SAEA | SYRIAN AMERICAN ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION

To: SAEA members and friends
From: SAEA board of directors
Re: SAEA strategic direction
Date: October 1, 2024

Some SAEA members have expressed concern about the board of directors' ongoing decision to refrain from formal participation in relief and refugee projects. This policy applies consistently to both governmental and non-governmental organizations, whether based in the U.S. or abroad.

Organizations such as SAMS and SRD in the U.S., along with engineering and governmental assemblies in Syria and Turkey, are involved in numerous beneficial projects aimed at serving Syrian citizens. SAEA has been and remains available to offer technical consultation in line with the expertise and capacity of its volunteer members. However, SAEA cannot assume the extended costs, liabilities, communications, or coordination associated with projects outside the U.S. As a professional technical association, SAEA does not engage directly in relief and rescue initiatives of any kind.

The SAEA Board of Directors would like to reaffirm the focused vision and mission of the association, which were adopted in 2020 following extensive strategic planning by our leadership. SAEA's strategic objectives and initiatives have been regularly communicated at each of our four annual conferences since 2021. The guiding principles and core values outlined on the SAEA-US.org website continue to inform the board’s decisions and guide the members and projects we undertake.

To provide clarity, documentation, and insight for new members joining SAEA, we present a historical overview of the factors and reasoning that shaped our current strategic mission and programming direction:

SAEA Historical Review:

SAEA does not engage in or support relief and rescue projects in Syria or elsewhere. This decision follows over a decade of involvement in various initiatives, during which we conducted thorough evaluations and held extensive discussions among our members regarding the outcomes and impacts of our efforts. Below is a summary of our findings and the reasoning behind this decision:

1. Previous participation in relief and development projects did not receive the appreciation or support from the organizations managing and funding these initiatives. Despite our significant experience, time, and effort, we consistently encountered disappointing reactions, regardless of the size or nature of the requesting organization. Below is a list of example projects that highlights the breadth of experience we gained from our past efforts in relief and development:

a. Planning and design of field emergency hospitals and medical facilities in Syria and neighboring countries
b. Repair and renovation of existing commercial and residential structures
c. New design of infrastructure facilities and refurbishment of existing infrastructure
d. Develop plans and strategies for electricity and power sources sufficiency including renewable and sustainable options
e. Securing clean drinking water and irrigation water sources
f. Housing for the refugees and the displaced
g. Food security and agricultural, farming, and fishery development
h. Damage surveying and condition assessment
i. Earthquake design of buildings and seismic retrofit

2. The majority of our members did not support or encourage SAEA's involvement in relief projects. Many of these initiatives demand substantial time commitments for coordination, fundraising, negotiations, and on-site presence—resources that a technical group like ours, with limited time and no budget, cannot allocate. Successful execution of such projects typically requires dedicated professionals with full-time commitments to manage the complexities of bureaucratic processes and documentation essential for tracking work and costs in crisis and conflict zones.

3. As a non-profit professional technical association, SAEA lacks the capacity to invest the time and resources necessary to secure funding for relief or rescue projects. Large-scale infrastructure initiatives, such as highways, bridges, water treatment facilities, transportation systems, schools, and hospitals, demand significant financial resources that only governments can provide. While these projects align with SAEA's mission and expertise, they rely entirely on government budgets and require extensive coordination with stakeholders. Engaging in such initiatives would divert SAEA from its core mission and compromise its non-political stance.

4. Relief and development projects primarily require one critical resource: funding. In many cases, the need for technical expertise or technology transfer is minimal. This is particularly true for SAEA members, who are trained in American codes, standards, and construction methods that may not be applicable in Syria or the broader Middle East. SAEA has never been—and will never be—in a position to secure or provide the substantial funding needed for these projects, nor is it aligned with our mission to do so.

5. Most relief and development projects necessitate affiliations and coordination with groups that often have strong political, religious, or ethnic affiliations. This requirement directly contradicts SAEA's core values of serving all Syrians, regardless of their religion, race, ethnicity, or political beliefs.

6. Many SAEA members have a deep love for their homeland and maintain homes and assets in Syria, where their family and loved ones reside. They hope to see Syria united and safe, allowing them to travel freely and spend time with their loved ones without restrictions. Their pride in being Syrian

American fosters a strong sense of love and respect for both nations and their respective laws and regulations.

SAEA Mission:

Support and improve the Syrian American Engineers' abilities and skills through continuing educational and professional development to prosper, advance their knowledge, and increase their value to their family, community, and profession.

1 SAEA members organize quarterly meetings, which include two on-site conferences and two online conferences each year.

2 Conferences address a wide array of topics crucial to the career and professional development of engineers and scientists. During these events, members actively exchange ideas and insights aimed at enhancing their education and career opportunities for mutual benefit. This collaboration includes discussions on professional licensure, specialized accreditation, and other avenues for advancing their expertise and professional standing.

3 Recent conferences have focused on themes such as supporting young engineers in their early career paths and addressing the unique challenges faced by female engineers in achieving a work-family balance.

