

STATEMENT: SBC rejects OCHA proposals¹ to shift Syrian aid decision-making operations to Damascus

The Syrian British Council (SBC) categorically rejects all and any move that would enable the Assad regime to gain de facto control over the decision-making and transportation process of humanitarian aid within Syrian territory. The SBC reminds OCHA of the regime's track-record of intentionally and actively manipulating and preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid to parts of Syria outside its control^{2 3}. In acknowledgement of this record, and in the absence of any evidence that would suggest a future cessation of the regime's obstructionist actions, the SBC stands against any scenario that would see the UN consolidate its Syria response base to regime-held territory. Any such move would leave all affiliated aid workers at the mercy of threats, violence and intimidation enacted by the regime's security branches and its allied foreign militias, in turn undermining efforts to deliver aid to an estimated 4.5 million people in opposition-held areas. In 2018 Dr. Annie Sparrow of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, observed that the OCHA's decision to base its operations in Damascus triggered:

...a cascading set of problems for the UN and allowed the Assad regime to seize control of the relief effort...The Red Crescent has long been tied to the Syrian state apparatus, and any hint of its independence was snuffed out after 2011...Red Crescent's new unofficial policy was to deliver aid according to partisan criteria. Staff and volunteers who violated these rules were detained and tortured, even killed. (ibid.)

The SBC stresses that any move to cement the Syria response base to regime-held territory would be seen as rewarding the regime with a status of legitimacy, in spite of its systemic and on-going committing of war crimes and crimes against humanity—a gross perversion of international norms and humanitarian law that will result in irreparably damaging the credibility of the United Nations and erasing the faith that many hold in this international institution. **ENDS**

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¹ http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2019/04/23/outcry-un-plans-consolidate-syria-aid-operations-damascus?fbclid=IwAR2TjBQYS2KdO7tq5Asgsd3N8p2lCXmg5W_J9O3djkuJVfSVbCaaSDL_q40

² <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/01/middleeast/putin-blames-rebels-ceasefire-syria-intl/index.html>

³ <https://eaworldview.com/2018/09/how-un-humanitarian-aid-propped-up-assad-regime/>