

# Sanctions Are Linked to the Syrian Regime's Continuing Violations and Don't Include Medical Supplies and Food, Which Shouldn't Be Delivered Through the Regime

Russia, Iran, and Other Countries Supporting the Syrian Regime Should Provide It with Medical Supplies to Combat the Coronavirus Instead of Supplying It with Weapons, Forces, and Mercenaries

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Monday, April 27, 2020

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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## I. The Syrian Regime Continues to Commit Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Against the Syrian People

Russia and other states led by totalitarian and dictatorial autocrats and regimes hostile to the basic principles of human rights, such as China, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and North Korea, are leading a campaign calling for the lifting or easing of the existing sanctions on the Syrian regime. This is despite the fact that these sanctions have not been imposed on the Syrian regime by the United Nations despite the regime committing innumerable crimes against humanity, due to Russia and China defending it in the UN Security Council through the repeated use of their veto power. These totalitarian states are demanding that all governments and other entities globally ease their sanctions on the Syrian regime, even though the Syrian regime has not taken any actual steps to end its crimes against the Syrian people, such as, for example: releasing any of the arbitrarily detained citizens and prisoners of conscience in its prisons, ceasing its forces' looting of the contents of homes in the areas where it has recently re-imposed control, or abolishing the exceptional courts and laws introduced by its legal organs to legitimize the theft of property. Indeed, Iranian and Iraqi militias, the Lebanese Hezbollah and Russian mercenaries (from the Wagner



Group) that support the Syrian regime are still dispersed across most Syrian governorates, with at least 95 percent of the forcibly displaced people unable to return to their homes due to the terrible destruction inflicted by Syrian Regime forces' attacks, and the subsequent looting, pillaging and burning operations against these citizens' properties by those forces after their owners fled in fear of execution, arrest, and forced conscription; the vast majority of these displaced people now live in hastily constructed, improvised and overcrowded camps vulnerable to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic; the Syrian regime still flatly rejects any real political transition from the hereditary totalitarian rule of the Assad family that has dominated the Syrian state for almost half a century towards participatory democratic governance, with the current regime and its organs continuing its involvement in and sponsorship of multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

In addition to all the above, the Syrian regime has not only failed to undertake any serious steps towards reform, but has, up until the moment of writing this report, continued to commit violations, some of which constitute crimes against humanity. Below is a list of the most notable violations committed by the Syrian regime that were documented by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) in March and April 2020; these were the months during which the COVID-19 pandemic first expanded, with the aforementioned totalitarian states allied with the regime, along with some civil society organizations established by the regime and its allies, exploiting this deadly outbreak to demand that the existing sanctions be eased. All this confirms that the Syrian regime continues to commit multiple crimes even while demanding the lifting of the existing sanctions imposed to penalize it for such crimes.

The Syrian regime's most notable violations in March and April, 2020, according to the SNHR's database:

#### **A. Extrajudicial killing:**

Syrian Regime forces killed 44 civilians, including six children.

#### **B. Arbitrary arrest:**

Syrian Regime forces arrested 156 persons.

#### **C. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:**

According to the SNHR's database, Syrian Regime forces have committed at least four attacks on vital civilian facilities, including two on schools.



More cases of arbitrary arrest contrasts with the concern to prevent the spread of Covid-19: Allied states that defend the crimes of the Syrian regime have exploited the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in order to demand the easing of the sanctions imposed on it. These states which are only now, for the first time in nine years, expressing supposed concern for the Syrian people after the Syrian regime killed at least a quarter of a million civilians and almost 14,000 through torture, as well as lethally deploying chemical weapons and perpetrating countless other gross violations, should be made aware that the detainees in the Syrian regime's detention centers are the group most at risk from the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, with one of the most notable features in the terrible range of regime violations being the continuing arbitrary arrests by regime forces; despite calls by the United Nations and dozens of national and international human rights organizations urging the release of prisoners of conscience and those aged over 60 held in pre-trial detention, a policy adopted by a number of nations globally, including the regime-allied Iranian regime, which should act as an example to encourage Syria's regime to do likewise, the Syrian regime has not released any of these detainees but has instead carried out additional arbitrary arrests, meaning that it has increased the total number of detainees in its detention centers, which exceeds 130,000 Syrian citizens. We would also like to remind these states that while the Syrian regime issued an amnesty decree in March 2020, it has carried out new arrests and failed to release any of the detainees arrested in connection with their participation in the popular uprising, once again exposing the lies and deceit in all of its amnesty decrees; SNHR has explained this in a [detailed report](#) published previously, and can confirm that 130,000 Syrian citizens are at high risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the horrific conditions of detention, particularly severe overcrowding and poor or non-existent provision of hygiene or sanitation services.

