The SEF is an innovative think tank dedicated to building a free, pluralistic, and independent homeland that rests on a strong economy to ensure a life of freedom and dignity for all Syrians. The organization will serve as an information resource for all matters relating to the Syrian economy, and its members will conduct economic research and publish scholarly reports. Beyond those attributes typically associated with a traditional think tank, the SEF will organize the private sector to advocate for the economic reforms needed in post-Assad Syria. The organization will develop policy proposals necessary for the birth of a free market economy that upholds equal opportunities of access for the welfare and prosperity of all Syrians. The days are coming when a free Syria will be governed by laws and not men, and the SEF will be at the forefront of economic restructuring that will restore the status, dignity, and rights of the Syrian homeland and people.

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Homs is geographically the largest governorate, and the third largest in population after Damascus and Aleppo in the Syrian Arab Republic. It is located on the Orontes River in “Al-Ghab Plain” fertile area, and 162 km north of the capital “Damascus”. Homs is the central link between the southern governorates, the coastal-northern provinces, and the northeast of the country, which gives it a unique commercial location, and enriched it with different vital, industrial, and commercial utilities. Its administrative capital is Homs city, its largest city. The governorate is divided into seven districts: Homs city, Talalakh, Al-Rastan, Al-Qusayr, Tadmur, Al-Mukharam, and Taldo. It has a population of around (1,267,000) as per 2011 estimates, due to its increasing importance and the growth of its commercial market.

Economy in Home Governorate:

Homs’ strategic importance comes from its being the largest governorate that covers more than 42,000 square kilometers, and contains fertile plains that made it one of the most important agricultural areas in Syria. The irrigation system is the first of its kind in the country, brought prosperity to the farmers, and led to establishing a number of companies and factories for food, agricultural and pastoral industries.

The grown crops in Homs plains include wheat, barley, lentils, sugarcane, cotton and vineyards. Homs attracts many commercial transport convoys heading towards Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq; because of the transportation routes to the Mediterranean ports whether in Syria; like Latakia and Tartous, or in Lebanon; like Beirut and Tripoli. On the other hand, Homs is home of heavy industries in the country, the largest is the Syrian Company of Homs refinery of the public sector. It operates one of the only two refineries in the country, and its capacity is 110,000 barrels a day, which is less than Banias refinery’s production of 130,000 barrels a day. The refinery was established in Homs for its strategic location in the middle of Syria, and economic and tourist position that makes it a capital that centralizes Syria. It is 478 meters above the sea level. Orontes River passes inside it and secure its water supply. It is located 7 kilometers from the city center on the highway. Currently, the refinery occupies nearly 4 square kilometers, and 4,500 employees from engineers, technicians, experts and workers. All its products are subject to the Syrian standards. There is also a chemical fertilizers plant in Homs, and another factory for processing phosphate which is rich in Tadmour; the administratively dependant district on Homs. Fertilizers and phosphates products are ready for local consumption and some of them are exported.

Since 2000, Homs witnessed a development in its private industrial sector, increase in the number of medium and small enterprises, and the northwest and the south villages of the city transformed into industrial areas. A refinery for producing sugar was established in cooperation with Brazil, and Sham factory for local cars was established in cooperation with Iran. In Hisyaa suburb (47 kms south of Homs), a new industrial zone across 25 km² (2600 hectares) was established, it covers four main industrial sectors: Textiles, food, chemical, engineering and vocational sectors. The facilities were designed to accommodate up to 66,000 workers with their families. Moreover, a free trade zone was established within the city to encourage bilateral trade and exempt its assets from custom fees.

Homs in Light of the Revolution:

Activists called it “the Capital of the Syrian Revolution”, for it was the second city after Daraa to join the revolution and call for overthrowing the regime. Large numbers, estimated by tens or hundreds of thousands, of its population joined the demonstrations. Then they called for a sit-in protest in the Old Clock Square, it was later named “the Freedom Square” in 18 April 2011. The next day, the Syrian security forces intervened and broke the sit-in protest brutally, leaving over 80 martyrs and hundreds between wounded and detained. It was the turning point of the peaceful movement inside the province. After that there were demonstrations and protests across the province and in Homs city in particular. Supported by the security devices and the Shabiha, the Syrian army broke in and besieged its districts end of May 2011, which resulted in more than 5000 martyrs and wounded till July 2012. Then manifestations of an armed struggle appeared. The Free Syrian Army battalions spread in some areas and protected the protesters, and started clashing with the Syrian army in February 2012 which committed the massacre of Khalidiya neighborhood. The Syrian army continued its operations through rocket launchers shelling over the besieged areas that killed and wounded large numbers and up to 1000 martyrs. Late in February, the regime forces launched a major offensive on the besieged “Babamro” district; the FSA declared its withdrawal after 26 days of continuous attack and bombing, then the regime army followed its usual path of collective genocides in the rest of the besieged neighborhoods in the city and its countryside. The regime forced a tight siege on Homs for more than two years. Even though it was not a very strict siege in the beginning; for the rebels could receive aids and support, yet it transformed soon from a military siege into a humanitarian one when hundreds of Syrian families suffered hunger, pain, and lack of food and medicine. The remaining people feed on grass, trees and olive leaves. Electricity and water were cut off, and most hospitals were fully destroyed or controlled by the regime army; which led to many deaths due to lack of first aid and medicines. In April 2014, it was agreed upon the withdrawal of citizens from Homs old neighborhoods and further settlements in return. That agreement was considered as a victory for the Assad and his army, and resulted in 220 persons leaving Homs old neighborhoods towards its liberated countryside early in May 2014. Currently, the regime forces control all districts in Homs city, except Al-Waer neighborhood - that is populated by around (50,000) people.
Prices of Basic Items in Homs Governorate:

1- The Dollar Exchange Rates in Syrian Pound: Data has been collected from our contact point about the dollar exchange rates as illustrated in diagram (1); they developed in Homs governorate between 1/12/2014 and 31/5/2015. The SYP’s value has sharply deteriorated during the study period from 190 to 264 SYP per dollar. Knowing that the dollar’s official rate was set by the Central Bank at 232 SYP per dollar.

2- Prices of Gas Cylinders: As shown in diagram (2), the received data indicates the fluctuated prices of a gas cylinder between 1/12/2014 and 31/5/2015. We note that its price has decreased in the liberated areas during the study period from 5000 to 1600 SYP, and in the regime-held areas from 3000 to 1600 SYP. While in the besieged areas (Al-Waer), its price goes between 4000 and 4500 SYP, which is three times the price in the liberated or the regime-held areas.
3- **Diesel Prices**: Diagram (3) shows the fluctuations in diesel’s prices between 1/12/2014 and 31/5/2015. We note that its price in the liberated areas is between 255 and 250 SYP per liter. While it rose in the regime-held (occupied) areas from 90 to 125 SYP, which is less than its price in the liberated areas. While it is tragic in the besieged areas (Al-Waer), for it amounted from 700 to 1100 SYP per liter during the study period; which is five times the price in the liberated areas, and nine times the price in the regime-held areas.

4- **Gasoline Prices**: Diagram (4) presents the changes in gasoline prices between 1/12/2014 and 31/5/2015. In the liberated and the regime-held areas, gasoline prices rose from 170 to 210 SYP per liter, while it dramatically amounted in the besieged areas from 900 to 2500 SYP during the study period; nearly twelve-fold the price in the liberated and the regime-held areas.

5- **Meat Prices**: Diagrams (5, 6, and 7) display the collected data by our contact point about the prices of chicken, lamb, and beef between 1/12/2014 and 31/5/2015. We notice in diagram (5) three waves of increase over each other reflecting the fluctuated and prices of lamb in Homs three areas; the lowest wave reflects the fluctuated and rising prices of lamb averagely from 1250 to 1500, then to 1700 SYP per kilo in the liberated areas, the medium wave reflects the fluctuated and rising prices of lamb averagely from 1300 to 1550, and up to 1900 SYP per kilo in the regime-held areas, while the highest wave reflects the fluctuated rising prices of lamb averagely from 1700, to 2000, to 2200 SYP per kilo in the besieged areas.

In diagram (6), we note two levels of beef prices in Homs three areas; the first level waves between 1000 and 1100 SYP in the liberated and the regime-occupied areas, although they fluctuate more in the regime areas. Prices are more stable in the liberated areas, as for the second level, prices wave in the besieged areas between 1500 and 1700 SYP, which is much higher than prices in the other two areas.
Diagram (7) shows three waves of fluctuations of chicken prices in Homs three areas; two intertwined waves high and low that reflect the chicken prices between 425, 550 and 450, then back to 525 SYP in both the liberated and the regime-held areas. The third wave reflects the fluctuating chicken prices between 750, 550, 670 and back to 750 SYP in the besieged areas, which are generally higher than the prices in the other two areas.

