

Statement of Dr. Muhammad Bakr Ghbeis, Immediate Past President and Board Member

Citizens for a Secure and Safe America

in the

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

July 10, 2024

Chairman Wilson and Co-Chair Cardin,

Thank you so much for holding today's hearing. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement on behalf of Citizens for a Secure and Safe America (C4SSA).

The last decade has seen extraordinary devastation across Syria with hundreds of thousands dead and millions displaced at the hands of the Assad regime. But today's hearing is so important because none of the murders, none of the disappearances, none of the brutality would have been possible without the support of Vladimir Putin and his war machine. Russian weapons are fueling the conflict while Moscow's political backing protects Damascus in the United Nations and around the world.

It would be bad enough if Russia's cruel approach to Syria stopped there, but unfortunately that's not the case. Putin has applied so many of the ruthless strategies he employed in Syria to his ferocious assault on Ukraine. Just yesterday, that attack took on a new and horrific face when Russian cruise missiles destroyed a Kyiv children's hospital, killing dozens.

Clearly, Bashar Assad and his henchmen must be held accountable for their campaign of terror in Syria. But Vladimir Putin must be brought to justice as well. Murderous schemes are murderous schemes regardless of where they occur, and the perpetrators must be held to account.

Some senior Assad officials have been indicted and convicted in courts across Europe, and the wheels of justice have begun to turn in other places. But more must be done. I'm pleased to inform the Commission that C4SSA, in partnership with the Public and International Law and Policy Group, has written a groundbreaking report entitled "Fighting 13 Years of Impunity: Accountability Opportunities for United States Leadership in Responding to Mass Atrocities in Syria." The report details progress in the effort to advance accountability for the terrible crimes committed in the Syrian Civil War and proposals more that must be done.

Chairman Wilson and Co-Chairman Cardin, I am writing this statement as I visit the Rukban refugee camp in southern Syria, near the border with Jordan. I am joining the Syrian Emergency Task Force as a guest of this community of 8,000 Syrians receiving vital lifesaving supplies. It is an honor to witness the conditions on the ground with the help of the U.S. military. Please know that Syrians everywhere appreciate the generosity of the people of the United States and the steadfast support of America's service personnel. Our presence in Syria is extremely important and must continue.

Again, I thank the Commission for holding this important hearing and greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement. I look forward to working with Senators and members of the House on both sides of the aisle in the days ahead to support the Syrian people in their quest for human rights, justice, and democracy and in critical efforts to push back against the Assad regime.