

Syrian organisations object to pro-Assad conference

27 March 2017

As UK-based Syrian organisations we wish to express our concern about the emergence of a new group, 'The European Centre for the Study of Extremism, Cambridge', which appears to exist primarily to spread propaganda for the Assad dictatorship.

The organisation's founder, Makram Khoury-Machool, is a close friend of Assad's former ambassador to the UK, Sami Khiyami. Khoury-Machool is a former lecturer at the University of Cambridge and has a profile on Churchill College's website. He appears keen to use the group's presence in Cambridge and its connections to members of the University to promote it as a legitimate entity.

On 5th-6th April 'EuroCSE' will hold a [conference](#) on Syria at an undisclosed location in Westminster. While majority of the 'distinguished speakers' advertised in the promotional materials hold pro-regime views, several have direct links to the regime and its allies, such as:

- Ali Haidar, a minister of the Assad dictatorship. He is the Syrian general secretary of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, a group which runs a militia with between 6,000 and 8,000 members currently fighting on behalf of the war criminal Assad.
- Bishr Riyad Yaziji, the Syrian minister for tourism. He is most famous for being responsible for the disgusting advertising campaign which promoted Syria as a land of pleasure and plenty at a time when around one million people were suffering under starvation sieges (the vast majority of which were imposed, and continue to be imposed, by the Assad regime and its terrorist ally, Hezbollah).
- Hamid Baeidinejad, the Iranian Ambassador to the UK. The Iranian regime is responsible for war crimes committed in Syria, most recently during the brutal assault on Aleppo in which Iranian troops played a major role.

We are concerned that a great many people who we expect not to share pro-regime sympathies are involved with this propaganda exercise. Neil Kinnock, for example, is a patron of the group. Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and current Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, is a patron of the group and is advertised as a speaker at this conference.

We call on those involved with the groups who do not share the objectives of this conference to publicly distance themselves from it.

We call on the University of Cambridge to publicly make clear its relationship, whatever it might be, with Makram Khoury-Machool and 'EuroCSE'.

Signed:

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Reem Assil, Syrian Platform for Peace
Dr. Fadel Moghrabi, Peace and Justice for Syria
Dr. Mohammad Tammo, Kurds House
Mazen Ejbaei, Help 4Syria UK
Dr. Bachar Hakim, Syrian Society of Nottinghamshire
Dr. Abdullah Hanoun, Syrian Community in the South West
Dr. Sharif Kaf Al-Ghazal, Syrian Association of Yorkshire
Clara Connolly, Syria Solidarity UK
Abdullah Alobwany, Oxford for Syria
Dr. Mohammad Alhadj Ali, Syrian Welsh Society