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The Syrian Association for Citizen's Dignity (SACD) has published a briefing paper which aims to deconstruct the Syrian regime's propaganda effort which claims that the EU and US sanctions hamper its effort to counter the COVID-19 pandemic.

The paper titled "'Assad's Model' of Fighting COVID19: Forget Syrian Lives, Use the Crisis to Annul Economic Sanctions" lays out in detail how the West's sanctions exclude the humanitarian and medical aid needed to fight the pandemic and points to the regime's corruption and cruelty as the underlying cause of regime's failure to contain the virus.

"Assad's strategy is to use the pandemic as a pretext for lifting of the sanctions and it has two "fronts". One is for Russia, China and their allies to demand the lifting of the sanctions in the United Nations and other international forums, and the other is to mount a sustained propaganda effort targeting Syrians living under Assad to convince them that the sanctions are the sole source of their suffering," says Souhaib Bouchy, the author of the SACD briefing.

The briefing details how both elements of this strategy ignore the basic facts that the sanctions do not apply to humanitarian and medical aid needed to confront the pandemic, and that the regime's response so far was disastrous due to completely unrelated factors.

The countries imposing the sanctions – primarily the EU and the United States - excluded important sectors to ensure the effects of the sanctions on the regime are not affecting the flow of humanitarian aid. The exceptions include granting waivers to the sanctions when the requested economic funds or resources are necessary for providing humanitarian relief, for the purpose of delivering or facilitating the delivery of aid in Syria, and finally excluding medical treatment, medical and nutritional materials, and any agricultural or humanitarian supplies to provide humanitarian relief or assistance to the civilian population.

"The sanctions are not hampering the COVID-19 response, but the regime's corruption and cruelty are. It is the regime that is blocking the aid to more than two million people in the northeast, which makes them extremely vulnerable to the spread of the virus," says Haya Atassi, a spokeswoman for SACD. "The regime's response to the pandemic has been abysmal. It covered up the truth, allowed people from countries with high number of infections to come in without any checks, and targeted doctors and media who tried to report the truth."

Most importantly, details the briefing, the regime's lack of concern for the health of Syrians is best illustrated by the fact that it has killed nearly a thousand workers in the medical sector from 2011 to 2020, and its prisons today contain a number of the most prominent Syrian medical cadres.



The regime's targeting of hospitals, clinics and ambulances in a policy of systematic destruction of health infrastructure in any areas outside its control, which is needed today more than at any previous time, demonstrates a clear approach to destroying the country and its capacity to protect the health of its people.

The sanctions, maintains the SACD, are one of the few remaining pressure tools applied to the Syrian regime and its allies that play an important role in highlighting the brutality of the Syrian regime and its allies.

They are a pressure tool that cannot be underestimated in their capacity to extract fundamental concessions in the structure and actions of the regime as a political solution is sought. These sanctions were imposed for specific reasons related to the regime's oppression of Syrians, and lifting them must be preceded by a fundamental change in the way the regime acts.