4 The SAEA board works diligently to organize and coordinate the quarterly conferences, often with minimal support from members due to the wide distribution of SAEA members across the USA. To enhance attendance at SAEA events, we encourage greater member participation and assistance, which would be greatly appreciated.

5 SAEA has developed a comprehensive charter for a Healthcare Facilities Management Committee and has proposed a team of engineering and technical members to support its establishment. This model charter is available for use by any ARCS members or members of the Syrian diaspora upon request. SAEA has carefully selected some of its top talent in engineering fields critical to large-scale facilities management for this initiative.

6 SAEA has formed an earthquake response task force comprised of fifteen members, led by six specialized civil and structural engineers with over 180 years of combined experience in the analysis, design, and construction of reinforced concrete buildings. The remaining eleven members bring additional decades of expertise in electrical, mechanical, IT, and environmental engineering. The task force identified damage surveying and condition assessment as SAEA's top priority for emergency response.

In response to the urgent needs of displaced families concerned about returning to damaged structures vulnerable to aftershocks and smaller earthquakes, SAEA published a comprehensive document to assist engineers in assessing buildings for continued occupancy. However, the scale of recovery required was immense, necessitating significant budgets and manpower. Unfortunately, much of the repair work was carried out by organizations with substantially larger

resources that did not comply with international quality standards for seismic hazard mitigation, despite SAEA's provision of technical guidance.

7 SAEA members are always welcome to attend committee or board meetings to propose and discuss projects or concepts, including those related to the association's social media. As long as the ideas align with SAEA's core values, they will be thoughtfully considered and deliberated.

8 Conference agendas and topics are published in advance, providing members the flexibility to propose additional topics and discussions for inclusion in the schedule. The SAEA board is continually seeking fresh and engaging subjects to feature at quarterly events, including social and networking functions.

SAEA Vision:

Members organized under SAEA will generate a positive impact and reflection on the engineering community and make a difference in developing Syrian cities, systems, and infrastructure to advance Syria into a productive and proud member of the global community of nations.

SAEA aims to strengthen pride in being Syrian through the achievements of its members in the U.S. and around the world. We believe that even small successes can create a positive impact that elevates Syria. A stable, secure, and thriving individual can share their wealth of knowledge with anyone seeking it, whether from Syria or elsewhere. Members are encouraged to assist their homeland in their personal capacity, regardless of whether they seek formal support from the association.

We kindly ask SAEA members to uphold the vision and principles of the association by refraining from making any political, racist, sexist, or religious remarks on any of SAEA’s platforms. Members are encouraged to share engineering-related topics that benefit others in a respectful manner, reflecting the identity and values of SAEA and its members. The Board of Directors will unfortunately have to dismiss any member who does not adhere to these guidelines.

SAEA Programs & Member Benefits

A. Contributions to Syria:

Educational: Periodic lectures and webinars conducted in Arabic.

Translation: Providing translations of codes, standards, and educational materials.

Technical Consulting: Collaborating with the international community on development programs for Syria.

Training: Offering face-to-face training for Syrian engineers worldwide through our technical support center.

B. Career Professional Development:

Connect with SAEA members to network, explore job opportunities, and discover career advancement strategies. Attend workshops focused on resume writing, job interviewing, and enhancing your career.

Find mentors in various engineering disciplines who can offer valuable insights and guidance on career development and continuing education.

C. Job Opportunities:

SAEA regularly shares job openings in the USA, Canada, and the Middle East with all members, offering access to new career opportunities.

Members can also find internships with various companies where they can gain practical engineering experience.

D. Learning and Continuing Education:

1. Lectures and webinars from national and international experts
2. Recorded webinars made available to members via website archives
3. Receive replies to technical inquiries through a capable and dedicated group of members who provide you answers in various specialties and engineering disciplines from our technical support group
4. Workshops and special price discounts for refresher courses for PE/SE licensing exams and FE engineer in training exams.
5. As a non-profit association we have special discount programs on Engineering software packages and Computer applications.
6. Members-only free or reduced-cost continuing education certificates.
7. Scholarship Program and young engineer awards
8. SAEA Innovation Award

E. Engineering support and consultancy:

1. Become part of SAEA team of specialists in our technical support center and answer questions in your area of knowledge and specialization

2. Create a practical dictionary of engineering terminologies; civil, electrical, mechanical, architectural, computer science, construction management
3. Translation of technical and engineering documents and post on the website
4. Translation of periodical and journal articles and posts on website

F. Networking Meetings and Conferences:

Face-to-face and online general membership conferences and collaborative events are designed to network, learn, and grow alongside other professionals in membership. Find new business opportunities and learn about upcoming projects in your engineering discipline

G. Family and Social Activities:

Bring your family to our social events and picnics. Meet and greet many other Syrian American fellows in our well-attended gatherings. All of our picnics are casual with delicious food and drinks served for all with games and special functions for children and young adults.