



Rethink Rebuild Society

A voice of the British Syrian community

Statement

4 December 2017

Rethink Rebuild Society expresses its concern over the ramifications of a BBC Report claiming that UK funding to Syria has been misappropriated

Rethink Rebuild Society (RR) expresses its concern over the possible ramifications that a BBC report expected to be broadcasted tonight might cause in terms of curtailment of crucial aid and development funds channelled to Syria.

The BBC's Panorama program will tonight air a report claiming that Foreign Office money supporting the Free Syrian Police in providing security and stability in areas of opposition-held northern Syria have reached the hands of individuals linked to militant extremist groups.

While we cannot pre-emptively judge the report before assessing its content nor can we verify the evidence's accuracy, yet the possible harmful consequences of such a report must be addressed. The UK Government funds a number of aid, security, and governance projects in Syria that are beneficial to local communities. In some cases, these projects are able to empower civil society groups and deflect the influence and hegemony of extremists and militant groups in general.

We are also concerned that the BBC report might use its investigation to further undermine opposition efforts against the totalitarian Assad regime, and harmonise the British public's attitude towards this regime. Earlier this year, RR released a discourse analysis report showing the BBC's bias in favour of the Assad regime in its coverage of the conflict and thus shaping British public opinion towards that bias. Judging by the report's title - "Jihadis You Pay For" -, we are concerned that the broadcast might reinforce the BBC's continued trend to alter the Syrian conflict's narrative and paint it as extremist-dominated while neglecting the progressive and democratic currents within the uprising against the oppressive Assad regime.

An investigation on possible misappropriation of funds must thus not be used to argue for the halt of any aid & development funds to Syria. Rather, it must be used to improve the risk management of such projects and to avoid counterproductive or damaging impacts such projects might have. It must also serve to show the vitality of more effectively reaching out to civil society groups in order to deflect the interference of extremists and militant groups in civilian affairs.

ENDS

For further information and press enquiries, please contact 07510007187, or email: bilal@rrsoc.org

Rethink Rebuild Society has established itself as a non-profit organisation that acts as an umbrella for the Syrian community in Manchester, and endeavours to clarify the Syrian cause to its audience in the UK and the wider public.