

CSSR ONLINE REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

– *Beirut*

Participants summary report

CSSR Beirut

5 and 6 March, 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional Consultations in Beirut from 5 to 6 March 2020 with 32 participants based in Lebanon and Syria reviewed the CSSR's roles, vision and mission; discussed its underpinning civic and societal values; discussed whether and how to link the CSSR to the political process, which is not limited to the Constitutional Committee; and explored ways to

share the CSSR's outputs with the widest possible spectrum of civil society. Some additional proposals covered humanitarian issues, including the detainees, abductees and forcibly disappeared persons' files, and the challenges faced by women, children and people with special needs.

BEFORE THE MEETING

In order to broaden participation and attract fresh participants and experiences, the organisers conducted individual meetings that lasted for several days with a new group of civil society activists who had been carefully selected based on nominations by organisations and individuals within the CSSR, with a view to familiarising them with the CSSR's activities, nature and roles, and to exchange ideas and experiences.

THE FIRST DAY

a) First Session

The First Session opened with a political briefing by the Special Envoy (SE) team (Deputy SE Khawla Matar, the political officers in the Office of the SE for Syria (OSE-Syria) and the CSSR team). This briefing focused on:

- ◆ The last meeting of the CSSR in Geneva and the points that were discussed related to the activation of the CSSR roles, the expansion of its activities, and how it can or cannot interact with the Constitutional Committee and play a more effective role in the political process.
- ◆ The launch of regional consultations in Turkey and Erbil.
- ◆ A summary of the challenges faced by the SE, including the difficulties facing his call for a nationwide ceasefire.

The Five Priorities of the Special Envoy:

1. To further the work of the Constitutional Committee, which is not the goal, but rather the door through which Syrians can be at the same table.
2. To communicate with political actors, civil society, and women at home and abroad.
3. To rebuild trust among Syrians, which is a top priority.
4. To ascertain the fate of detainees and missing persons of all parties, which is the most difficult file.
5. To achieve the deeper integration of civil society in order to reach a solution and to bring back the Syrian-Syrian dialogue under Syrian ownership.

Most of the questions and interventions revolved around specific points:

- ◆ What is the Constitutional Committee in terms of its fate and progress? What is the role of the Middle Third and its relationship with the CSSR?
- ◆ Efforts to reduce the level of violence, the fate of the detainees and abductees file, and

the guarantees that can be provided as an entry point to strengthening confidence among Syrians.

- ◆ Support for the CSSR, including expanding its representation and enhancing its roles in order to benefit from its participation in the political process.

b) Second Session

The colleagues who attended the last meeting of the CSSR in Geneva provided a comprehensive briefing on the proceedings of that meeting. Also, papers were distributed that included the outcomes of the said meeting, including joint messages and a preliminary draft of ideas that included recommendations for linking the CSSR and the Constitutional Committee. Later, there were fruitful group discussions between the participants and the Deputy SE and political affairs officers in the OSE-Syria.

The participants concluded that the Constitutional Committee should be considered as a window to the political track. In addition, it was emphasised that the constitutional framework is part of a long negotiating track that is not clearly time-bound; that the SE will not facilitate any process that is not credible; and that the political process cannot be confined to the Constitutional Committee only, noting that CSSR participants may agree to:

- ◆ A set of recommendations for linking the CSSR to the Constitutional Committee (Annex No. 1 of the Geneva Report).

- ◆ A map of the relationship with the Constitutional Committee in the event that its work continues or stalls (Annex No. 2 of the Geneva Report).
- ◆ Joint messages submitted to the International Syria Support Group (Annex No. 3 of the Geneva Report), and the messages to the SE on the role of the CSSR (Annex No. 4).

Speakers stressed the suffocating economic situation experienced by the people of Syria and the need to lift economic sanctions and secure a safe legal environment for the functioning of civil society, and protect Syrian refugees in neighboring countries from the forced repatriation to Syria. They also emphasised the need to secure adequate and necessary support for the health and education sectors; to take care of the wounded and victims of war; to immediately disclose the fate of all detainees, abductees and missing and enforced disappeared persons and to have them released without preconditions; to protect the movable and immovable property and funds of Syrians in all Syrian territory; to cease hostilities in whatever form; and to activate the political track.

THE SECOND DAY

a) Review the CSSR's Path and Redefine its Roles

The session was opened with a review of the nature and path of the CSSR, a discussion of its underpinning societal values, and a redefinition of its roles. The participants concluded that the CSSR is a civilian space that is diverse, unified, flexible, technical; not affected by divisions and political and ideological polarisation; plays an advisory role to the UN SE for Syria in the political process; aspires to a larger and broader role that would have oversight over the entire constitutional and political process, based on supporting and strengthening the civil space and peacebuilding; and works continuously to transmit the voices of all Syrians wherever they are and to include them in the political process.

b) Roles of the CSSR

In addition, the participants identified four key roles for the CSSR under the acronym “CKCA” (Coordination, Knowledge, Consultation, Advocacy). Furthermore, they stressed that these roles are fundamental, interrelated and integrated with one another, and that the CSSR should perform optimally at all stages during and after the political process. All who were present emphasised the Syrian ownership of the entire process and the outputs resulting or relating to the CSSR.



