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Diplomacy Could Have Prevented the Bloodshed in Northeastern Syria

Washington, DC (October 10, 2019) – The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) issued the following statement today on the need for careful diplomacy in deescalating tensions in Syria:

As a Quaker organization committed to ending all wars, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) calls on Turkey to immediately end its assault on northeastern Syria and urges the U.S. government to pursue a diplomatic solution to this quickly deteriorating situation.

The U.S. military presence in Syria was never authorized by Congress and must come to an end. But the sudden withdrawal of U.S. troops without consulting our allies or our nation's own military and diplomatic experts – without plans to protect the thousands of civilians and refugees living there, enable the delivery of humanitarian aid, or guard captured ISIS fighters – can only mean a humanitarian and security disaster.

Careful diplomacy by the Trump administration with all the regional stakeholders, including Syria, Turkey, Russia, the Kurds, and Iran, could have prevented this. Their involvement is desperately needed going forward.

Before ordering the drawdown of U.S. troops, President Trump should have obtained guarantees from Turkey, a NATO ally, to ensure the safety and well-being of all civilians living in northeastern Syria. The Trump administration should have worked with European and other countries to repatriate their citizens detained in prison camps in Kurdish-controlled Syria for fighting with ISIS. The administration also should be encouraging the United Nations to negotiate an end to the civil war in Syria and all the conflicts in the region.

Diplomacy and international cooperation are the most effective and principled means of preventing violence and resolving conflict. Attempting to impose the will of the United States on others using force is rarely successful in the long run and carries unacceptable human, economic, moral, and environmental costs.

Continued U.S. military involvement in Syria is unjust, unwise, and unsustainable. It is also not in the interests of the Syrian or American people.

The dire results of this unilateral move by President Trump underscore the importance of securing congressional authorization before engaging U.S. troops in overseas conflicts. We call on Congress to exercise its responsibilities under the Constitution to debate and vote before allowing the United States to be drawn into armed conflict.

For more information or to speak with FCNL's Legislative Representative for Middle East Policy Hassan El-Tayyab, subject matter expert, please contact Tim McHugh at tim@fcnl.org.