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**From:** Anne-Marie Slaughter [redacted]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 18, 2012 7:20 PM  
**To:** H  
**Cc:** Abedin, Huma; Jacob J Sullivan (SullivanJJ@state.gov); Cheryl Mills  
**Subject:** the power of women, Syria, and 21st c statecraft

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I hope you've seen this. The text of the video letter gives me chills. AM

## The public shaming of Asma al-Assad

Posted By Colum Lynch · Wednesday, April 18, 2012 - 11:53 AM · [Share](#)



Dear Asma, remember those heady times before the Arab Spring, when we pinned our hopes on the "rose of the desert," your ability to work your liberalizing magic, and the dream that you could turn your autocratic husband into a democrat?

Those days are over.

Europe's elites have completed the total ostracism of Syria's stylish British-born first lady, **Asma al-Assad**, banning her from stepping foot in most European capitals or shopping in Europe's finest department stores.

Last month, the European Union added her name to a list of President **Bashar al-Assad**'s cronies subjected to a travel ban and asset freeze.

And now, the wives of Britain's and Germany's U.N. ambassadors have produced a new YouTube **video** letter scolding Asma for her obsession with fashion and image at a time when her husband's government is launching a bloody crackdown on protesters. (See the online **petition** here.)

The video draws from the image of Asma that emerged from a series of **leaked emails** she sent to her husband, describing extravagant purchases at posh European retail establishments. Interspersing glamour shots of Asma from a *Vogue* magazine shoot with images of mortally wounded Syrian children and common women protesting her husband's rule, the video serves as an online letter and petition from the world's women to Asma to stop the violence in Syria.

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The text reads:

"Dear Asma...

Some women care for style

And some women care for their people.

Some women struggle for their image

And some women struggle for survival.

Some women have forgotten what they preached about peace

[Asma, at lectern: "We all deserve the same thing: We should all be able to live in peace, stability and with our dignities."]

And some women can only pray for their dead.

Some women pretend that they have no choice

And some women just act.

What happened to you, Asma?

Hundreds of Syrian children have already been killed and injured

One day, our children will ask us

What we have done to stop this bloodshed

What will your answer be, Asma?"

That you, Asma, had no choice?

What about this boy, where was his choice?

Each single child had a name and a family.

Their lives will never be the same again.

Asma, when you kiss your own children goodnight,

Another mother will find the place next to her empty.

These children could all be your children.

They are your children.

Stand up for peace, Asma.

Speak out now, for the sake of your people.

Stop your husband and his supporters.

Stop being a bystander.

No one cares about your image.

We care about your action.

Right now.

The project is the brain-child of **Huberta von Voss-Wittig**, a journalist married Germany's U.N. ambassador **Peter Wittig**, and **Sheila Lyall Grant**, the wife of Britain's U.N. ambassador **Mark Lyall Grant**. Other prominent diplomatic spouses, including **Muna Ghassan Tamim Rihani**, the wife of the Qatari president of the U.N. General Assembly, **Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser**, have signed the petition. By Wednesday morning, the online campaign had registered more than 4,500 signatures, including the wives of the U.N. ambassadors from Japan, Lithuania, and Finland.

The point of the project is to try to harness the power of YouTube to draw attention to the crisis in Syria and to rally women from across the globe to register their disgust with the Syrian first lady's conduct during one of the bloodiest chapters in the Arab Spring.

"We came up with this idea really to make Asma speak out; her voice is desperately needed in stopping the bloodshed," said Huberta Wittig, who traveled frequently to Syria when her husband was Germany's ambassador to Lebanon. "She can't hide behind her husband any more."

Wittig told *Turtle Bay* that the initiative is personal, and that it has nothing to do with the U.N.'s diplomatic or her husband's government's efforts to resolve the crisis. The video was produced with the unpaid help of a team of two producers, and a young British actress, **Clemency Burton-Hill**, who provided the narration voiceover. Wittig said the project was partly inspired by the Kony2012 YouTube campaign, but that they strove to produce a film that didn't look like a Hollywood picture.

The campaign caps a dramatic reversal of fortune for the Syrian first lady. Indeed, the 36-year-old former British investment banker from Acton, West London, was viewed as a force for modernity and liberalization in Syria when she married the young Bashar in 2000, the same year the ophthalmology student replaced his father, **Hazef al-Assad**, as Syria's ruler.

Before the current upheaval, she was lauded as a force for modernization in Syria, a whip-smart beauty whose liberal views might one day trickle through the repressive ranks of the Assad regime. *Vogue* magazine dubbed her the "Rose of the Desert" in a controversial and highly flattering profile that was published at the start of the Syrian uprising and subsequently removed from its online website.

But her standing has taken a sharp fall since the *Guardian* published a trove of highly personal emails with her husband, revealing her taste for online luxury shopping, which included thousands of dollars of purchases, including French chandeliers, candlesticks, and other items -- which seemed not only excessive but incongruous with the mounting bloodshed and crackdown on ordinary Syrian civilians.

"Here she is an educated woman who came in as a young moderate and she hasn't lived up to that reputation," Lyall Grant told *Turtle Bay*. "She has spoken about dignity and all these important aspects of life but she has not taken action" to reaffirm them.

Despite her pariah status and an EU travel ban, Asma is still allowed to travel to Britain, where she retains British citizenship. But senior British officials have made it clear that she is not really welcome, and she could also face possible arrest on charges of violating EU sanctions during her online shopping sprees.

"British nationals, British passport holders do obviously have a right of entry to the United Kingdom," Britain's Foreign Secretary **William Hague** said last month, according to the BBC. "But given that we are imposing an asset freeze on all of these individuals, and a travel ban on other members of the same family and the regime, we're not expecting Mrs Assad to try to travel to the United Kingdom at the moment."

Anne-Marie Slaughter  
Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University Professor of Politics and International Affairs  
Princeton University  
440 Robertson Hall

Princeton, NJ 08544

Assistant: Terry Murphy

Website: [www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr](http://www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr)

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