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## **National Faith Organizations urge the United States to lift sanctions on Syria and expedite humanitarian assistance to facilitate earthquake response**

Early on the morning of February 6, the region surrounding Gaziantep in Southern Türkiye was hit with a [7.8 magnitude earthquake](#), followed by a second earthquake nine hours later with a [magnitude of 7.5](#). Since then, there have been well over a hundred aftershocks, with many more expected in the coming weeks and months. As of February 17, over 40,000 Syrians, Turks, and Kurds are known to have perished and around [26 million persons](#) have been affected by the earthquakes. The Türkiye-Syrian border has been home to many displaced Syrians since the beginning of the Syrian war on March 15, 2011.

We appreciate the Biden administration's quick humanitarian response. [Disaster response teams](#) sent by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to Türkiye and Northern Syria were direly needed. We additionally applaud the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)'s issuing of the new [Syrian General License](#) for the necessary aid response, but fear this will not go far enough.

The Middle East Council of Churches and World Council of Churches have called for the lifting of U.S. [economic sanctions](#) in order to help not only those affected by the recent earthquakes but also civilians throughout [all of Syria](#) who are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. They cannot fulfill all the needs of Syrians within their parishes and regions because of the multilayered constrictions caused by [U.S. sanctions](#).

Joining in with our siblings in Syria, and in the spirit of Isaiah 1:17, "Do good; seek justice," and Micah 6:8, "...do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly..." we call on the U.S. government to urgently reconsider the [use of broad based sanctions](#) in Syria. Sanctions and their collateral effects have already caused Syrians dire harm. The recent earthquakes will surely compound humanitarian needs in [Syria](#), and U.S. sanctions will continue to inhibit our work with our Syrian counterparts. Therefore, we as a community ask Congress and the Administration to:

- **Lift sanctions** in order to expedite aid delivery, open commercial access, and expand relief services to civilians in need.
- **Remove the 180-day sunset** on the new General License for Syria.
- **Extend applicability** for the newly adopted [Global General License](#) for material support in *all* of Syria.
- **Continue to communicate** with Syrian and UN counterparts during the earthquake response, and **work** to open new border crossings for personnel to access Northern Syria.
- **Issue letters of comfort** to financial institutions and aid organizations to help facilitate emergency assistance in Syria.
- **Coordinate** the opening of banking channels to help NGOs and INGOs get aid to where it is needed; *including* family remittances.
- **Appropriate** additional funds to USAID and UN programs to support Türkiye and Syria through the earthquake response and recovery.

We as the faith community ask the Biden administration and Members of Congress to affirm the dignity of all persons by **lifting sanctions, continuing diplomacy, and sending aid to those most affected** in Türkiye and Syria.

**Signed by:**

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)

Community of Christ

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. (MCC)

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (USA)

The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries