



Press Release

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As Britons Return from Syria without Question, Syrians Stopped and Questioned at the Borders

Recent news reports have covered the stories of British nationals returning from fighting in Syria alongside Kurdish forces without being questioned at the borders. Meanwhile, Syrians and many other Muslim groups continue to face scrutiny at the borders for travelling abroad.

Dr. Haytham Alhamwi, director of the Rethink Rebuild Society (RR), returned to the UK on 9 June after a three-day visit to his cousin (a refugee) in Sweden. Upon producing his passport to a border agent which reveals his Syrian identity, Alhamwi was immediately passed over to a security officer for questioning. "I was very upset," he says, "I was travelling in Sweden, not in Turkey or any country near Syria, and it was only for three days! Even though the officer was extremely polite, I was really upset that I was singled out just because of my identity".

Alhamwi continued, "The day after I arrived from Sweden, I listened to and read the news about Mr. Gifford entering the UK without question at the border. I burst with anger. It is a shame." [Harry](#) (going by the assumed name of [Macer Gifford](#)) returned to Britain after fighting IS in Syria alongside the YPG (People's Protection Units). He passed through airport security without question although the group with which he fought constitutes the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), itself the Syrian affiliate of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) which is a designated terrorist organisation in the UK.

RR describes these double standards as severely damaging for equality and justice, as well as for the reputation of the UK Visas & Immigration. Airport stops and interrogations seem to be directed overwhelmingly towards Syrians and Muslims and bring immense frustration to people.

RR is echoing a question that many Syrians are asking: How can Syrians believe that the UK government really wants to help them achieve freedom and dignity from their brutal tyrant? When Britons travel to Syria to fight (with non-proscribed groups) against the Assad regime, which is responsible for the overwhelming majority of the civilian casualties in Syria, they are prosecuted, not only questioned at the airports. But when people travel to Syria to fight against another devil (joining groups with links to terrorist organisations) they are welcome in the UK without question.

RR is calling upon the UK authorities to implement consistent and fair policy on its borders. Inconsistent practices will simply cause targeted communities to feel stigmatised and marginalised because of their origins or beliefs. RR also calls upon the UK government to work towards a binding UN resolution calling upon all foreigners to leave Syrian territories regardless of which side they are fighting for.

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For further information and press enquiries, please contact 07769704656, or email: advocacy@rrsoc.org

Rethink Rebuild Society has established itself as a non-profit organisation that acts as an umbrella for the Syrian community in Manchester, and endeavours to clarify the Syrian cause to its audience in the UK and the wider public.