## **II. Russia and China Are Accused of Using the Veto to Block the Entry of UN Aid Across Borders**

Russia is clearly culpable in participating in the deliberate starvation of tens of thousands of Syrian civilians, with vast amounts of evidence plainly demonstrating this. We believe that the two clearest examples of this evidence are:



### A. Obstructing the extension of the resolution to deliver aid across borders:

In the UN Security Council a few months ago, specifically in December 2019, Russia and China opposed a draft resolution<sup>1</sup> providing for the extension of Security Council Resolution 2165<sup>2</sup> that would allow the United Nations to deliver aid across borders, not once but twice in a row; after exhaustive debate, both countries eventually agreed to extend the resolution to deliver aid across borders on January 10, 2020<sup>3</sup>, but for a period of only six months, and only through two border crossings, instead of four crossings.

The attack by the Syrian regime's forces and its Russian allies on and around Idlib from mid-December 2019 up until April 2020 has so far caused the displacement of at least 1.1 million people from their homes. In light of the worldwide spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially from March 2020, it is virtually impossible to imagine the extent of the harm that will be caused to millions of Syrians in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime in northern Syria if Russia succeeds in blocking the January 2020 extension of the resolution to provide cross-border aid; despite this, Russia is still threatening to hinder the extension of the resolution on delivery of cross-border aid during the next scheduled discussion of this subject in June.

### B: Direct participation in the siege of numerous areas, deliberately starving their inhabitants:

Russian forces have supported the vast majority of violations perpetrated by the Syrian regime, specifically with regard to obstructing the entry of aid to the besieged areas; the Russian forces bombed the besieged eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo, as well as participating in the siege of the Eastern Ghouta in Damascus Suburbs governorate and the northern suburbs of Homs city. The Russian bombing has contributed in a decisive manner to the Syrian regime's control of these areas, thus displacing the vast majority of their residents, with the displaced people now being additionally vulnerable to Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairman of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, says:**

“The Russian regime is involved in committing war crimes in Syria for two reasons: The first: Supporting the Syrian regime that is involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes and justifying these. Russian support has contributed to the Syrian regime's committing further crimes and expanding them. The second: The Russian forces themselves have committed war crimes by killings or by indiscriminate or deliberate bombing of civilian facilities. Russia must stop supporting the Syrian regime, stop committing crimes, and support a political transition toward democracy and stability, and then it can demand the lifting of economic sanctions.”

<sup>1</sup> UNSC, Draft Resolution to renew UNSC resolution 2165 (2014), <<<https://undocs.org/en/S/2019/961>>> [25 April 2020]

<sup>2</sup> UNSC Res 2165 (14 July 2014) UN Doc S/RES/2165 <<[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2165\(2014\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2165(2014))>> [25 April 2020]

<sup>3</sup> UNSC Res 2504 (10 January 2020) UN Doc S/RES/2504 <<[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2504\(2020\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2504(2020))>> [25 April 2020]



### **III. Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea and Iran Should Help the Syrian Regime Financially and Medically to Confront the Outbreak of the COVID-19 Coronavirus**

According to the Russian Central Bank's data, the Russian monetary reserve has reached approximately 557 billion dollars, and is considered one of the largest monetary reserves in the world. Since September 2015, the Russian state has spent huge sums on its military operations and the deployment of regular and mercenary forces (Wagner Company) in Syria, with Russian forces causing the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians, and the destruction of dozens of vital facilities. While the Russian state stands perpetually ready to spend billions of dollars on these activities and on committing multiple violations and war crimes, it does not, however, provide material assistance that contributes to rebuilding what the Russian war machine itself has destroyed, on assisting the displaced, or on providing medical assistance to support its ally the Syrian regime in confronting the novel Coronavirus; instead, it calls on other countries to provide medical and humanitarian assistance and reconstruction funds, while reserving its own funds for flights and bombing. The SNHR has repeatedly called on the Russian regime to compensate the victims and their families and to rebuild what was destroyed by the Russian war machine, especially in the Eastern Ghouta, in Damascus Suburbs, and in Idlib and its environs.

