

OPEN LETTER TO CONGRESSMAN ADAM SCHIFF

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From [Asbarez](#) Magazine, 10 December 2013

Congressman Schiff,

With utmost pain and bewilderment, I read your article about ["The Plight of Syria's Christians"](#) on the December 4 issue of Asbarez Post.

Finally and after nearly three years of uninterrupted and vicious covert action for a regime change in Syria, enthusiastically supported by you and your misguided colleagues on Capitol Hill, you come to plainly and accurately describe the open graveyard that my birthplace, Syria, has turned into.



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With utmost pain and bewilderment, I read your article about ["The Plight of Syria's Christians"](#) on the December 4 issue of Asbarez Post.

Finally and after nearly three years of uninterrupted and vicious covert action for a regime change in Syria, enthusiastically supported by you and your misguided colleagues on Capitol Hill, you come to plainly and accurately describe the open graveyard that my birthplace, Syria, has turned into.



Accounts of witnesses and conditions on the ground testify to the fact that death, destruction, displacement and despair in recent wars past, fade away compared to what the perpetrators of this calamity succeeded in achieving in Syria.

And you Congressman, supported those who were intent on destroying Syria.

You supported the sanctions imposed on Syria in which the Syrian Christians were equally victimized.

You supported the funding, arming and invasion of Syria by gangs of extremist fanatics whose imported symbols of freedom and democracy were depicted in kidnapping bishops and nuns, slashing throats of Christian priests and the desecration of Christian & other houses of worship.

Through your silence and lack of condemnation you supported the repeated violations of Syrian sovereignty by Israel and its destructive air raids on targets where Syria's Christians, proudly serving the Syrian army were naturally among the targets.

And at the threshold of the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide, do I remember a condemnation of Turkey's role in opening the gates of HELL on "good neighbor and friendly" Syria, allowing the funding, training, arming and access of the world's jihadists through it's long joint border? Did I hear you condemn Turkey's role in the destruction of the Genocide survivors' safe haven, the heroic city

of Aleppo, and the attack on the Armenian Genocide monument in Der El Zor?

You were one of the first to hail the Obama Administration's "bright" decision to compound the pain and suffering of the Syrians, including Syria's Christians, by remotely bombing Syria for an ugly crime (a last desperate effort of the foreign criminal gangs in Syria trying in vain, to secure a foreign intervention?) . And you only changed your mind, Mr. Schiff, after witnessing the tsunami of opposition from the American people against any kind of attack on Syria.

And when did this love of Syria's Christians wake up in you, Mr. Schiff? And what's so special about Syria's Christians?

Your enthusiastic support of George Bush's war on and occupation of Iraq resulted in the demise of hundreds, the displacement of thousands and the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians from their ancestral lands.

Your blank-check support of Israel's discriminative policies, perpetual occupation, land seizure, settlement expansion, violence against the indigenous population in occupied Palestine have long ended the "continued vitality" of the two thousand year old Christian communities, including the exodus of tens of thousands of Armenians, who once called Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Palestine, the cradle of Christianity, their home.

Shall I continue with Egypt, Sudan or Lebanon?

Enough said about your care and compassion for Christians in the Middle East.

Congressman, spare us the insult of shedding crocodile tears over the Christian communities in Syria and the Middle East.

For a century indeed and the last 40 years in particular, The Christian communities in Syria lived in peace, security, prosperity and an atmosphere of cultural & religious freedom, until the allies you supported, introduced "freedom" and "democracy" to the region.

Congressman, when it comes to Syria, silence, and a hands-off policy, will be the best demonstration of respect towards the Plight of Syria's Christians.

Respectfully,

Zaven Khanjian

Chairman of the Syrian Armenian Relief Fund

THE PLIGHT OF SYRIA'S CHRISTIANS

By Representative Adam Schiff

As winter descends upon the Middle East, the plight of Syria's people, who have endured nearly three years of savage civil war, grows more desperate with each passing day.

Fighting rages on throughout much of the country and, with government forces making headway in recent months, many of the rebel groups have splintered, turning on each other. As in wars throughout history, it is civilians – especially children – who have borne much of the suffering. More than nine million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance and a quarter of these, two point two million, have fled the country, mostly to neighboring Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Half of those refugees – more than one million people – are children.

Another six point five million Syrians are internally displaced, having fled their homes but remaining inside the country, often in parts of Syria that have changed hands on multiple occasions and with attendant civilian suffering.

While all of Syria's people have been affected by the fighting, it is Christians, who make up about ten percent of the country's population, who are at greatest risk, given their small numbers and the increasingly religious nature of a war that started out as a broad-based secular movement that sought to change the character of the Syrian regime – but not the regime itself.

For two millennia, Syria has been home to one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, a population dominated by the Eastern churches, but also including smaller numbers of Catholics and Protestants. Syria's Christians have been comfortably and fully integrated into the economic, political and cultural life of modern Syria and, despite their small numbers, are well-represented among the country's elite. Tragically, this long, peaceful coexistence has been shattered and half a million Syrian Christians – nearly one in four – have fled the country since the fighting began.

Like minorities the world over, Syria's Christians have tried to avoid getting dragged into the fighting that has gripped their homeland. But with their top two population centers, Aleppo and Homs, having seen some of the most savage fighting of the war, Christians have been unable to avoid being drawn into the conflict.

While the uprising against Syrian President Bashar Assad did not start out as a sectarian conflict, it has increasingly taken on a religious tone as many of the rebels have wrapped themselves in the mantle of fundamentalist Islam.

Initially, the Free Syrian Army and other larger rebel groupings, distanced themselves from the more religious rebels factions, some of whom are linked to al Qaeda, but even they have adopted an increasingly Islamist tone in recent months. This has exacerbated the plight of the Christians, who are increasingly targeted simply because they are Christian and because they are seen by many Muslims as backing the government.

The truth is that Syrian Christians, many of whom have family members among my Armenian-American constituents, did not rally to the regime. Syrian Christians, like most other Syrians, simply wanted a freer and more open society and a greater voice in their own government. It is a testament to the depth of Christian desperation that atrocities perpetrated by radical Islamists have done more to test Christian neutrality than the use of chemical weapons and war crimes by Assad's forces.

Ending the civil war through a negotiated solution represents the best outcome for the Christian community, and the international community must insist that any agreement reached at the upcoming peace talks in Geneva or thereafter will guarantee the safety of Syria's minority populations.

In the meantime, America can do more to help those seeking refuge. That is why I have been working for much of the past year to convince the Administration to allow humanitarian parole for the nearly six thousand Syrians with approved immigrant petitions to the United States.

As hundreds of millions around the world prepare to celebrate the most joyful day of the Christian calendar, the international community must intensify its efforts to end this terrible war, to protect Syria's Christians and to insure the continued vitality of this two thousand year old community.

Representative Adam Schiff *represents California's 28th District in the U.S. House of Representatives, and serves on the House Intelligence Committee and Appropriations Committees.*

