

A Syrian resistance leader's plea to the world

By **Muhammad Zuka**, with **Ammar Abdulhamid** and **Ken Ballen**, Special to CNN

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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- A resistance leader: Protest leaders counted on the world's support for their cause
- Instead, they have been left alone to fight, their appeals for help ignored, he says
- Writer: "Our suffering increases under the weight of the violent and brutal crackdown"
- He calls for support for the Syria Free Army, humanitarian corridors, safe havens

Editor's note: *Muhammad Zuka, a pseudonym, is a Syrian resistance leader in his mid-30s from the Qalamoun region, north of Damascus. He owned a small business but lost it in the crackdown. He recently participated, with six colleagues, in a Skype call with U.S. journalists and others hosted by the [Foundation for Defense of Democracies](#). This commentary was translated from Arabic and facilitated by Ammar Abdulhamid, author of the daily blog *Syrian Revolution Digest* and a foundation fellow. Ken Ballen, author of the book "[Terrorists in Love](#)" (Free Press, 2011) and president of [Terror Free Tomorrow](#), a nonprofit institute that researches attitudes toward extremism in Syria and elsewhere, also assisted.*

North of Damascus, Syria (CNN) --The Syrian revolution has taken place as a long-delayed response to the misery and helplessness visited upon the Syrian people by a narrow authoritarian clique that treated the country as its own private fiefdom.

Occurring within the context of the Arab Spring, and considering what world leaders already knew about the nature of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, protest leaders had believed that world reaction would be far more sympathetic to our desire for freedom. Unfortunately, we were wrong. The world has been slow to condemn al-Assad's atrocities and sanction his behavior. Worse, the international community has failed to develop a plan or vision of what should come next.

Syrian protesters have been entirely left to our own devices, to fend for ourselves against a barbaric regime actively supported by its historical allies. We have tried to appeal to the world, to argue our case in the arena of international public opinion and to suggest courses of action, using the Internet and YouTube videos, and by talking to the

few foreign correspondents who managed to find their way to us. Meanwhile, our suffering increases under the weight of the violent and brutal regime crackdown. International sanctions have been inadequate to stop the bloodshed and could easily backfire when there is no endgame in sight.

When the death toll reached 5,000 and the number of detainees 50,000, we were finally forced to resort to violence. Our protests started entirely peacefully. Yet after months of seeing unarmed protesters mowed down by tanks and children targeted by snipers, we needed to start defending ourselves. Defectors from al-Assad's loyalist army joined with us and have led to the establishment of the Free Syrian Army.

Stopping our resistance is no longer an option. Talking to al-Assad and the people who drove us to the brink, who called us "infiltrators," "germs" and "terrorists" is tantamount to betraying everything we have stood for. Al-Assad's promises of reform sound as disingenuous now as they did when he first made them in 2000.

Today, as the regime's brutality increases and entire residential neighborhoods and towns are being targeted indiscriminately with howitzers and tanks, we are more committed than ever to defending ourselves while protecting the civic nature of our movement.

For those who doubt our ability to do this, just remember that not a single massacre or act of revenge has taken place in any of the communities that have been under the control of the protesters. The regime makes claims and spreads rumors but offers no verifiable proof. Meanwhile, its atrocities have been meticulously documented by our colleagues and more recently by the foreign correspondents who gained access to the country.

The world has no reason to be afraid of us. This revolution was launched to reclaim the future for freedom and democracy. For this, we should be engaged and supported. We are not one color, but a rainbow, committed to protecting our national diversity and the values of tolerance for which Syrian society has always been known -- not because the world wants it, but because it is our heritage. Had we had any other agenda, the world would have already seen signs of that on the ground. It has been almost a year since the revolution began, yet, despite the regime's provocations, we remain committed to national unity, and we shall not waver.

Here is what we ask of the world:

- Recognize the Free Syrian Army, whose soldiers stand among us and risk their lives to protect us;
- Provide material and logistical support to the Free Syrian Army so it can protect protest hubs while developing the necessary command structure to act in accordance

with the professional standards required for leading the transitional period with the civilian leadership;

- Engage the protest leaders on the ground, for we are the ones responsible for ensuring that this revolution remains committed to civic and democratic values.
- Help establish safe havens along Syria's borders with her neighbors; and
- Help establish humanitarian corridors to embattled Homs communities, where the specter of famine grows by the day, and where residential neighborhoods are getting bombarded around the clock.

We know these are not simple or easy demands. But it's clear by now that, long before the Russian and Chinese vetoes of the U.N. Security Council resolution, international reluctance and confusion have given al-Assad's regime a green light for further escalation.

Today the death toll is approaching 8,000, with 60,000 detained and 20,000 missing. When will it be the right time to help us? What other option is there that hasn't been tried yet?