Russia, China, and those states that have requested other countries to lift their sanctions from the Syrian regime, are fully able to send whatever medical, relief and electrical aid they want to the Syrian regime, with nothing preventing them from doing so. Indeed, they should stand by their fellow totalitarian ally, the Syrian regime, in the provision of relief, as they stood alongside it militarily. These totalitarian states that justified the crimes of the Syrian regime should be the first to support it with medical supplies to confront the Coronavirus in the current difficult conditions.

### **IV. Five Basic Points That Should Prevent Any Party from Directly Cooperating and Coordinating with the Syrian Regime in the Field of Humanitarian Aid**

Over the past nine years, we have carefully observed the mechanism of the Syrian regime's handling of humanitarian aid, and spoken with a large number of managers of humanitarian organizations, former employees of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and people forced to flee the besieged areas, and with the people outside the besieged areas. Following on from these observations and discussions, we believe that there are six fundamental elements that significantly strip the Syrian regime's claims to be providing humanitarian aid in the areas under its control of any plausibility; through this, we aim to search for the best ways to mitigate these negative effects and overcome them as much as is practically possible in the circumstances. These six points are the following:





One: Targeting aid and Civil Defense workers with arrest, bombing, and killing, including the UN convoy in Urm al Kubra:

**Extrajudicial killing:** Between March 2011 until the end of April 2020, the SNHR documented the killing by Syrian Regime forces of 893 humanitarian workers, including 669 medical personnel and 165 Civil Defense personnel.

**Arrest and enforced disappearance:** According to the SNHR's database of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, at least 3,327 of these individuals, including 182 women, are medical personnel, including paramedics, doctors, pharmacists, nurses, health technicians, medical workers with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, students who were studying medical specialties, and trained civilians who volunteered and participated in providing medical care; all these individuals are still detained or forcibly disappeared in the Syrian regime's detention centers after being arrested between March 2011 until the end of April 2020. Most of these individuals were arrested while practicing their profession in hospitals, clinics and dispensaries, or through regime forces setting up security ambushes for them and luring them to security branches under the pretext of seeking medical help for people there. These arrests were concentrated in the governorates of Damascus Suburbs, Daraa, Homs, Hama and Damascus, with most of the arrests took place in 2012 and 2013.

**Illegal attacks:** The Syrian regime's forces and its Russian allies have targeted medical facilities and Civil Defense centers in a brutal, deliberately planned manner, with SNHR documenting the targeting of some centers on more than one occasion, which further confirms the intention of the Syrian-Russian alliance to bomb these facilities; in the period since the beginning of the latest military campaign in and around Idlib alone, from the beginning of December 2019 until the end of April 2020, we have documented the Russian-Syrian alliance forces committing at least 24 attacks on medical facilities, and 23 others on vital Civil Defense facilities.

In this context, the United Nations and the countries that support it must always bear in mind one of the most heinous and most prominent of these incidents, which was the bombing of a humanitarian aid convoy in Urm al Kubra by the Syrian and Russian regimes on Monday, September 19, 2016, in which government helicopters and fixed-wing warplanes, which we believe were mostly Russian, participated in an intensive attack and in several attacks on a center belonging to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to the east of Urm al Kubra village in the western suburbs of Aleppo. This bombing lasted for about three hours, primarily targeting the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Center, and destroying a convoy of trucks loaded with relief assistance from the United Nations, which was waiting to be unloaded in warehouses of the Red Crescent Center, and was scheduled to benefit about 78.000 people. The SNHR documented, as a result of these attacks, the deaths of 12 civilians, all of whom were relief



workers and bus drivers, including Omar Barakat, the Head of the Red Crescent Division in the village, in addition to the massive destruction to the Red Crescent building, and the burning of more than 10 trucks loaded with relief aid. We previously issued a special [report](#) documenting the incident.

