

THE BERTRAND RUSSELL PEACE FOUNDATION

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MOTHER AGNES MARIAM AND MUSSALAHA

Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross (civil name Fadia Laham) and the Mussalaha Reconciliation Initiative in Syria have been nominated by Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate, for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize.

In her letter to Nobel Institute, Mairead Maguire said:

‘At a time when the world so desperately needs to see a peaceful way forward to end the bloodshed and conflict in Syria, the Mussalaha Initiative stands out as a beacon of hope showing us a better way forward, one which comes from within Syrian Society and expresses the spontaneous desire of the majority of Syrians for a peaceful path, a way forward that departs from violence and embraces a future where differences are resolved in an atmosphere of mutual respect that preserves the historic fraternity of the Syrian people. The Mussalaha initiative is an outstanding example of the resilient spirit of the Syrian people and their innate ability to resolve their difficulties, by themselves, even in the most tragic and exceptional of circumstances. We have a duty to support their work in every way possible.

Mussalaha, which translates as ‘reconciliation’, is a community-based non-violent popular initiative stemming from within Syrian civil society. Founded at the community level, it includes members of all Syria’s ethnic and religious communities who are tired of the war. Mussalaha fills a void created by the noise of weapons; it does not side with any of the warring parties, rather it embraces all. The movement says ‘no’ to the continued loss of life, and ‘yes’ to a non-violent solution. The initiative says ‘no’ to civil war and rejects all forms of sectarian violence and denominational strife. Its founding session was a peace congress held two years ago on 25 January 2012 in the Sahara complex on the Syrian coast.

As a guest of the Mussalaha Initiative, I visited Syria in May 2013 where I met a few of the millions of refugees and internally displaced

people whose lives have been torn apart by the ongoing conflict in that country. I learned from those I spoke to, both within the government and in opposition groups, that while there is a legitimate movement calling for long overdue reform in Syria, it is one of peaceful non-violence and that the worst acts of violence are being perpetrated by outside groups who strive to incite inter-communal division and discord. Extremist groups from around the world have converged upon Syria, bent on turning the conflict into one of ideological hatred. The Mussalaha Initiative has worked diligently to stem this flow of violence and heal the wounds inflicted on the social fabric of the country.

Over the last two years, the Mussalaha Initiative has worked in mediation and negotiation, often crossing lines of conflict in the most difficult and life threatening of circumstances. Many abducted people have been freed, prisoner swaps facilitated, humanitarian aid supplied without discrimination, evacuation of civilians from conflict zones made possible, and disarmament of local opposition fighters peacefully facilitated. Principle among those who have worked tirelessly for this peace initiative is Mother Agnes Mariam; with courage and conviction she has been an outspoken advocate of peace, a voice seeking justice, and one which has consistently called on the international community to recognize the truth with regard to what is happening in Syria.

Mother Agnes Mariam's astute observations, which discredited the video evidence offered by the United States as proof of an alleged chemical gas attack in East Ghouta, contributed to help forestall what would have proved a regionally devastating external military intervention in Syria. This heroic peacemaker has thought nothing of placing her own life on the line for the sake of others, and at great personal risk she personally brokered a cease-fire between rebels and the Syrian authorities in Moadamiya, Damascus province. This work facilitated the transfer of over 5,000 civilians from a besieged opposition area and included the voluntary surrender of over 500 men, many of whom had been armed opposition combatants.

In making this nomination for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize, I believe that there is no military or paramilitary solution to the Syrian conflict and only through dialogue and negotiation can peace be reached. We urgently need a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria. Mother Agnes Mariam and the Mussalaha Initiative in Syria exemplify all that is remarkable about the resilience of humanity when faced with unbelievable adversity. The Mussalaha Initiative, which unites people of all faiths, and none, and ethnic backgrounds, deserves to be nurtured, supported and fully

recognized for the enormous contribution it has made, and continues to make in saving lives, and in directing all Syrians towards the path of peace.

www.facebook.com/peoplescommissionforinternationalreconciliation

See also; *Australians for Mussalaha reconciliation in Syria*; AMRIS; <http://australiansforreconciliationsyria.wordpress.com/>

KURDS IN SYRIA: AN INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

We support the peace efforts initiated towards ending the war in Syria. This war has been going on for almost three years, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people, the displacement of millions more and the destruction of the country. To achieve an end to this conflict, we hope that the Geneva II Conference to be held on 22 January 2014 will result in a peaceful and permanent solution.

