

## Statement

### **Baytna & SNHR Hold an Event on the Sidelines of the Brussels VIII Conference 2024 Entitled, ‘The Devastating Effects of Humanitarian Aid Cuts in Syria: Challenges and Strategies to Mitigate the Disaster’**



**Tuesday 07 May 2024**

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 analyzes in Syria.

## The Hague – The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR):

On Monday, April 29, 2024, the Syrian Network for Human Rights, in collaboration with Baytna, held an in-person event entitled, 'The Devastating Effects of Humanitarian Aid Cuts in Syria: Challenges and Strategies to Mitigate the Disaster' on the sidelines of the Brussels VIII Conference 2024 in the Belgian capital. The event, which was live-streamed on SNHR's social media channel, featured Mazen Kewara M.D., the M.E. Regional Director at the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS); Riyadh Al Najem, Executive Director of Child Guardian; Atef Nanoua, CEO of the Mulham Team; Razan Brghol Head of Programs at Baytna; and Fadel Abdulghany, SNHR's Executive Director, with Jelnar Ahmad, Research and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) manager at IMPACT, serving as moderator.

The participants discussed the serious issue of humanitarian aid cuts in Syria, focusing on the recent cuts announced by the World Food Programme (WFP) in addition to tackling the impact of the Russian veto in obstructing international cross-border aid and preventing the development of sustainable solutions, as well as its devastating impact on the lives of millions of displaced people in parallel with the WFP's cuts. In regard to these issues, the speakers proposed a number of ideas to mitigate the adverse effects of these dangerous cuts, including prioritizing the need to mobilize international support to increase humanitarian support inside Syria.

Jelnar Ahmad, Research and M&E manager at IMPACT, opened the event by underlining the importance of the subjects under discussion, before proceeding to introduce the speakers.

Fadel Abdulghany, SNHR Executive Director, was the first speaker. In his address, he noted that there are currently over 7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), stressing that the forcibly displaced are the most fragile group in society, having been uprooted from their homes and livelihoods. Due to these factors, he explained, about 90 percent of IDPs rely on humanitarian assistance for sustenance.

At the end of last year, the WFP announced it would be reducing its aid across Syria, while also decreasing its funding to a number of Syrian organizations. Those cuts have not been limited to relief and aid groups, with many human rights organizations also forced to grapple with similar funding cuts even though the conflict in Syria is still ongoing, with more and more victims being recorded.

***“With the absence of a real, functional, credible, and transparent government countrywide, civil society organizations play a role that parallels that of the government in the case of Syria,”*** the SNHR head stressed. ***“Military groups are in control, and those groups employ an unelected political front, which have lost them the confidence of donor states and international organizations. As such, civil society organizations have been compelled to play a much larger role.”***

He added that, while the number of military attacks has dramatically dropped, they have not completely ceased. For instance, he noted, SNHR has documented the killing of **329 civilians**, including 49 children and 31 women so far in 2024 as of this writing. Furthermore, Mr. Abdulghany stressed, violations in Syria are not limited to hostilities between the parties to the conflict; rather, many violations are perpetrated by the controlling forces against the communities they control. These controlling forces, he argued, are despotic military bodies with a political front. For instance, SNHR has documented at least **791 arbitrary arrests**, including of 24 children and 16 women, since the beginning of the year up until the start of May, in addition to 28 deaths due to torture, including one of a child.

Mr. Abdulghany re-asserted that the Syrian regime remains the primary perpetrator of violations in Syria, being responsible for about 80 of all violations. It is because of this that the majority of IDPs come originally from regime-held areas, to which they are still unable to return.

Relatedly, Mr. Abdulghany stressed that the Syrian regime and its Russia and Iranian allies have displaced millions of Syrians. As if that was not enough, he added, the Syrian regime systematically steals as much as 90 percent of all humanitarian relief aid. On December 28, 2023, SNHR released a report concerning this issue entitled, '[How The Syrian Regime Uses the Humanitarian Organizations SARC and STD to Steal Humanitarian Aid](#)'.

Moreover, he added, Russia has used its veto powers in an abusive and unlawful way to block the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance on six different occasions, even though delivering cross-border humanitarian assistance does not require permission from the UN Security Council to begin with. [SNHR has released multiple reports detailing the legal causes and contexts necessitating cross-border humanitarian assistance delivery.](#)

Mr. Abdulghany concluded his address by reaffirming that reducing aid will lead to more violations, such as extorting women and children in what would be the worst form of child labor, not to mention a further rise in rates of theft, and incentivizing tens of thousands more people to seek asylum.

Meanwhile, he added, donor states reducing their funding directly goes against their legal and moral obligations, and sends the wrong message to millions of victims. In that context, Mr. Abdulghany raised questions about the effectiveness of the international community's response to a crisis that has not ended by any means.

The next speaker was Mazen Kewara M.D., SAMS's M.E. Regional Director, who shed light on the adverse effects of dwindling support for organizations in Syria, which will limit their ability to provide aid to Syrians who are in exceptionally dire need of said aid. Dr. Kewara also pointed out that this will also mean medical organizations will be unable to provide adequate treatment and healthcare services.

In his address, Atef Nanoua, CEO of Mulham Team, shed light on the protracted suffering of IDPs in the camps in northern Syria, most of whom have now been living in camps for over five years. Mr. Nanoua also noted that reducing aid adversely affect the ability to provide support and the level of any support available.

The next speaker, Riyadh Al Najem, Executive Director of Child Guardian, noted that education and child protection are already two of the least-supported sectors, which means that reducing the already-scarce funding will generate a negative impact for those sectors in particular.

Razan Brghol Head of Programs at Baytna; described the humanitarian crisis as “devastating”, with millions of Syrians reliant on humanitarian assistance to simply stay live. Ms. Brghol also stressed that this latest reduction in humanitarian assistance is a “severe blow” especially for children, women, and persons with special needs, in addition to many activities concerned with raising awareness and defending human rights, particularly for children’s and women’s rights, which are under threat in light of these cutbacks.

At the end of the event, the speakers answered questions from the audience. To watch the event in full, please click on [this link](#).



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*No justice without accountability*

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