Two: Besieging areas, hindering the delivery and controlling the quantity of aid, and black-mailing the United Nations and humanitarian organizations in order to deliver aid:

In a large number of reports published over the last nine years, SNHR has documented the siege tactics practiced by the Syrian regime against a large number of areas in Syria, which constitute a war crime, and the prohibition of aid access to these areas in a systematic and deliberate manner; in [the report](#) issued by the SNHR on June 17, 2016, we talked about 14 besieged areas, whose people were prevented from entering or leaving them, with aid cruelly withheld as a form of collective punishment against these areas.

According to the reports in which we documented the sieges, the Syrian regime's flagrant deliberate withholding of food and medical aid ultimately forced those areas to surrender with their inhabitants subsequently forcibly displaced. The Syrian regime has used humanitarian aid as a weapon of war, with regime forces frequently removing whatever they chose from convoys carrying tons of aid that were headed towards the besieged areas; most of the supplies that were removed or prevented from entering were medical supplies. The Syrian regime's forces remove aid materials during the first loading process from warehouses, and remove others before their entrance to the besieged areas while inspecting aid convoys at regime checkpoints. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the World Health Organization<sup>4</sup> have also talked about similar practices<sup>5</sup> by Syrian Regime forces.

Three: The local partners in the areas controlled by the Syrian regime are either affiliated with the Syrian regime or are closely monitored by its security services:

The aid funds provided for the relief of the Syrian people are tempting to the Syrian regime, prompting it to instruct a number of loyal regime-affiliated figures to establish organizations nominally concerned with humanitarian aid, development and relief. By this strategy, the Syrian regime limits the implementation of the vast majority of relief projects through use of these local partner bodies which it created, thereby achieving several goals simultaneously, including:

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization, Seven years of Syria's health tragedy, <<<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/14-03-2018-seven-years-of-syria-s-health-tragedy>>> [25 April 2020]

<sup>5</sup> The New Humanitarian, Syrian government increases restrictions on medical aid, <<<http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2013/08/07/syrian-government-increases-restrictions-medical-aid>>> [25 April 2020]





- 1- Obtaining additional material income in foreign currencies, including euros or dollars.
- 2- Imposing specific projects that serve the interests of regime loyalist areas and communities.
- 3- Thwarting implementation of the aid projects for which the aid funds are intended and plundering the vast majority of these of their funding.
- 4- Gaining legitimacy and affection from Syrian society because of the distribution of aid.
- 5- Breaching the intended aid recipients' security by revealing their full data.

**The most prominent of these local regime partners and affiliates are the following trio:**

The Syria Trust for Development, which was founded by Asma al Akhras; al Bustan Association, which was founded by Rami Makhoul, and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Asma al Akhras, the wife of the President of the Republic, has consistently defended and justified crimes against humanity and war crimes in which her husband is involved as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and the Armed Forces, and is on the lists of US and European sanctions. She established the Syria Trust for Development in 2007 as a kind of public relations exercise and to give the appearance of a humanitarian, progressive, development-oriented and civilized leadership. The Syrian regime has benefited from this institution and imposed it as a local partner on the United Nations and international organizations, with Asma al Akhras remaining the Chair of the Board of Trustees to date.

Rami Makhoul is a cousin of Bashar al Assad and one of the largest funders of the war crimes and crimes against humanity carried out by Syrian Regime forces. Apparently unsatisfied with responsibility for these crimes alone, he founded the nominally charitable al Bustan Association on May 10, 1999, which has supported - since the start of the popular uprising in March 2011 – the National Defense Militias, which are directly involved in committing multiple types of crimes against humanity and war crimes; foremost amongst these are extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, kidnapping and enforced disappearance, the siege of civilians, and extensive terrorizing and threatening of Syrian society. Makhoul, who is also subject to US and EU sanctions, is also presented by the Syrian regime as a local partner for the United Nations and international organizations.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent: The Syrian Arab Red Crescent was established by Legislative Decree No. 117 of 1966<sup>6</sup> issued by the President of the State, Nur ad-Din al-Atassi,

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<sup>6</sup> Syria Modern History, Legislation of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent system in 1966, <<<https://syrmh.com/2019/06/06/%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1/>>> [25 April 2020] (Arabic Only)

and based on Cabinet Resolution No. 675 of 9/11/1966, and granted financial and administrative independence, making it exempt from the provisions of the Law on Associations and Private Societies and its amendments. It has no affiliation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, and has the power to own property while preventing the confiscation of its property, with the President of the Syrian state appointed as the honorary president of this organization.