6- Prices of an Eggs Carton: Diagram (8) displays the fluctuating prices of eggs between 1/12/2014 and 31/5/2015. In the studied period, the prices are close in rise and fall in Homs three areas, knowing that they are lower in the besieged area than those in the liberated or the regime-held areas. Generally, the fluctuated prices of an eggs box rose to 500 then to 700, then declined to 520 SYP during the studied area, because this material enters the besieged areas through the regime-held areas in the first place.

7- Cereal Prices (Bulgur, Rice, Lentils, and Chickpeas): Data has been collected from our contact point concerning the prices of bulgur, rice, lentils and chickpeas between 1/12/2014 and 31/5/2015, as illustrated in diagrams (9, 10, 11, and 12). Diagram (9) shows significant fluctuations in bulgur prices in the besieged areas from 200 to 325, and then back to 165 SYP per one kilogram. Prices fluctuate lowly between both areas; in the regime-held areas, bulgur prices wave between 140 and 120, and then back to 150 and 125 SYP per kilo, while in the liberated areas, its prices wave from 150 to 90 then back to 140 SYP per kilo. We note that its prices are higher and fluctuate more in the besieged areas than the other two areas.
Diagram (10) shows the significant disparity in rice prices in the besieged areas where they fluctuate between 225 and 70, then back to 420 and 230 SYP per kilo, due to instable times of smuggling rice to these areas, and its different qualities. In diagram (10), we note significant fluctuations in rice prices in the liberated and the regime-held areas from 225 to 250, then to 210 and 280 SYP per kilo. They fluctuate in the besieged areas more than they do in the other two areas.

The fluctuating prices resulted from the greatly diverse rice qualities in the besieged areas; some are low quality (aids rice), some are medium, good and high quality. It is worth mentioning that before permitting its entry, only the low quality rice was available in the besieged areas.

Diagram (11) shows that lentils prices are high and intertwined in the liberated and the regime-held areas, yet lower in the besieged areas than those in the liberated areas. In the three areas, lentils prices started by around 200 SYP, then increased to 275 and 340 SYP per kilo in the regime-held areas, and to 265 SYP in the liberated areas, while they decreased to 135 SYP per kilo in the besieged areas. We note that lentils prices in the besieged areas are lower than those in the liberated and the regime-held areas because they enter in large quantities through food-aid baskets, distributed in good amounts to the families, and they are also grown in this region. It is worth mentioning that entry of humanitarian aids was not stopped even during siege, but they were only hindered and delayed.

Diagram (12) displays the significant fluctuations in chickpeas prices in the besieged areas from 200 to 400 then back to 175 SYP per kilo. While they lowly intertwine and fluctuate in the other two areas; in the regime-held (occupied) areas, chickpeas prices fluctuate between 160 and 200 then back to 80 and 100 SYP per kilo, while they wave between 160, 80 and back to 150 SYP in the liberated areas. They are higher and more changeable in the besieged areas than the other two areas.
8- Sugar and Tea Prices: Data has been collected from our contact point about sugar and tea prices between 1/12/2014 and 31/5/2015 as illustrated in diagrams (13 and 14). Diagram (13) shows that the sugar prices have declined from 1000 to 170 SYP per kilo in the besieged areas, then raised from 100 to 170 SYP as well in the liberated and the regime-held areas. Diagram (14) displays significant fluctuations in tea prices in the besieged areas for they increased from 1500 to 5000, declined to 1100, then rose to 1600 SYP per kilo. In the liberated and the regime-held areas its price also reached 1600 after it was 1200 SYP per kilo, same as the besieged areas. The gradual decrease in tea and sugar prices in the besieged areas resulted from the partial siege-ll, and access of foodstuffs - including those two items – on various stages and in large quantities that spread and secured them well in the market after they were very rare.

Families Living Conditions In Homs Province:

1- Electricity for Housings:
Data has been collected from our contact point about families’ average consumption of electricity; its monthly consumption is 14 hours a day in the liberated areas, and 7.75 hours per day in the besieged areas. Electricity resource is generally available in the public web only, without depending on private generators or Ambers. Its monthly cost exceeds 368 SYP in average in the liberated areas and 233 SYP in the besieged ones.

