million deaths (probably much more but they stopped counting), and tens of thousands of political prisoners, thousands of whom have been tortured and killed in Assad's dungeons. The overwhelming majority of these outrages are the work of the regime.

We understand that on Jan. 14, 2021, your organizations will feature a webinar on Syria with the participation by Rania Khalek. We are specifically writing to express our disappointment and concern over your choice of Ms. Khalek, who is problematic. On various platforms, many of which are sponsored by Russia Today, she has promoted outright lies and echoed the propaganda that is put out by the Assad regime and Russia. It is also important to note that there is a sizeable Palestinian population in Syria, of whom thousands have suffered the fate of arrest, torture, bombing, gassing and murder by the regime. On these Palestinians she is silent. (For further information, please see the Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, www.actionpal.org.uk/en). She spouts propaganda about Syria and whitewashes the crimes of the oppressors.

Any group or entity that calls itself progressive must stand against oppression everywhere. An apologist for Assad's genocidal regime and his Russian backers should not be normalized nor considered a valid source of information. We ask that you reconsider your choice of presentation on the subject of Syria and perhaps seek out Syrian voices, such as Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees, Syrian American Medical Society, or Abdul Aziz al Hamza of Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently.

It is an attack on the dignity of a group of people when you dismiss and ignore their voices and make them invisible.

Yours truly,

Syria Solidarity New York City

NYC Syria Peace Vigil Group

Syrian American Council

Gail Vignola, Scholars for Syria

Andrew Berman, Veterans for Peace

Stanley Heller, Middle East Crisis Committee, CT

CISPOS, Committee in Solidarity with the People of Syria

Lara el Kateb, Alliance of MENA Socialists

Fred Mecklenburg, *News & Letters*

Stephen R. Shalom, *New Politics*

Emma Wilde Botta, *New Politics*

Abraham Weizfeld, PhD., for the Direct Democracy Movement

Amenah Masri

Adam Ibn Shaddad

Darren Fenwick

Phil Gasper, Professor Emeritus, Notre Dame de Namur University, Belmont, CA

Scott McLemee, *New Politics*

Dan La Botz, *New Politics*

Daniel Fischer, Transnational Solidarity Network, *New Politics*

Jason Schulman, NYC Democratic Socialists of America

Lois Weiner, *New Politics*

Joshua Gold, Broward Democratic Socialists of America and South Florida Jewish Voice for Peace

Michael Hotkowski, Chester, CT

Joshka Wessels, Sweden

Mary Rizzo, Italy

Lelyn R. Masters

Update–Peace Action New York State sent this response on Wednesday January 13th at 9:31 AM:

> Dear Syria Solidarity NYC and other signatories of this letter,
>
> Thank you for reaching out and bringing this to our attention. I appreciate you calling us into this important conversation and for taking the time to give context and propose alternative speakers and organizations to partner with.
>
> As a peace organization, it is never our intention to dismiss and ignore the voices of any victims of war, violence, and militarization. Though we oppose US military intervention abroad, we also absolutely do not want to give a pass to the Assad regime and the atrocities they have committed.
>
> Peace Action New York State has decided to withdraw our cosponsorship of this event. We would love to find some time in the future to touch base more about this and figure out how we can best work together moving forward.
>
> Best,
>
> Emily
>
> — Emily Rubino Director of Policy and Outreach Peace Action New York State