

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND JUST PEACE IN SYRIA

SEPTEMBER 2014

In advance of the UN General Assembly Ministerial, a delegation of five Syrian women representing the Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy, Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria, and women of the Local Councils convened to discuss concrete steps to construct a more inclusive political transition, improve humanitarian access, and strengthen protections for human rights. They sought to engage in constructive dialogue with international and regional actors as well as recommend effective solutions, grounded in the needs of local communities.

The following recommendations were developed by this diverse group of Syrian women from different geographic areas within Syria, representing broad civil society networks comprised of individuals and organizations. These networks have operated with a commitment to reviving a sustainable, peaceful political process and to inclusion of women and civil society in all stages of the transition.

SUSTAINABLE POLITICAL TRANSITION

The international community must maintain pressure on parties to the conflict to return to the negotiating table and devise a sustainable political solution based on the Geneva I Communique. To this end, confidence-building measures should be designed in consultation with women and civil society organizations, particularly those focused on gender, to build trust between the negotiating parties and cultivate popular buy-in for another round of talks. A sustainable political transition necessitates inclusive negotiations, an accord that reflects input from affected communities, and representative political transition bodies.

We urge:

1. UN Special Envoy de Mistura to structure the talks to enable the full and meaningful participation of women and civil society by:
 - a. Including an official consultative forum for Syrian civil society in the structure of the negotiations with a requirement that negotiating parties consider the outcomes, statements, and position papers produced by the forum.
 - b. Creating incentives for the official parties to the negotiations to reserve at least 30% of the seats on their delegations for women.
 - c. Assembling a Technical Expert Team comprised by Syrian women and civil society, with at least 50% representing organizations that focus on gender and social inclusion. The team should have a mandate to advise the mediator and official delegations, assured access to all parties, and a formal role in the review of draft text.
 - d. Appointing a gender and social inclusion advisor responsible for identifying and liaising with active, representative networks of women and civil society.
 - e. Requiring each of his technical advisors to integrate gender into their thematic areas and regularly consult active networks of women and civil society.

2. UN Special Envoy de Mistura and his team to work with women and civil society to define confidence-building measures that will create trust and encourage support on all sides for renewed negotiations. Options may include:
 - a. Prioritizing construction of temporary housing for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from both sides of the conflict, with a focus on those currently living in tents.
 - b. Coordinating the safe passage of university students between government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas to allow them to resume their studies.
 - c. Allowing for the immediate release of all women and children currently detained by all sides.
 - d. Improving conditions in prisons and detention centers.
 - e. Opening additional channels for the distribution of humanitarian relief.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

By conservative estimates, nearly 200,000 people have died in the Syrian conflict. Almost three million are registered as refugees and over six million are internally displaced. Approximately half the population is living in extreme poverty, in dire need of humanitarian assistance. The amount of relief reaching affected communities inside Syria is insufficient. The Syrian government and regional actors continue to violate UN Security Council resolutions to expand the access of humanitarian agencies. Better coordination between the international community, Syrian women and civil society, along with substantial support for local ceasefire negotiations, is essential.

We urge:

1. UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to appoint one person on his team in Damascus to be responsible for tracking all local ceasefire agreements in an official registry; UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) should use this information to pressure the Syrian government to comply with the agreements. We further urge the UN to supply two international observers—one man and one woman—in each locality to monitor implementation of the agreements' provisions.
2. UN Human Rights Council, in coordination with UN DPA, to issue quarterly reports on local ceasefires and their compliance with international human rights standards.
3. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to work with civil society to devise a localized relief effort reflective of each area's unique needs and characteristics. Such specialization would address:
 - a. Areas besieged by the Syrian government, where in-kind assistance is typically disallowed, only cash transfers are feasible, and local ceasefire negotiations are required to expand access.
 - b. Areas held by the government, where the distribution of aid insufficient relative to the high number of IDPs.

- c. Areas controlled by nongovernment actors, where Local Councils and civil society organizations, particularly women's organizations, play an important role that would benefit from stronger coordination with the international community.
 - d. Areas controlled by the Islamic State (ISIS), where close coordination with tribal elders and other community leaders is required for assessment and access, and support for girls' education should be prioritized.
 - e. Communities of IDPs along the borders, where assistance for education and response centers for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence should be central, and international and local monitoring of aid distribution must be increased.
4. UN OCHA to engage a broader cross-section of Syrian organizations in the monitoring of aid. Should the UN commit to recognizing a civil society-led coordination body, active organizations in each province stand ready to form a committee to conduct needs assessments and monitor the delivery of assistance.
 5. UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to establish refugee camps in Lebanon to accommodate the rising number of displaced Syrians.
 6. UN Member States to allow Syrians to travel on expired passports to allow for freedom of movement while access to government agencies for passport renewal is extremely limited.
 7. UN Member States to coordinate to commit the full amount of the UN appeal for the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan before May 2015.
 8. UN Special Envoy de Mistura, as well as allies of the Syrian government, to pressure the government to expand humanitarian access in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 2165 and 2139.

DETAINEE AND PRISONER RIGHTS

The arbitrary arrest and detention of peaceful activists in Syria is an egregious violation of international human rights and humanitarian law. The full extent of unlawful detention of civilians by all sides is currently unknown. The negative, long-term impacts on detainees' physical and mental health, as well as on the livelihoods of them and their families, are significant and remain largely unaddressed. Civil society can play an essential role in tracking detentions, as well as attending to the needs of prisoners, former prisoners, and their families.

We urge:

1. UN Security Council Members to introduce and pass a resolution that requires the Syrian government and armed opposition groups to acknowledge the full extent of those detained and imprisoned. Further, they should call on these actors to provide a full list of names and facilities and to provide fair trials for all detainees and prisoners.

2. UN Special Envoy de Mistura to mandate monthly protection group meetings between his staff and civil society representatives, particularly women, to share information on detainee issues.
3. International donors to commit financial, health, and psychosocial support for prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, to be delivered by Syrian civil society organizations, particularly women's organizations.
4. International donors to create an education fund for prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, whose lives and livelihoods have been severely disrupted.

The Institute for Inclusive Security hosted the delegation of Syrian women leaders. Due to security constraints, contact information for delegates has been withheld. Please contact Inclusive Security if more information is needed and/or you need to contact the delegates:

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