



**Catherine Ashton**  
**High Representative**  
**European External Action Service**  
**1046 Brussels**  
**Belgium**

Brussels, 11 February 2012

Dear High Representative Ashton,

The continuing massacres of the Syrian people make it imperative for the international community to act. We must act now to stop the bloodshed and the killing of thousands of innocent Syrians.

30 years after the massacre on the streets of Hama, the international community ought to have learned something. In 2012, today in Homs and on the streets of other Syrian towns and villages we are repeating mistakes of the past. Thousands and thousands of Syrian people will pay the highest price if we do not push our differences aside and put the interest of the Syrian people first. What is happening in Homs today is clearly the “Benghazi-moment” of Syria. It is either acting or being guilty.

The co-operation that you are developing with the League of Arab States (LAS), the United States and Turkey should be further stepped up. Together with the US Senate, I call on you to take responsibility in setting up a "Friends of the Syrian People" Contact Group of countries for democratic change in Syria, including Turkey and members of the LAS. A meeting of this Contact Group should happen without further delay and should have three main objectives.

Firstly, prepare an operational plan for a humanitarian intervention in Syria, creating safe zones along the Turkish-Syria and Jordan-Syria border with humanitarian corridors leading up to them. This would require concerted efforts by LAS, Turkey, the US and the EU.

Secondly, jointly identify and provide substantial material and technical support, upon request, to Syrian organisations that are representative of the people of Syria. These organisations must make a demonstrable commitment to protect human rights and religious freedom, reject terrorism and abstain from destabilising neighbouring countries. At the same time the sanctions need to be further stepped


up and must target individuals, government officials and state companies responsible for or associated with human rights violations in Syria.

Thirdly, China and Russia have made a serious mistake by vetoing the UN Security Council resolution, but this is a comma and must not become a full stop for our efforts. The aforementioned actions should be integrated in the LAS Action Plan of 2 November 2011 and proposed to the UNSC for its consideration. Meanwhile preparations need to be advanced on proceeding with the "Friends of the Syrian People" Contact Group that should serve as a convening ground for the "coalition of the willing", in which the European Union should actively participate.

In order to support the Syrian people in getting rid of the illegitimate and criminal regime of Bashar al-Assad we have to act now and all options should be considered in achieving our objectives. Support the opposition, work with our international partners and seek transition to democracy which meets the legitimate demands of the Syrian people and is based on an inclusive process of national political dialogue with the participation of all democratic forces and civil society in the country.

It is nearly a year now that the Syrian regime is killing its citizens every single day. There is no time left for talking and doubting. Without waging war, we have the duty to protect the people. It is time to move forward.

Sincerely,



**Guy Verhofstadt**

President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe