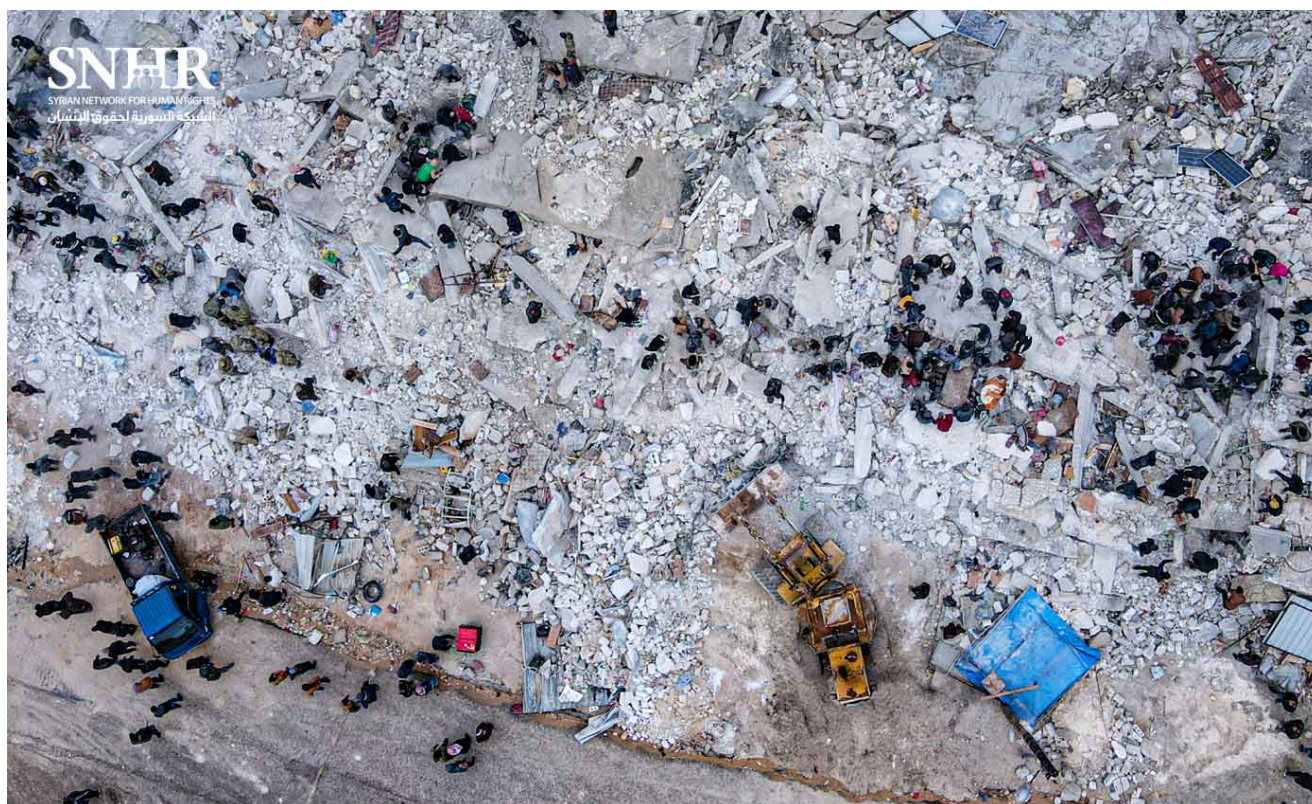


# Joint Statement: Responding to the Earthquake Should not be an Ill-Conceived Means of Restoring Relations with a Regime Involved in Crimes against Humanity against Its Own People

[snhr.org/blog/2023/02/21/responding-to-the-earthquake-should-not-be-an-ill-conceived-means-of-restoring-relations-with-a-regime-involved-in-crimes-against-humanity-against-its-own-people](https://snhr.org/blog/2023/02/21/responding-to-the-earthquake-should-not-be-an-ill-conceived-means-of-restoring-relations-with-a-regime-involved-in-crimes-against-humanity-against-its-own-people)

February 21, 2023

- [Statements](#)



Syrian Civil Defense rescue workers (White Helmets) and local residents searching for survivors victims' bodies from under the rubble of a destroyed building in Harem city in the suburbs of Idlib governorate following the earthquake that hit northern and western Syria on February 6, 2023.