Several figures have been appointed to chair the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the most prominent of whom was the Syrian businessman Dr. Abdul Rahman al Attar, who held the position from 1981 until he submitted his resignation in 2016.

The Syrian regime has made several amendments to Legislative Decree No. 117, the last of which was on December 27, 2016, when Prime Minister Imad Khamis issued a directive amending Article 20, giving the head of the Syrian regime the right to choose one of four candidates to head the organization, even if the candidate is from outside the organization. Based on this amendment, the Syrian businessman Khaled Ahmad Tawfiq Hboubati was appointed as the head of the organization, succeeding Dr. Abdul Rahman al Attar, which was the first time that the appointment was made directly by the Prime Minister, and of a person who has not previously worked with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, or any organization concerned with humanitarian work.

Khaled Ahmad Tawfiq Hboubati is a Syrian businessman from Damascus city, who owns several companies involved in customs clearance, nightclubs and restaurants. Given that his son-in-law is Ratib al Shallah, the former head of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Syrian Chambers of Commerce, his relations with influential figures in the Syrian regime has expanded. This enabled him, in 2010, to open the first gambling club and casino in Damascus. He is not known to belong to any humanitarian or human rights organization.

No organization whose head is closely affiliated to the Syrian regime can have independence or impartiality. Rather, it will most certainly be overlapping and coordinating with the Syrian regime's security services and most of its personnel will be appointed by the regime.



Four: The security forces encroach in every aspect of society and the entire state, including humanitarian aid:

The security services in Syria consist of four general departments: Air and Military Intelligence, Political Security, and General Intelligence, with all of these supervised by the so-called National Security Office headed by Major General Ali Mamlouk. [In a previous extensive report](#), the SNHR detailed the security services, their branches and leadership; here we wish to emphasize that these security services have expansive and absolute powers in various aspects of Syria's political, social and economic life, and it is recognized in Syria that the citizen can barely make any move, however minor, without the need to get what is called "security approval"; this extends to every area, from opening a store up to these services' interference in ministries and the judiciary. As a quick example to clarify the idea, it is theoretically assumed that Political Security division belongs to the Ministry of the Interior, but in reality the President of the Republic has sole authority for appointing the Head of Political Security, who does not report to the Minister of Interior but rather to the National Security Office or the Prime Minister directly; in practice, the Political Security Division monitors the work of the Ministry of the Interior rather than the other way round. All the security services in Syria, in all their branches, have been involved as primary perpetrators since 2011 in committing widespread and systematic violations against the Syrian people that amount to crimes against humanity.

The security services enforce a condition on all local partners, whether those imposed by the Syrian regime or international parties, and on any Syrian citizen who wishes to work with a foreign organization, requiring them to obtain approval from the Political Security Division, which must receive all lists of beneficiaries of aid; similarly all organizations must obtain approval before being allowed to distribute any aid to these people; as we indicated in a previous paragraph of this report, the Syrian regime can remove and limit the quantities it wants and give or withhold approval for those items it specifically wants. In addition, the security services have numerous other powers, including the power to confiscate (or, more accurately steal) whatever they want of any amount of aid donated, which is then sold at a profit to local retailers who sell it on. We have previously published a number of reports documenting cases where goods and materials bearing the logo of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have been stored in Syrian Regime forces' depots, with such blatant misappropriation of aid often taking place in coordination between the security services and staff members working within relief organizations in Syria, mainly those organizations imposed by the Syrian regime (the aforementioned Red Crescent, Syria Trust for Development, and al Bustan Association). Since the security services are largely



in control of the recruitment and approval process, it is common for them to employ the children and relatives of heads of senior security services officials or other Syrian regime officials within these organizations<sup>7</sup>. The security services have also created smaller local organizations, which often limit the provision of assistance to the population in a wide number of areas through these three main major organizations or through the smaller organizations that they have established, combining misappropriation with profiteering, and accordingly, providing them with sizable financial returns.

