

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova's answer to a media question about the UN Secretariat's directive on assistance to Syria

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Question: What can you say about the UN Secretariat issuing a directive on assistance to Syria?

Maria Zakharova: This is about an internal UN document, Parameters and Principles of UN Assistance in Syria, which, according to our data, was drafted back in October 2017 for use by relevant UN agencies and programmes. This document was developed without the participation of the UN member states, without a Security Council resolution and at the same time, it is a deeply political document and provides instructions that go beyond the scope of regular coordination of steps between UN agencies.

One of these instructions is worded as follows: "The UN will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties in the conflict is firmly under way." Clearly, there is an attempt to keep the UN away from working on rebuilding Syria at the current moment, to extend the political approach of the states that are in favour of changing the government in that country to UN programme activities. The directive emphasises that the subject of rebuilding should be discussed in "other formats." There's not a word about demining.

The UN document proposes not to promote the matter about returning refugees and IDPs and restricts cooperation with the Syrian government. The prohibition on assisting parties accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity is a sleight of hand. We are well aware that such accusations are regularly voiced by the opponents of the Syrian government and are aimed at official Damascus.

We expect that the UN Secretariat will reconsider its non-transparent methods and distortions in its work on Syria, which, in light of the growing trend for the return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons, needs international assistance in rebuilding essential infrastructure and education and healthcare facilities. If certain influential donors think that time is not right to make money available for these needs, but, on the contrary, it is necessary to tighten sanctions on Syria, this does not mean that the UN should be guided by such irresponsible approaches as well.