## Available In

As the whole world has seen, many areas in Syria have been affected by the devastating earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria on February 6, with the areas closest to the earthquake's epicenter being the most affected. A natural disaster like an earthquake is not concerned with borders and dividing lines. As such, aid should be delivered to all those in need and in an equal capacity on both sides of the border and all sides of the conflict lines. Unfortunately, however, even in such a crisis, one cannot dismiss the Syrian regime's long

history of politicizing aid. The earthquake must not serve as an opportunity for the Syrian regime to escape justice enabled by the international community's negligence regarding the regime's crimes under the pretext of accessing those in need.

The Syrian regime's constant, systematic theft of UN and international relief aid has been abundantly proven in a myriad of detailed reports from local and international media and human rights organizations dating back years. Stating this fact is not, and should not be regarded as, controversial. On the contrary, this has been a deliberate policy adopted by the regime since 2015. Through its security apparatuses, the Syrian regime has built an airtight framework for controlling aid to the point that it is virtually impossible for any UN and/or international group to operate in Syria outside that framework. The Syrian regime's so-called High Committee for Relief has always been, in fact, an all-pervasive arm for the Syrian regime, created specifically to tighten its absolute control of all humanitarian aid channels. In fact, this committee has never lifted any of the security restrictions imposed by the regime on humanitarian operations, including those in response to this earthquake. On the contrary, there have been well documented reports of volunteer humanitarian aid workers being arrested and relief aid being sold by individuals with close ties to the regime's security agencies.

Since the UN issued a distress call in response to the earthquake, relief aid has flowed into Syrian regime-controlled areas from over 25 countries; meanwhile, the Assad took eight days before allowing the use of border crossings. This makes it clear, beyond any shred of a doubt, that the regime had every intention, from the first, of politically exploiting a devastating humanitarian catastrophe.

The Syrian organizations signing this letter feel that it is imperative to remind all these donor states and all states which overtly back the regime of the following fundamental points:

1. Over the course of the past 12 years, the Syrian regime has killed at least 200,422 Syrian civilians, including 22,953 children and 11,955 women. The Syrian regime's mass murder is of a systematic character that qualifies as a crime against humanity.
2. The Syrian regime is still committing heinous crimes against the Syrian people, most notably enforced disappearance and torture. Accordingly, restoring relationships with the Syrian regime, or making any attempt to rehabilitate it is effectively an expression of support for a tyrannical regime involved in crimes against humanity, constituting a violation of international law.
3. None of the Syrian regime's agencies, including all of its ministries involved in responding to the earthquake, provide any credible or independently verifiable data on the victims and those affected by the earthquake, and we have grave doubts over the validity of the figures released by the regime.
4. Russia, an ally of the Syrian regime, has used its veto powers on four separate occasions to block cross-border aid delivery to northeastern and northwestern Syria.

All of the above is further confirmation that the Syrian regime does not have the slightest regard for the lives and suffering of the Syrian citizens, whether in areas under its control or

in nonregime territories. The Syrian regime is simply cynically exploiting the issue of relief aid to revive political relations. To the Syrian regime, the Syrian people are merely hostages whose suffering can be used to extort political gains from the international community, with the earthquake and the resulting catastrophic suffering providing it with another useful opportunity for such exploitation.

The signatory organizations stress, in the strongest possible terms, that the Syrian regime's heinous crimes, as well as the violations by the other parties, must not be treated lightly. A humanitarian catastrophe of this magnitude must never be allowed to be exploited as an illconceived means to achieve ill-conceived political gains.

#### Signatories:

1. R-SEAT
2. Souriyat Across Borders
3. Amal Healing and Advocacy Center
4. LDSPS
5. Jana watan
6. Dozana
7. Bousla for Development & Innovation
8. Women Now for Development
9. Syrian Center for legal studies and research
10. Union of Revolutionary Bureaus
11. Syrian British Consortium
12. Local Development and Small-Projects Support (LDSPS)
13. Syrian Memory Institution
14. Syrian Network for Human Rights
15. SEMA
16. Maram Foundation for Relief and Development
17. Urnammu for Justice & Human Rights
18. Union of German-Syrian Associations
19. MARS
20. Duderl e.V.
21. Start Point
22. The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)