The Kurds in Syria have always declared their support for all such international efforts. The Kurdish people are struggling for the right to live freely with their own identity in a democratic Syria. The Kurds in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) have neither succumbed to the persecutions and massacres by the regime or by those groups linked to Al-Qaeda. The Kurds want to live autonomously within a democratic, equal and just Syria alongside all its peoples and religious minorities of the country; Syria represents a multi-cultural, multi-faith and multi-ethnic reality. We, the undersigned academics, politicians, human rights activists and scientists, believe that the Kurdish people should be represented at Geneva II by a delegation from the Kurdish Supreme Council. The Supreme Council was formed last year and is representative of all Kurdish parties and institutions.

We believe that the Kurdish people should be represented by the Kurdish High Council in an international conference of this significance where the Kurdish people's future will be directly determined. Only then can Geneva II play its rightful role in securing the desired peace for all.

First Signatories:

Venkatraman Ramakrishnan, Nobel Prize Laureate (2009), India; **Dr. Vandana Shiva**, Alternative Nobel Peace Prize, India; **Ann-Margarethe Livh**, Oppositional Vice Mayor of Stockholm City Council, Sweden; **Mikael Gustafsson** – Member of the European Parliament Left Party, Sweden; **Lincoln Davis**, Member of the US Congress (2003-2011), US; **Shudhakar Reddy**, Secretary General, Communist Party (CPI),

India; **Lars Ohly** – Member Of Parliament, the Left Party and Ex-President of left party, Sweden; **Hans Linde** – Member of Parliament Left Party and Foreign spokesperson, Sweden; **Torbjörn Björlund** – Member of Parliament Left Party, Sweden; – **Igshaan Higgins** – South African Academy For Young Leaders, South Africa; **Solly Mapaila** – Deputy General Secretary of South African Communist Party; **Judge Essa Moosa** – Chairperson of KHRAG, South Africa; **Faizel Moosa** – ANC Dullah Omar Region, South Africa; **Ebrahim Wise** – ANCYL RTT Dullah Omar Region, ANCYL RTT Executive Member Economic Development Portfolio, South Africa; **Kariane Westrheim**. EUTCC chair & University of Bergen, Norway; **Dr. Gisela Penteker**, IPPNW, Germany; **Kurdo Baksi**, Author and candidate for the European Parliament (Green Party); **Lord Hylton** – House of Lords, UK; **Lord Rea** – House of Lords, UK; **Jean Lambert** – Member of the European Parliament, UK; **Jill Evans** – Member of the European Parliament, UK; **Hywel Williams MP** – House of Commons, UK; **Bruce Kent** – Vice-President, International Peace Bureau,UK; **Robert Olson** – Professor of Middle East History and Islamic History at the University of Kentucky, US; **Tony Simpson** – Editor, The Spokesman journal,Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, UK; **Nick Hildyard** – policy adviser, UK; **Felix Padel** – Professor in Rural Management, Indian Institute of Health Management Research, Jaipur, India & UK; **Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, dr.phil.** Denmark/Finland; **Rezan Saleh** – Secretary General, AIDA, non-profit European association for intercultural artistic development.; **Margaret Owen OBE**, –international human rights lawyer; **Melanie Gingell** – barrister, UK; **Maggie Bowden** – General Secretary ‘Liberation’, UK; **Hugo Charlton** – barrister, UK; **Joost Jongerden** – Assistant Professor, Wageningen University, the Netherlands; **Khatchatur I. Pilikian** – Professor of Music & Art, LSFC Secretary; **Mark Durkan MP**, House of Commons, UK.