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## **THE WORLD MUST ACT TO STOP IDLIB CATASTROPHE**

The Assad regime and its ally Russia have escalated their assault on Syria's Idlib province. Since 4th November, four medical facilities have been targeted in aerial bombings: two in Jisr al Shaghour, both supported by the UOSSM (Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations); a maternity hospital in Shnan village; and a further hospital in Kafr Nabol. This escalation signifies the resumption of Assad and Russia's campaign to take over the last remaining opposition stronghold in North West Syria. Now, as before, targets have so far focused on civilian infrastructure, hospitals and residential neighbourhoods, in what appears to be a campaign designed to terrorise civilians into submission. Over the last five days, at least three children have been among more than 12 casualties killed in the strikes.

Given that a vast portion of Idlib's population is composed of internally displaced people who have already fled persecution and violence by the regime elsewhere in Syria, it is unlikely the province's civilians will choose to remain in the area and risk imprisonment, torture and death should the regime and Russia manage to takeover. Idlib's 3.5 million inhabitants' only option of escape lies in crossing the border into Turkey—a country that already hosts over 3 million Syrian refugees—with the likelihood of another mass migration into Europe.

To avert this catastrophic scenario, the Syrian British Council urges the international community—and the United Kingdom in particular—to take steps to make Idlib a territory in which its current population is safe from regime and Russian terror. In particular, the international community must act to uphold UN Security Council resolution 2286, which stipulates the protection of healthcare facilities in the context of conflict. Furthermore, the international community must cease all political negotiations—including those pertaining to the constitutional committee—until an immediate and unconditional ceasefire is implemented in North-West Syria.

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