

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

August 5, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In the face of a brutal and unjustifiable crackdown on ongoing protesters in Syria, I urge you to call for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down. It is incumbent on our nation to rally the international community to increase pressure on the regime and to support the change sought so courageously by the Syrian people.

The durability of the Syrian people's protests in the face of a regime intent on brutally putting down their legitimate clamor for change has surprised and amazed the world. It is a testament to the Syrian people's courage and commitment to gaining their freedom. President al-Assad and his regime's vicious assault on their own people has robbed his regime of any possible claim on power and has served to undermine whatever support he had among other nations. Secretary of State Clinton recently estimated that over 2,000 Syrians have been killed in the crackdown, and the regime's assault has only intensified in recent days. It's time for al-Assad to go, and it's time for the United States to publicly state that.

You have rightly maintained and toughened targeted sanctions on Syria, but the reality is that the U.S. has limited unilateral leverage with that country. Working with our partners in Europe and the region, we can increase pressure on the regime and isolate it. The deteriorating economy—resulting from the regime's crackdown and international isolation—should help persuade the Syrian business community and many members of the regular armed forces that their future lies not with the al-Assad regime but with a new, more open and democratic Syria.

At the same time as the international community increasingly denounces the al-Assad regime, it must begin preparing for a post-Assad period. There is a real risk that the aftermath could be chaotic and bloody, especially if the Alawite minority in Syria chooses to fight rather than participate in an orderly transition to democracy.

Throughout, the U.S. must express its support for the right of Syrian protestors to peacefully express themselves and achieve reform. In this regard, U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford's outspoken criticism of the al-Assad regime, and his remarkable visit to Hama despite Syrian efforts to restrict his movement, has provided vital support for protestors. Now, we must declare ourselves publicly in favor of a new regime in Syria.

What is happening in Syria is being driven by the Syrian people, and it is about them. But that nation's transition to a democracy would have a transformative effect on the entire region. Thank you for your continuing efforts to support that important transformation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Al Franken". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Al Franken  
United States Senator