

The VII Brussels Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region.

The ACT Alliance Syria forum would like to convey that the complex humanitarian emergency in Syria has been going on for more than 12 years, leading to the near-collapse of the Syrian economy and physical infrastructure exacerbated further by the recent earthquake. The suffering of the Syrian people has only been compounded by the detrimental effects of constant conflicts and war, widespread poverty, and the unwillingness of the international community to fund and enable disaster risk reduction¹ and reconstruction. The overlap of comprehensive and targeted Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCMs) has been a major driver in creating a shortage of a wide variety of essential goods and major restrictions on financial flows, resulting in skyrocketing prices, loss of purchasing power, and an extremely high rate of unemployment². Estimates are that today 90% of the Syrian population live under the poverty line.³ In addition to natural and political factors, the direct, indirect, accumulative and combined impact of UCMs will perpetuate the impoverishment and suffering for the population of the country without affecting their officially intended targets.

The ACT Alliance Syria Forum⁴ has had national and international members operating in Syria since 1994. Through this letter submitted to the Brussels conference, they would like to address important matters that are much needed to alleviate the suffering of more than 15.3 million Syrians needing humanitarian assistance.⁵

- The funding coming in to support the Syrian crisis was substantially reduced in 2022. ACT Alliance members operating within Syria have had to make the hard decision of prioritizing the most imminent need: food, medicine or shelter. It is crucial that these basic needs are met across the board and **more support is provided to humanitarian organizations working within Syria**. The international community is urged to distinguish the political from the humanitarian sides of the crisis and act accordingly, in a principled manner throughout.

As far as Unilateral Coercive Measures are concerned:

- As of today, organizations operating in Syria are still facing significant limitations to design their activities, restrictions in their selection of local suppliers and service providers as well as challenges in engaging in international procurement and receiving funds due to over-compliance and de-risking measures. In the spirit of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2664 of

¹ Schuler McCain, Haley (2023, April 24), *How the earthquakes could spark progress for disaster risk reduction in Syria*. The New Humanitarian. [Online Access: [The New Humanitarian](#)]

² Andronik, Byron, 'An Inhumane Response. The Humanitarian Consequences of Sanctions: A Case Study of Syria', UCL Global Governance Institute Working Paper Series, 2018/1, September 2017.

³ UNICEF. (2023, May 17). *Syria crisis*. UNICEF Middle East and North Africa. <https://www.unicef.org/mena/syria-crisis>

⁴ The ACT Alliance Syria Forum comprises the membership of [ACT Alliance](#) operational in Syria.

⁵ Andronik, Byron, 'An Inhumane Response. The Humanitarian Consequences of Sanctions: A Case Study of Syria', UCL Global Governance Institute Working Paper Series, 2018/1, September 2017.

December 2022 - which mitigates the impact of counter terrorist measures on the delivery of humanitarian aid by providing broad humanitarian exemptions - **we ask for humanitarian exemptions which extend beyond the earthquake response and are clear, open-ended and harmonized between jurisdictions**. Since these measures are also negatively impacting the delivery of humanitarian aid by delaying the response, undermining its results, increasing its cost and aggravating the daily defies faced by the population.

We call for:

- **A comprehensive revision of the sanctions’ framework from a legal perspective, in regard to the International Law** (in particular considering the extra-territorial dimension of some regimes) as well as the International Humanitarian Law to avoid any breach of the humanitarian principles.
- **A sincere analysis of the sanction’s intended, unintended, and counterproductive impacts on the population of Syria from a humanitarian perspective.**
- The ACT Alliance Syria Forum would also like to denounce the double standards shown after the earthquake that greatly impacted Syria and Turkey. That is, terms such as “relief, recovery and reconstruction” are used internationally in reference to Turkey, but “relief recovery and rehabilitation” are used in reference to Syria. We urge the international community and the European Union to see the restrictions and pre-conditions imposed on reconstruction-related activities from a humanitarian perspective rather than a political lens, and **support national and international organizations in engaging in interventions focusing on re-establishing the access to essential infrastructures to respond to the basic needs of the population on a sustainable manner.**

The ACT Syria Forum members and partners’ work inside Syria and have the added value of working as first responders in hard-to-reach areas. ACT members and partners work with local faith and non-faith actors who are committed to work for humanity and dignity, motivated and framed by faith, and in full respect to the humanitarian principles and standards. Continuing our involvement and commitment to provide assistance and protection to all people in need is not only an expression of our faith and our conviction to humanity, but is also inspired by our wish to contribute to peace and restore the dignity and the social fabric of the population of Syria.

We urge the Brussels conference and the international community to understand how coercive measures, the lack of funding and aid politicization have and continue to hinder the delivery of a principled, timely and efficient humanitarian response which the population of Syria is entitled to, and to take the necessary actions to tackle those challenges.