

Russia's Moral Imperative to Save Syrians

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The crisis in Syria has grown worse over the last two months. The death toll has reached 25,000 by most estimates, and 2,000 to 3,000 Syrians leave the country every day, according to the United Nations. More than 10 percent of Syrians have been forced to flee their homes, and 250,000 people, including children unaccompanied by adults, have become refugees.

In addition, an increasing number of Syria's medical institutions have become dysfunctional. Some hospitals have been destroyed by the fighting, while others have been seized by armed groups. The medical supply line has been disrupted, and chronically ill patients no longer receive needed treatment. Charitable organizations say the amount of humanitarian aid reaching Syria is woefully inadequate.

As violence sweeps across Syria for the 18th consecutive month, governments accuse one another of either supporting or working against the ruling regime in Damascus. But the civilian population of Syria is the primary victim of that political impasse. If independent

international humanitarian organizations from both the East and the West were allowed into Syria, they could provide much-needed first aid, distribute food and restore water supplies.

Russia, one of Syria's main allies, could lead the international community in demanding that the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad allow humanitarian organizations to aid those most in need. Such an initiative would show the world that Russia cannot tolerate what is happening and will not let the lives and property of hundreds of thousands of displaced and vulnerable Syrians be ignored as the international community searches for a way out of the political impasse. With the harsh Syrian winter approaching, the already serious humanitarian situation will rapidly deteriorate if action is not taken quickly.

Russia needs to show Syrians that it will not remain an impassive observer of the tragedy taking place in Syria. Securing unrestricted, safe and uninterrupted access for humanitarian organizations to operate in Syria is Russia's moral responsibility.

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