Five: Given the current means of distributing aid, the Syrian regime is the primary beneficiary of the vast majority of aid provided at the expense of the most affected areas:

We at the SNHR are aware that in the case of totalitarian regimes like Syria's, it is very difficult to have civil society organizations independent of the security services, forcing the United Nations and international relief organizations to yield to the organizations established by the authorities since they cannot otherwise carry out any work at all, where there is a point; after nine years of such blatant and massive corruption by the regime in Syria, however, it is essential to create mechanisms and an appropriate environment so that the proportion of the aid donated that benefits the intended recipients in affected communities which desperately need it is greater than the proportion misappropriated to benefit the Syrian regime and its affiliated organizations. The current situation in Syria means that the Syrian regime, its security services and its affiliated organizations are the primary beneficiaries, receiving by far the largest proportion of total aid intended for the affected areas<sup>8</sup>. A question that must be asked is, if the majority of aid provided is used to support the Syrian regime, with only a tiny proportion being handed over to serve the affected communities who need it, how feasible is this aid as a humanitarian measure? In this case, the Syrian regime will abuse the resources made available through its misappropriation of the aid donated to launch more attacks on the afflicted areas that should be benefiting from this aid, further increasing its victims' suffering and meaning they will require more aid at more expense, which will in turn be abused by the regime, resulting in a vicious cycle in which humanitarian aid becomes a tool to fund the violations of the Syrian regime.

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<sup>7</sup> The Guardian, UN hires Assad's friends and relatives for Syria relief operation <<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/28/un-hires-assads-friends-and-relatives-for-syria-relief-operation>>>[25 April 2020]

<sup>8</sup> HRW, Rigging the System <<<https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/06/28/rigging-system/government-policies-co-opt-aid-and-reconstruction-funding-syria>>>[25 April 2020]



We at the SNHR warned previously about some of these points in [a report](#) we issued since June 2016, with these warnings also echoed by another report issued by the Syria Campaign<sup>9</sup>, as well as by a number of articles in the British Guardian newspaper<sup>10</sup> which further confirmed these concerns in the same period through official documents they obtained. Our colleagues in Human Rights Watch also addressed the Syrian government's policies of co-opting and misusing aid in a massive and extensive report in June 2019<sup>11</sup>, along with a large number of local humanitarian organizations and the international media.

## V. Conclusions and Recommendations to Confront the COVID-19 Pandemic in Light of Sanctions

### Conclusions:

**One:** The Syrian regime is the primary and main party responsible for the current Syrian economy state due to its harnessing most of the resources of the Syrian state to preserve the ruling family and its absolute rule of power, no matter how ruinous this is to the nation, causing the collapse of the Syrian pound, the displacement of nearly 13 million Syrian citizens and the destruction of entire villages, towns and city neighborhoods, along with thousands of vital facilities. These reasons are major factors in the collapse of the Syrian economy, in addition to the network of corruption and interests associated with the Syrian regime, which is engaged in large-scale looting of the capabilities of the Syrian state. Rami Makhlouf, the President's cousin, is a blatant example of this, with the sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime considered a minor influence at most compared with these factors.

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<sup>9</sup> The Syria Campaign, Taking Sides: The United Nations' Loss Of Impartiality, Independence, And Neutrality In Syria <<<http://takingsides.thesyriacampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/taking-sides.pdf>>>[25 April 2020]

<sup>10</sup> The Guardian, How Assad regime controls UN aid intended for Syria's children <<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/29/how-assad-regime-controls-un-aid-intended-for-syrias-children>>>[25 April 2020]

The Guardian, UN pays tens of millions to Assad regime under Syria aid programme <<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/29/un-pays-tens-of-millions-to-assad-regime-syria-aid-programme-contracts>>>[25 April 2020]

