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Press Statement: 43 Syrian and international NGOs call for immediate end to attacks on civilians and hospitals in Idlib, Syria

Three million civilians in northwest Syria are scared and many are homeless. With no concrete actions taken beyond political statements and promises, Syria and the world may soon be witnessing the “[worst humanitarian tragedy of the 21st century](#)”. Rescue and medical workers on the ground are warning that they have not seen such ferocious attacks in eight years in Idlib. If the conflict continues to escalate, as many as [700,000](#) people could be displaced from their homes in Syria’s last opposition stronghold.

According to the United Nations, over [200,000](#) people were forced to flee the continuous bombing and shelling of towns in southern Idlib and northern Hama and have few options to seek safety. Up to [80,000](#) of those who have fled are sleeping rough with no shelter, and many others are crammed into overcrowded homes. Since the beginning of the escalation at the end of April, the United Nations confirmed at least [105](#) have been killed, [3](#) IDP sites were impacted, and [17](#) schools have been damaged or destroyed. The United Nations has counted 23 attacks on 20 health facilities, some of them hit twice. [49](#) have had to suspend their operations due to attacks or insecurity. Some of the health facilities that were attacked were on the de-conflicted list provided to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

“Attacks on community hospitals, including specialized maternity centers left thousands without medical care in Aleppo and East Ghouta.” said Dr. Ahmad Tarakji, SAMS President. “Last year, our medical staff on the ground agreed to share hospital coordinates as part of the UN de-confliction mechanism: The United Nations has a responsibility to protect these hospitals and present a tangible plan to deter such attacks. The people of Syria have the right to know who is attacking and destroying their hospitals.”

Half of the three million people living in Idlib are internally displaced already and have experienced this violence time and again over the course of this conflict. The memory of Aleppo, East Ghouta, and Daraa, is still fresh in their minds, as they fear the latest offensive is only an indicator to the full-scale assault to come.

“Half of Syria’s population has already been displaced by eight years of war, yet the worst may still come,” said Arnaud Quemin, Mercy Corps’ Syria Country Director. “While entire communities were forced to flee and sought shelter in Idlib, three million people there, half of whom are internally displaced already, now fear they will have nowhere to go if war comes again to their doorsteps.”

There is no justification for ongoing attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Parties to the conflict have a legal obligation to protect civilians and spare them from the worst effects of the fighting and to avoid attacking schools, hospitals and homes. Clearly these rules are being violated in northwest Syria today. **In response to the recent alarming chapters of military escalation, we, the undersigned Syrian and international human rights, humanitarian and solidarity organizations, urge all parties to act quickly to ensure the protection of civilians in northwest Syria and compliance with international humanitarian law:**

The United Nations Security Council members have a mandate to ensure the protection of civilians and maintain international peace and security. They cannot keep hiding behind divisions in the Council to allow the worst to happen in Idlib, and should exercise all the pressure they can on warring parties to

end the hostilities, stop the systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure, and ensure that cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access is facilitated to allow aid agencies to reach all communities in need, in compliance with UNSC resolution 2393.

We also call on UNSC members to work with Turkey and Russia to honor their commitments to the so-called demilitarized zone agreement signed by both parties in September 2018 and implement an immediate ceasefire over the entirety of northwest Syria.

Members of the Security Council should support the Secretary General's Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen to engage parties and broker a peaceful resolution of the security situation in Idlib to avert further bloodshed and urge all parties to return to the table to negotiate a political settlement to the conflict.

We also urge leaders from the Istanbul Summit between France, Germany, Russia and Turkey, to uphold their commitment to maintain the ceasefire in Idlib.

Signatories

1. 11.11.11
2. Adopt a Revolution
3. Baytna Syria
4. Big Heart Foundation
5. Binaa for Development
6. Bridge of Peace
7. Christian Aid
8. CCFD-Terre Solidaire
9. Council for Arab British Understanding
10. Dawlaty
11. Ghiras Al-Nahda
12. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P)
13. Hand In Hand for Aid & Development (HIHFAD)
14. Ihsan for Relief and Development (IRD)
15. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
16. International Rescue Committee (IRC)
17. Islamic Relief UK
18. Just Foreign Policy
19. Kesh Malek
20. Massrat
21. Mercy Corps
22. Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies
23. Orange Organization
24. PAX
25. Physicians Across Continents (PAC)
26. Rahma Relief Foundation
27. Relief & Reconciliation for Syria
28. Shafak
29. Shaml Coalition

30. Social Development International (SDI)
31. STAND
32. Syra Relief and Development (SRD)
33. Syria Relief (SR)
34. Syrian American Council
35. Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)
36. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
37. Syrian Expatriate Medical Association (SEMA)
38. Syrian NGO Alliance (SNA)
39. Takaful Al Sham Charity Organization
40. The Syria Campaign
41. Union of Relief and Medical Care Organizations (UOSSM)
42. Violet Organization
43. Vision GRAM International

Press Contact

Several signatories are available for comment. Please contact John Senior in New York to receive contact details: john.senior@crisisaction.org / +1 551 722 8464

***** Please note that Crisis Action operates behind the scenes to build coalitions that campaign for the protection of civilians. We should not be quoted in coverage. *****



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