

Security Checks and Construction Permits: HTS-Affiliated Governing Body Seeks to Regularise Real Estate in Idlib

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The Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), associated with the Islamist extremist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), is beginning to regularise the real estate sector in areas under its control in north-western Syria. The group is counting properties, organising construction, and banning slum housing. This new policy is also a potential source of revenue.

The SSG has started expanding and developing the work of the General Directorate of Real Estate, which is a part of the group's so-called Ministry of Local Administration and Services. The group is also setting up technical offices, such as the Contract Documentation Office and the Licensing and Complaints Office, to handle real estate legal matters. The SSG then staffed these offices with employees, engineers and technical observers who were mostly hired in June, according to *The Syria Report's* correspondent.

In September, the General Directorate of Local Councils, which is part of the ministry, requested that the Idlib Engineers Syndicate cooperate with its technical offices in regulating real estate. The SSG's president and the minister of local administration both visited Administrative Area centres across Idlib to meet with local council officials and discuss the need for real estate regulation, as well as the preparedness of the authority's licensing offices. Area administrations are new administrative divisions confined to large cities in Idlib. Each administration includes notables, military commanders, and civil activists, and sometimes performs legislative functions.

The SSG has not yet announced details of the new steps required for regulating real estate. However, a notice posted by the Sarmada Area Administration, on 12 September stated: "It is strictly forbidden to construct any residential or commercial building or execute any infrastructure project...without a review from the Directorate of Local Administration and Services to obtain a work permit, written approval or license...at risk of prosecution."

The SSG licensing regulations appear to be focused on residential areas in northern Idlib, which have seen unprecedented construction in recent years — especially the towns of Sarmada, Harem and Dana, as well as in central Idlib city. Meanwhile, the Idlib governorate's southern countryside is still largely empty of residents, as the towns there are close to the frontlines between rebel and regime forces, along the strategic M4 highway linking Aleppo and Lattakia.

Construction licences issued by the SSG will be priced in Turkish liras, local sources told *The Syria Report*, with prices determined according to the total area of the property to be built. Each square metre will cost TRY 3, in addition to other sums that the owner of the property must pay in order to obtain documents required by the licensing offices, such as security approval and the title deed.

The licensing process is a potential source of income for the SSG, especially amid increased construction in Idlib city since the latest Russian-Turkish ceasefire in March 2020 brought some degree of respite from the bombardment of last year and the first months of this year. New regulations are also working to control demographic distribution in the area after a large number of people were forcibly displaced to the rebel-held northwest from other areas of Syria, by encouraging people to move from camps and temporary housing to more permanent properties, especially along the Turkish border.

Along those lines, the General Directorate of Real Estate now requires property owners to obtain

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security approval from the body's surveying department. The approval must include confirmation that the owner had no affiliation with parties that are hostile to the SSG and HTS, such as the Islamic State and the Syrian government. Without security approval, the property owner cannot obtain a building permit.

The security check process appears to be central to the SSG's plans for regulating real estate in Idlib. In recent weeks, the body granted itself provisional claims over properties originally owned by regime employees, soldiers or security and administrative officials. The SSG's [Ministry of Justice](#) announced in June that it rejected all agencies or parties that appeared to be working with the regime, including those who periodically visit regime-controlled areas to receive their salaries. The SSG has not yet taken any measures to acquire claimed properties.

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