



10 September 2013

The Prime Minister
Parliament of Australia
PO Box 6022, House of Representatives
Parliament House, CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Tony Abbott

Congratulations on your becoming Prime Minister. On behalf of Australian Quakers I wish you well in the many tasks you face.

I take this opportunity to raise with you our concern at the challenge posed to peace and security by the recent use of chemical weapons in the civil war in Syria.

We believe that Australia, as a member of the United Nations Security Council, should emphasise that Council's central role in any decisions about the response. Australia's contribution can thus help affirm the United Nations as the primary avenue for international efforts to resolve the crisis posed by the chemical weapons attack, and its capacity to explore all nonviolent options available to prevent any further use of such weapons (e.g. through seizure of the weapons, embargo on arms).

The report of the UN inspectors about their findings needs to be weighed fully, and a full debate held in the Council on the options available to the international community to uphold international law and ensure that any action taken does not add to the conflict and cause further violence and suffering in the region.

If necessary, the mandate of the inspectors needs to be extended to be more comprehensive, given the different versions of what happened in Syria. We have become aware recently, for example, that a group called Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) – in an open letter to President Obama - has revealed information that raises real questions about the US Government's claims that the attacks were the responsibility of the Syrian government.

More widely, we ask that Australia use its good offices to support moves by the United Nations and others to bring the parties involved in the civil war to negotiations to end the enormous human and material cost that has resulted.

In peace

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julian Robertson".

Julian Robertson
Presiding Clerk
Australia Yearly Meeting

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