The Guardian, Aid groups suspend cooperation with UN in Syria because of Assad 'influence' <<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/08/aid-groups-un-syria-concern-assad-united-nations>>>[25 April 2020]

The Guardian, UN's \$4bn aid effort in Syria is morally bankrupt <<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2016/aug/29/uns-4bn-aid-effort-in-syria-is-morally-bankrupt>>>[25 April 2020]

The Guardian, UN under pressure to set up inquiry into Syria aid programme <<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/30/un-under-pressure-to-set-up-inquiry-into-syria-aid-programme>>>[25 April 2020]

The Guardian, UN hires Assad's friends and relatives for Syria relief operation <<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/28/un-hires-assads-friends-and-relatives-for-syria-relief-operation>>> [25 April 2020]

<sup>11</sup> HRW, Rigging the System <<<https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/06/28/rigging-system/government-policies-co-opt-aid-and-reconstruction-funding-syria>>> [25 April 2020]



**Two:** The Syrian regime and its allies are responsible for the deterioration of the medical sector through large-scale targeted operations affecting medical facilities, as well as by arresting, imprisoning or killing thousands of Syrian medical and rescue personnel, with these detainees' immediate release not being among the concerns mentioned by the totalitarian states demanding the lifting of sanctions under the pretext of the Coronavirus, although the presence of these desperately needed medical workers would contribute to the fight against the pandemic.

**Three:** There is nothing to prevent Russia, China, or countries supporting the Syrian regime from providing medical and relief assistance, nor is there anything preventing the Syrian regime from purchasing medical equipment and devices; instead of spending its money on such essential items to help the people, it has exhausted most of the state's capabilities in security and military operations against those demanding political change, as well as in widespread looting and corruption operations by prominent figures of the Syrian regime.

**Four:** Sanctions cannot be lifted as long as violations continue and serious progress has not been made in terms of basic human rights, the release of detainees, the abolition of special courts, holding the security services accountable, the cessation of military operations, or the initiation of any sign of political transition towards democracy that would guarantee stability and enable the safe and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees. Meanwhile, the existing sanctions constitute a serious and effective form of pressure on repressive regimes and must be escalated and be accompanied by military sanctions, given the Syrian regime's violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention<sup>12</sup> and Security Council Resolution 2118<sup>13</sup> according to the latest report issued by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons<sup>14</sup> (OPCW).

**Five:** All members of society and state institutions suffer under the rule of totalitarian regimes, and the Syrian regime in particular has ruled the Syrian state since 1970 and penetrated into every aspect of the state and its institutions, so that it has become difficult to separate it from state organs and institutions; the Syrian regime has created an environment of laws and policies that have made the work of relief organizations in Syria essentially dependent on its patronage, making it almost impossible to circumvent it or work outside it.

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<sup>12</sup> OPCW, CWC, << <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention>>> [25 April 2020]

<sup>13</sup> UNSC Res 2118 (27 September 2013) UN Doc S/RES/2118 << [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2118\(2013\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2118(2013))>> [25 April 2020]

<sup>14</sup> OPCW, FIRST REPORT BY THE OPCW INVESTIGATION AND IDENTIFICATION TEAM << <https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020/04/s-1867-2020%28e%29.pdf>>> [25 April 2020]





**Six:** The framework put in place by the Syrian regime for international humanitarian organizations forcing them to work exclusively under its patronage has caused these organizations to violate the concepts of neutrality and independence, which are fundamental tenets of the four principles of humanitarian action (humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence), with this wholly corrupt system being based on discrimination according to sect and loyalty, and not according to need.

**Seven:** The Syrian regime categorizes all Syrian citizens into several classifications and degrees based on political opinion, loyalty, and sect, and has constructed all its policies and practices based on this classification, and within this general concept upon which its power rests; this means that it automatically practices a discriminatory process towards allocating humanitarian aid, which has been clearly demonstrated in its dealings with previously besieged areas, and with all areas outside its control.

