

H.E. Mr. António Guterres  
Secretary-General  
United Nations

31 January 2018

Your Excellency,

On 3 January 2018, more than 130 Syrian civil society groups wrote to you to voice our concern regarding Russia's planned Sochi conference. Among us were humanitarians, rescue workers, human rights monitors, and local councils based inside and outside of Syria. All of us were united in our opposition to Sochi, and urged you to redirect your efforts to reinvigorate the Geneva process and to do everything in your power to support a fair and credible national dialogue process.

In the run-up to Sochi, both your office and the Office of the Special Envoy made clear that the United Nations would only participate in Sochi if the Syrian regime **engaged substantively** in talks held in Vienna in January. By any measure, the Syrian regime failed to meet your criteria. Yet the condition you set was ignored, and instead it was replaced with "assurances" from Russia. By conceding ground to Russia without extracting the change in regime behavior that you demanded, you have reinforced Russia's sense of control and ownership over the process and abandoned the leverage you sought to create. Instead of an onus on Russia to get the regime to the table in a meaningful way before Russia was rewarded, you gave them the reward of UN legitimacy upfront. What now will be the consequences for Russia if it reneges on the assurances that it gave you? How will you enforce compliance with those assurances?

In the days leading up to Geneva IX, Assad's forces deployed chemical weapons in Douma, injuring and sickening dozens of civilians. While it gassed children, the regime – with Russia's backing – perpetrated a devastating aerial assault on Idlib, resulting in an exodus of tens of thousands of civilians. During the talks, the regime tightened its siege of Eastern Ghouta, killing civil defense workers and refusing to allow medical access to 765 desperate patients. While talks were underway in Vienna, on 25 January, Hadieh – a 50-year old cancer patient – became the 21<sup>st</sup> civilian to die because of Assad's siege.

As Assad's brazen attacks increased inside Syria, its negotiators refused to engage in substance in Vienna. Instead of laying a pathway to peace, Assad's representatives wasted time lambasting the Special Envoy. How can such blatant obstructionism be characterized as reason to consent to Sochi? How can the United Nations – to whom Syrians have entrusted our peace process – abandon its own conditions in favour of trusting the "assurances" of a government that has brutalized Syrian civilians, shielded war criminals, and reneged on almost every assurance that it has made?

The UN's failure to abide by its own conditions – and the repeated pattern of red lines and conditions being abandoned – is exactly why the Syrian regime and its allies refuse to negotiate in good faith, and continue to defy international law. Parties to the conflict will continue to kill, starve and gas civilians as long as they suffer no consequences for their crimes. We gravely fear that your decision to lend legitimacy to Sochi will only undermine the UN-led peace process. Not just because we don't trust Russia's intentions in Sochi, but because of the signal that is sent every time that the international community fails to enforce the lines it draws. We urge you not to repeat this mistake, and instead to abide by the conditions you set. Anything less only diminishes the prospects for peace and undermines the standing of the United Nations in the eyes of civilians everywhere.

Sincerely,

1. A Voice of the British Syrian Community
2. Agriculture Engineering Syndicate of Daraa
3. AKILLICA France
4. Al-Gouta Youth Volunteering Team
5. Alkawakibi Organization for Human Rights
6. Alqunaitra free Governorate Council
7. ANA PRESS
8. Association de Soutien aux Medias Libres
9. Basmaat for Development
10. Baytna Syria
11. Bourka Ahla
12. Daraa Bar Association
13. Daraa free Governorate Council
14. Decostamine Initiative
15. Detainees' Voice Team
16. Emergency Team in Daraa
17. Emissa for Development
18. Engineers Association - Hama
19. FADA
20. Family issues Directorate in Daraa
21. For All NGO
22. Free Agriculture Directorate in Qunaitra
23. Free Daraa Seeds Association
24. Free Directorate of Real Estate in Daraa
25. Free Directorate of Transportations in Daraa
26. Free Engineering Syndicate of Daraa
27. Free Syrian Lawyers Aggregation - FSLA
28. Free Syrian Writers
29. FSCSO
30. General Directorate of Civil Registry in Daraa and Qunaitra

