

Dear Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP,

We, at the Syrian British Council (SBC), are writing in regard to the recent plan proposed by the Lebanese Government to return the Syrian refugees to Syria.

With this letter, we hereby wish that you urge the Lebanese Government against pushing the Syrian refugees to return to Syria against their will as the time is not ripe for them yet to return.

The repatriation plan is based on the assumptions that the security situation has improved in Syria and that the Syrian regime is now able to welcome the return of all Syrians. We believe that these two assumptions are untrue since the unresolved conflict that resulted in that forcible displacement of Syrians from their homes still exists making their return unsafe.

Hereby, we call on the British government, due to its pivotal role in the Middle East, to put pressure on the Lebanese government to drop this plan which is perceived as a desperate attempt by the government to evade responsibility in tackling Lebanon's economic crisis.

Implementing this plan will jeopardise the presence of Syrian refugees on the Lebanese soil, as the Lebanese government will possibly use it as an excuse to hand over opponents of the Syrian regime under the section of "voluntary return" and under the eyes of international organisations.

Forcing Syrian refugees to return home without internationally guaranteeing their safety is a flagrant violation of human rights conventions. The cessation of hostilities in most of the Syrian territories does not imply the end of the conflict that has been raging for almost a decade.

The repatriation of refugees is strongly linked to the achievement of satisfactory political progress and peaceful solution to the conflict. This includes the preparation for a transitional period which leads to a peaceful transfer of power and paves the way for presidential and legislative elections under international supervision.

Last, this plan, once approved, will possibly encourage other host countries to move forward in the same direction in that it will offer dictatorial regimes the opportunity to violate human rights and ensure that there no safe haven for human rights activists around the world.

We have overwhelmingly placed our trust in you, and we look forward to seeing you taking further steps to prevent involuntary and unsafe return of the Syrian refugees to Syria.

Yours sincerely

Dr Haytham Alhamwi

Chairman
Syrian British Council