



Rethink Rebuild Society
The voice of the Syrian Community of Manchester



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Geneva III: Humanitarian Aid and Civilian Protection

With the Syrian opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) leaving Geneva, it is clear that the third round of the talks has collapsed. The opposition is angered by the lack of progress on its key demands – comprehensive ceasefire, humanitarian aid to besieged areas, and release of detainees. The two task-forces set up by the UN responsible for handling ceasefire and the delivery of humanitarian aid have failed to achieve any substantive progress: The number of besieged towns has increased from 18 to 28 and aid has actually worsened during the course of negotiations.

This shows a lack of seriousness by the UN and Co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group, USA and Russia. The international Community needs to take serious measures to stop Assad's violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

UN special envoy Mr De Mistura needs to do more than tirades and publicising what he considers as the actual death toll. He will struggle to engage both sides in the negotiations as long as Assad's delegation refuses to discuss any political transition. The recent Russian shipment of heavy weapons to Syria, direct involvement of the Iranian Quds Force, along with constant barrel bombing by Assad's air force violate the fragile 'cessation of hostilities' agreement and threaten to end the peace talks entirely. Assad's barrels have caused daily massacres and his Iraqi and Lebanese militias have intensified the war in certain areas especially around the city of Aleppo.

Turning a blind eye will leave Syria with another year of war, and will intensify the refugee crisis. Closed borders have also made it harder for Syrian refugees to escape the fighting and have left thousands of Syrians trapped on the Turkish border. German Chancellor Ms. Merkel has restated her support for Turkey's call to create a safe-zone inside Syria. Only by protecting civilians in Syria, whether through a properly enforced safe zone or other civilian protection measure, can the refugee crisis be brought to an end.

Resettlement programmes and migrant deals, patrol boats and fences, are all failing to deal with the effects of the war. A policy to deal with the cause is long overdue. We urge the International Community to put civilian protection at the heart of its Syrian policy: Force the Assad regime to stop bombing schools and hospitals, to release detainees, to lift the sieges, and to engage seriously in peace talks.

Signatories

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