31. General Union of Syrian Students
32. Ghayth Charity
33. Help 4Syria UK
34. Houran Independent Journalists
35. House Of Justice in Daraa
36. Hurras Network
37. Ibdaa for Research and Administrative Development
38. Jasmine Dream Organization
39. Jozor foundation
40. Kawakibi Center for Transitional Justice and Human Rights
41. Lawadessa Center
42. Local Council of Alghadir
43. Local Council of Alharra
44. Local Council of Alhirak
45. Local Council of Aljizah
46. Local Council of Alkahil
47. Local Council of Alkoum
48. Local Council of Allajat
49. Local Council of Almuhajrin
50. Local Council of Almusifra
51. Local Council of Alqahtanya
52. Local Council of Alsanamin
53. Local Council of Alsawara
54. Local Council of Alsheikh Maskin
55. Local Council of Alsheikh Saad
56. Local Council of Alshwa
57. Local Council of Ataman
58. Local Council of Beir Ajam
59. Local Council of Bousra Alsham
60. Local Council of Bouyda
61. Local Council of Busr Alharir
62. Local Council of Dael
63. Local Council of Daraa Albalad
64. Local Council of Dourwin
65. Local Council of Ebttaa
66. Local Council of Em Batnah
67. Local Council of Em Walad
68. Local Council of Enkhil
69. Local Council of Gharbya Ghariya
70. Local Council of Jasim
71. Local Council of Jbab
72. Local Council of Jillin
73. Local Council of Jubata Alkhashab

74. Local Council of Karak
75. Local Council of Khan Arnaba
76. Local Council of Kharab Alshakhim
77. Local Council of Kharbit Ghazala
78. Local Council of Kodana
79. Local Council of Mashara
80. Local Council of Museika
81. Local Council of Muzirib
82. Local Council of Najih
83. Local Council of Namar
84. Local Council of Nasib
85. Local Council of Nawa
86. Local Council of Qusaiba
87. Local Council of Rafid
88. Local Council of Saida
89. Local Council of Shariaa
90. Local Council of Sharqia Gharya
91. Local Council of Souesah
92. Local Council of Tafas
93. Local Council of Tal Shihab
94. Local Council of Yadoudah
95. Local Council of Zaizoun
96. Local Development and Small Projects Support (LDSPS)
97. Masar Research Center
98. Mazaya
99. Mouwatana for Civil Action
100. New Syrian Network
101. Nidaa Production
102. Obaida Organization
103. Office for the Documentation of Violations in the Southern Region
104. Orphans association in Nahta
105. Pro Media Group
106. Reformation Assembly in Houran
107. Rethink Rebuild Society
108. Revolutionary Council of Houran
109. Roia Organization
110. Sanad for People with Special Needs
111. Save The Rest Campaign
112. Scotland for Syria
113. Seeds Increasing Association in Qunaitra
114. Shahid Media Association
115. Shaml Coalition
116. SMART

117. Sonbola Group for Education and Development
118. Sound and Picture Organization
119. Souryana Al Amal
120. Syrian American Council (SAC)
121. Syrian Center for Documentation
122. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Information
123. Syrian Civil Defense (The White Helmets)
124. Syrian Concourse of Tomorrow
125. Syrian Freedom Youth for Citizenship and Secularism
126. Syrian Journalists Association (SJA)
127. Syrian Network for Human Rights
128. Syrian Nonviolence Movement
129. Syrian Revolutionary Committee
130. Syria Solidarity UK
131. Syrian Virtual National Movement
132. Syrian Women Association for Development in Qunaitra
133. Syrian Women Association Salam
134. Syrian Women's Network
135. Syrians for Truth and Justice - STJ
136. Technical Services Directorate in Qunaitra
137. Thabat Humanitarian Society
138. The Day After
139. The Local Administration Councils Unit
140. The Syrian Authority for Sports and Youth
141. The Syrian Est. for Human Care and Development -MASRRAT
142. The Working Group for Syria
143. URB
144. Warmest regards
145. White Smile Org
146. Wisdom House
147. Women Now for Development
148. Zaad
149. Zaiton Magazine
150. Zenobia, Syrian Women's Association