

ADAM KINZINGER
16TH DISTRICT, ILLINOIS

DEPUTY REPUBLICAN WHIP

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COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE

—
COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1602

June 27, 2016

□ 1221 LONGWORTH HOB
WASHINGTON D.C. 20515
(202) 225-3635
FAX: (202) 225-3521

□ 628 COLUMBUS ST., STE 507
OTTAWA, IL 61350
(815) 431-9271
FAX: (815) 431-9383

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We are writing to urge the Department of State to commit funding to international criminal investigations and prosecutions of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Syria.

Despite years of censure, the regime of the evil dictator Bashar al-Assad continues to act with impunity against civilian populations, particularly women and children because the regime believes it inflicts more pain per capita on the population. Daily barrel bombs destroy hospitals and markets, hunger continues to be used as a weapon to kill innocents, peaceful protesters have been gunned down or languish in regime prisons, and weapons of mass destruction have been used to gas children.

Unlike many of the atrocities of the twentieth century, the crimes stemming from the Syrian war have been meticulously documented. The compelling nature of this evidence demonstrates a machinery of death unprecedented by any conflict since World War II. Even with the promise of a “cessation of hostilities,” these crimes continue apace, unmoved by international condemnation or strict action.

Though traditional avenues for accountability are currently unavailable for Syria due to political and logistical challenges, the wealth of documentation has made it possible to launch investigations in national courts, bringing the promise of justice decades closer for the victims of these heinous crimes. Moreover, such investigations may have a deterrent effect by shattering the illusion of impunity.

There are currently several organizations and NGOs operating in Syria that send local researchers and lawyers into dangerous warzones to collect crucial evidence that can help prosecute Syrian officials complicit in war crimes against innocent civilians. These war criminals are involved in the decision making that results in indiscriminate barrel bombs on civilian population centers, starvation campaigns against cities like Aleppo and Madaya, or even chemical weapons attacks on civilians, including children in Ghouta. These barbaric murderers must be brought to justice for their participation in these brutal actions.

As Americans, we have a long and proud tradition of standing at the forefront of issues of international criminal justice, offering extensive support to bodies charged with prosecuting the most despicable war criminals following acts of genocide and other crimes against humanity. However, in this category of supporting investigations and prosecutions in places like Syria, we are years behind our counterparts in Europe and Canada. In the FY2016 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, the State Department was authorized to “document, investigate, and prosecute human rights violations in Syrian, including through transitional justice programs and support for nongovernment organizations.” Despite receiving this congressional authorization, the State Department has seemingly only focused efforts on documentation which, while necessary, does nothing to prosecute war criminals and advance justice in our time.

In March, the U.S. House of Representatives sent a powerful message when it overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan H.Con.Res.121, which condemns the actions of the Assad regime and urges the United States to support efforts by international partners to collect evidence and prosecute Syrian government officials that have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. In reflecting the will of the people’s House, the United States must undertake all necessary measures to support international and national non-governmental organizations focused on launching criminal investigations against Syrian war criminals and seek to build the capacity of local investigators in Syria. Even this modest improvement to U.S. Syria policy would have a tremendous impact in future accountability efforts for the Syrian war and reinvigorate faith in America’s commitment to justice for the victims of atrocities.

We have an obligation to the people of Syria and to our own interests as a global leader to investigate and prosecute the crimes of the murderous Assad regime and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. In that vein, we request that the Department of State, within 60 days of receiving this letter, report to Congress on the efforts it has undertaken to support criminal investigations and prosecutions for war crimes committed in Syria and future plans in this endeavor.

We look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



ADAM KINZINGER
Member of Congress



ANDRE CARSON
Member of Congress



ROBERT J. DOLD
Member of Congress



BETTY MCCOLLUM
Member of Congress



RYAN COSTELLO
Member of Congress



CARLOS CURBELO
Member of Congress



DONALD S. BEYER JR.
Member of Congress



EDWARD R. ROYCE
Member of Congress



PETER DEFAZIO
Member of Congress



SUSAN W. BROOKS
Member of Congress



MARCY KAPTUR
Member of Congress