**Eight:** The continuation of humanitarian organizations' work within the framework of policies established by the Syrian regime has contributed, throughout the past nine years, to the majority of the aid revenues ending up in the hands of the Syrian regime, thereby firstly reducing the effectiveness of the sanctions imposed on it, and secondly assisting it to continue to commit violations.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **The Russian, Chinese, Cuban, and Iranian governments and the governments of states supporting the Syrian regime:**

1. Provide medical and relief assistance to the Syrian regime to help fight the Covid-19 pandemic, rather than the current military support, land forces, militias, and mercenaries.
2. End all forms of military and political support for the Syrian regime which is involved in committing war crimes and crimes against humanity; Russian forces must stop committing such crimes before Russia can demand the lifting of economic sanctions.
3. Support the process of political change in Syria, which will contribute to stopping the armed conflict, and to completely changing the state services and removing those individuals and associated entities involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes; this is an essential step towards any lifting of sanctions and the return of the displaced people, and towards attaining reconstruction and stability.
4. Allow the extension of the UN Security Council's resolution on delivering cross-border humanitarian aid, and re-include the al Ya'rubiya border crossing with Iraq and the Nasib border crossing with Jordan, so that the Syrian al Jazira region and southern Syria benefit from it.



## **The OCHA and international organizations operating in the Syrian regime-controlled areas:**

1. It is essential after nine years of these bodies' work and experience inside Syria to find a unified mechanism to coordinate aid assistance in a manner that compels serious negotiation on the part of the Syrian regime and rejects any partnership with organizations linked to its security branches or to the Ministry of Interior, or any entity established by figures affiliated with the Syrian regime; this would be a vital contribution to the effective delivery of aid to the most affected areas, thus greatly increasing the usefulness of aid.
2. Avoid any kind of work with organizations established by or subject to the security services, because this enhances the ability of these services to continue to fund their activities and commit more violations.

## **The United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Turkey, Australia and countries that have imposed sanctions on the Syrian regime:**

1. Support the establishment of the aforementioned coordination mechanism, and form an advisory council to monitor the effectiveness of its work.
2. Sanctions alone are not sufficient to put pressure on the Syrian regime, with all the evidence showing that the regime has continued for nine years to date to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity regardless of sanctions. Economic sanctions, therefore, must be accompanied with a political administration and by serious moves within a strict time plan towards achieving the political process aimed at achieving a political transition towards democratic rule.
3. Evaluate sanctions periodically, adding individuals and companies that continue to support the Syrian regime and place them on the sanctions lists.
4. Under the Corona Virus Crisis (Covid-19):
  - A.** In areas outside the control of the Syrian regime: Increase material support for local relief organizations in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime, and provide support directly to them free from the WHO's bureaucracy.
  - B.** In the areas controlled by the Syrian regime: Assist humanitarian organizations operating there which are not able to negotiate unsupported with the Syrian regime and are forced to acquiesce to most of its conditions, by finding ways to pressure the Syrian regime to lift the security measures that it established with the aim of controlling the maximum proportion of aid and employing it in its favor.



### **The United Nations:**

- Impose UN sanctions on the Syrian regime if it continues to commit crimes against humanity and war crimes, particularly torture, against nearly 130,000 Syrian citizens who are still either detained or forcibly disappeared.
- Request that those states which have called on the United Nations to ask other countries to lift the sanctions on the Syrian regime initiate pressure on the regime to release political detainees who constitute the vast majority of detainees and forcibly disappeared individuals, and that these countries provide medical assistance to the Syrian regime instead of weapons and militias.
- The United Nations should have no dealings with individuals, companies and bodies involved in committing violations. Here, it can be assisted by the data of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, the International, Impartial and Independent Investigative Mechanism and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, all of which are issued by the United Nations.
- The United Nations should ensure that the issue of delivering cross-border humanitarian aid is not subject to veto power.

### **The Syrian regime:**

- Request from its allies, Russia, Iran and similar countries that they provide medical and relief assistance, and that they stop exporting combat troops and militias.
- Stop subjecting humanitarian aid to extortion and theft, and allow international organizations to operate freely away from the hegemony and domination of the security services.
- Release 130,000 unjustly detained Syrian citizens, primarily 3,327 medical personnel, due to the urgent need for the Syrian people to combat Coronavirus.





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