2- Fuel for Housings:
The collected data from our contact point about a family’s average consumption of fuel indicates the following; in the liberated areas; monthly consumption of a fuel reached 48 liters in average, with a monthly cost of 7676 SYP averagely. While in the besieged areas; monthly consumption of a fuel reached 28 liters in average, with a monthly cost of 1600 SYP averagely. Data indicates that fuel is available in all areas.

3- Gasoline for Housings:
The collected data from our contact point about a family’s average consumption of gasoline indicates the following; in the liberated areas; it reached 45 liters per month, with an average cost of 6619 SYP per month. While in the besieged areas it reached 54 liters per month, with an average cost of 6348 SYP per month. Data indicates that gasoline is available in all areas.

4- Gas for Housings:
The collected data from our contact point about a family’s average consumption of gas shows that; in the liberated areas; it is 9 liters per month and 233 SYP in average. In the besieged areas; monthly cost reached 241 SYP in average in the liberated areas, and 50 SYP in the besieged ones.

5- Firewood for Housings:
The collected data from our contact point about a family’s average consumption of firewood indicates that; it reached 161 kg per month in the liberated areas with an average cost of 6348 SYP per month, and it is available by 79%, as per data. While a family’s average consumption of firewood reached 209 kg per month in the besieged areas, with an average cost of 9161 SYP per month, and this item is generally available, as per data.

6- Water for Housings:
The collected data from our contact point about water resources indicates that; 100% of families in the liberated areas obtain water from the public web, without relying on water tanks or private wells. Its monthly cost reached 241 SYP in average in the liberated areas, and 50 SYP in the besieged ones.

7- Housings Characteristics:
The collected data from our contact point about housing characteristics indicates that; basic services are available in their areas. Most of the inhabitants confirmed no hostile acts in their areas. 100% of the families confirmed no hostile acts in their areas. 100% of them said that there are no mines or explosives in their areas. 93% of them confirmed no missile attacks, and 93% of them confirmed no air strikes over their areas.

8- Humanitarian Aids for Families:
The collected data from our contact point about humanitarian aids indicates the following; in the liberated areas; 65% of the families said they are sufficient, and 35% of the families said they are insufficient. As for main obstacles for aids access to families; 47% of them are due to the regime’s prevention, the major organizations providing humanitarian help in Homs province are: 1- The UN Organization by 82%, 2- The Syrian Red Crescent by 18%.

9- Safety in the Housing Area:
The collected data from our contact point about the housing area safety indicates the following:
In the liberated areas; 21% of families confirmed that their areas are insecure, and 79% of them said their areas are secure. 100% of the families confirmed no hostile acts in their areas. 100% of them said that there are no mines or explosives in their areas. 93% of them confirmed no missile attacks, and 93% of them confirmed no air strikes over their areas.
In the besieged areas: 42% of the families said their areas are unsafe, and 58% of them said their areas are safe. 100% of them confirmed no hostile acts, and 100% of them confirmed that there are no mines or explosives in their areas. 92% of them said there are no air strikes, and 67% of them confirmed no missile attacks over their areas, while 33% of them confirmed the opposite.
Recommendations

According to the previous report, the SEF recommends the following from the Local Councils:

1. We demand the media institutions (local, Arabic, and universal) to deal professionally with the besieged and the disaster areas in Syria, shed the light on the humanitarian tragedy there, and reflect reality in the right way.

2. Since the living conditions in the besieged areas are highly difficult, we call upon the UN, the human rights organizations, the Security Council permanent member states, and all organizations involved in Syrian affairs to work on the siege-lift on Homs besieged areas.

3. Due to the largely different fuel prices (fuel, gasoline, gas) between the liberated and the besieged areas, the Local Councils should coordinate with the donor organizations to find a way for fuel delivery to the besieged areas through an acceptable partner by the Assad regime; like the Syrian Red Crescent.

4. Educate citizens, especially in those areas, to rely on chicken and eggs to fulfill their nutritional needs from fat and protein due to the sharp increase in lamb and beef meat.

5. The Local Councils should coordinate with the civil society organizations to establish training courses for civilians concerning some domestic and agricultural economy projects, especially domestic farming, livestock and poultry farming to secure meat, eggs, bulgur and other items.

Sources of Data

1. The collected information from Homs province contact point.
2. Homs Province (Al-Mawsouaa Al-Shamila).
3. Chamber of Commerce in Homs.
4. Items List of prices in Homs showrooms.