



Press Release

06/04/2017

UK Syrian groups question why National Liberal Club is hosting pro-Assad conference

Eight UK-based Syrian groups wrote a letter (reproduced below) to the President and Vice President of the National Liberal Club (NLC) questioning why their venue is hosting an event (5-6 April) organised by the 'European Centre for the Study of Extremism' (EuroCSE). This organisation's founder, Makram Khoury-Machool, is a close friend of Assad's former ambassador to the UK. The conference itself is hosting a range of pro-Assad speakers, including two Assad regime ministers and the Iranian ambassador to the UK. The conference also commenced a day after the Assad regime committed a horrific chemical attack against the city of Khan Sheikhoun which killed dozens and injured hundreds more.

The signatory Syrian organisations wrote to the venue President and Vice President:

'We note that your Club has a proud history of association with the Liberal tradition, and that your members must sign a declaration that they will not use the club's facilities 'for any political activities adverse to liberalism'. We cannot imagine any purpose more adverse to liberalism than that of promoting a monstrous criminal regime such as the Syrian Arab Republic.'

'We ask you to investigate how and why this conference was hosted by your Club, and ask how you intend to prevent further such gross lapses from the spirit of liberalism.'

The conference has maintained a high level of secrecy regarding speakers and event content. **We have obtained a full copy of the conference agenda which we can be make available upon request.**

Feedback from conference attendee

One conference attendee who wishes to remain anonymous stated after attending the first day:

'This conference is a disgrace, loaded with lies and toying with public opinion at the expense of the suffering of the Syrian people. Shameful.' The attendee described the conference as a *'platform for promoting regime propaganda that portrays the conflict in Syria as a War on Terror, as the fight of security against Islamist Jihadi fundamentalism, as a war of fake media coverage in complete disrespect to the lives that have been unjustly lost'*.

Feedback from protesters

As the conference proceeded, activists lined up outside the conference venue to protest the pro-Assad event. George Morris, one of the protest organisers, said: *"The lies and misinformation spread by this pro-Assad conference have to be confronted. People came out of the event all day to speak to us, disgusted by what they had been hearing inside. It was worse than any of us expected. Just a day after the chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime in Idlib, a speaker who denied that the event had happened was apparently treated to a round of applause. Standing up to these poisonous lies has never been more important."*

Actions taken – Activists post negative reviews on NLC Facebook page

Activists have taken to the NLC's [Facebook page](#) to voice their shock that such a respected venue could host such a conference with a clear pro-Assad propaganda message. They have been voicing their frustrations by leaving negative reviews of the venue on the Facebook page.

Actions taken – Phone-in to the NLC

Activists also participated in a call-in to the venue yesterday to question how such a pro-Assad conference could be allowed to take place in the NLC. One activist spoke with a representative from

the NLC, who told her that the conference a private event and that the NLC had knowledge of neither the event participants nor the content which was being discussed. When the caller told her that this information was publicly available on Twitter, the representative said that she is not aware of this public information, nor is she on Twitter, nor is she interested in receiving this information from the caller. Other callers were hung up on.

Event participants: Brief bio's

The conference promotional material included names of members of the Assad regime as well as well-known Assad sympathisers. **We have obtained a full list of conference speakers which can be made available upon request.** Below are short descriptions of only some of the speakers:

- **Ali Haidar:** Syrian Minister of State for National Reconciliation. 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:** 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.
- **Peter Ford:** Former UK Ambassador to Syria. After the forcible displacement of an estimated 36,000 people from East Aleppo in December 2016, which itself followed months of relentless aerial bombardments against the city by Assad and Russia, Ford [said](#) that the Assad regime had 'returned security to Aleppo'. He also said, 'I think we need to give the [Syrian] government a little bit of credit for what has been a relatively peaceful end to this terrible period.'
- Two individuals who were part of a UK delegation to Syria in September 2016 and met with Assad:
 - **Baroness Cox**
 - **Lord Hylton**
- **Dennis Kucinich:** Former US Congressman who visited Assad in January 2017.



George Morris, one of the protest organisers





From the above Syrian organisations in the UK
info@syria.uk.org

To The Rt Hon. the Lord Beith The Rt Hon. the Lord Steel of Aikwood KT KBE DL
beithalanj@gmail.com steeld@parliament.uk

5 April 2017

Dear Lord Beith and Lord Steel of Aikwood,

We write to you as President and Vice President of the National Liberal Club, to draw your attention to the Club's hosting of a conference on 5th and 6th April, organised by EuroSCE and entitled 'Syria: from destruction to reconstruction.'

Despite its academic veneer, and the participation of a number of your fellow peers (Lord Kinnoch and Lord Desai have withdrawn their patronage) this is in fact a propaganda exercise for the Assad regime. We link here to a statement from Syrian organisations in the UK which clarifies its nature, and that of its main billed speakers.

<http://www.togetherforsyria.org.uk/2017/03/syrian-organisations-object-to-pro.html>

Two of the speakers are so close to the Assad regime as to be on the UK Government's Syria Sanctions list—Ali Haidar at No. 128, and Bishr Yazigi at No. 232:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/601796/syria.pdf

We note that your Club has a proud history of association with the Liberal tradition, and that your members must sign a declaration that they will not use the club's facilities 'for any political activities adverse to liberalism'. We cannot imagine any purpose more adverse to liberalism than that of promoting a monstrous criminal regime such as the Syrian Arab Republic.

It is particularly obscene that the event should take place when the world is reeling with horror at the latest chemical attack by the regime on its own people. That the venue is of such a venerable tradition, in the heart of Westminster, gives an appearance of respectability to a rogue regime and its supporters.

We ask you to investigate how and why this conference was hosted by your Club, and ask how you intend to prevent further such gross lapses from the spirit of liberalism.

We would be grateful for a response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Mohammad Alhadj Ali, Syrian Welsh Society
Mohammad Isreb, Syrian Association of Yorkshire
Dr Fadel Moghrabi, Peace and Justice for Syria
Yasmine Nahlawi, Rethink Rebuild Society, Manchester
Sawsan Abou Zainedin, Syria Solidarity UK
Dr Mohammad Tammo, Kurds House
Mazen Ejbaci, Help 4Syria UK
Dr. Abdullah Hanoun, Syrian Community in the South West