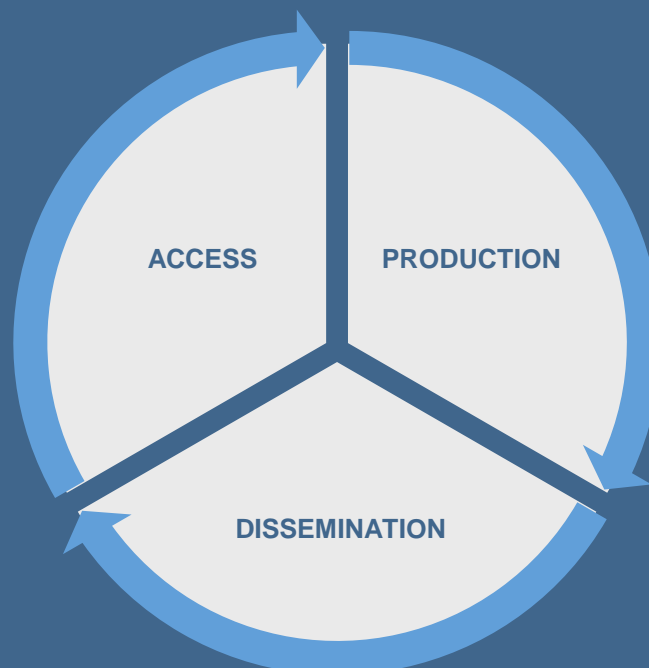
1. Coordination Role

The CSSR actively coordinates the activities of its members; communications and interactions with the SE and his advisers; and the sponsors, supporters, and organisers of the political processes of organisations, councils, individuals and entities. Moreover, it coordinates with international and local bodies, UN and European Union (EU) missions, diplomatic missions dealing with the Syrian issue, and civil society organisations and individuals in Syria and refugee host countries. Furthermore, it arranges its own rotational and thematic meetings. The CSSR has the exclusive right to determine the form and nature of these meetings; set their agenda; and invite diplomats, consultants, experts, organisations, entities, and individuals to attend as it considers appropriate.

2. Knowledge Management Role

The knowledge management role of the CSSR is a fundamental and essential one that intersects with all its other three roles. It promotes and reinforces these roles with all the necessary information and knowledge in order for them to be performed

optimally. This knowledge management role has been divided into three key axes under the acronym “PDA” (Production of Knowledge, Dissemination of Knowledge, Access to Knowledge), with an emphasis on the importance of benefitting from the cumulative process of the CSSR; collecting, archiving and developing previous knowledge outputs and products; and making these outputs/products available to all activists and stakeholders, and those interested in the peacemaking process in Syria. The CSSR is also committed to continuously raising the level of knowledge of new and old members by providing them with studies, reports and experts’ experiences, in addition to running training programmes aimed at the continuous development of their capabilities. It was also emphasised that there is a need to develop an online platform that includes a centralised database, with tools for data collection, organisation, sorting and analysis, that can be used later to identify the needs and the order of priorities for Syrians in the various regions, as well as to develop policies, design programmes and support local and international civil society organisations, individuals and decision-makers with the necessary knowledge to enable them to have an influence on the entire political process.



3. Consultation Role

The consultation role of the CSSR is the most popular one. It is the role through which the CSSR was introduced to the world upon its launch by the former SE for Syria. There is a popular belief among the majority of the current and new members of the CSSR that the current form and way of managing the political process do not allow the CSSR to effectively exercise its consultation role, even with the OSE-Syria. Nonetheless, the CSSR confirms that it seeks by all means available to exercise this important role with the SE, his office and team, and all the actors in the Syrian file. Furthermore, the CSSR confirms its desire to provide technical advice to and support the decision of actors and influential members of the Syrian file such as political parties, civil society organisations, entities and individuals. In addition, the CSSR seeks to develop specialised expertise to perform its role optimally.

4. Advocacy Role

This role is one of the CSSR's most important roles. The CSSR emphasises its work to lobby and advocate for efforts to deal fairly with the pressing political, social and economic issues affecting all Syrians without discrimination by participating actively in events, forums, and local and international conferences in order to make a positive difference in Syrians' reality. Furthermore, the CSSR works to build and strengthen the values of trust, dialogue, acceptance of others, renunciation of violence, active citizenship, and social peace. Besides, the CSSR places at centre stage the issues of expanding, protecting and ensuring the civil society work space, and developing a fair legal environment for the work of civil society organisations and members. In addition, the CSSR works to gain the trust of local communities and raise their awareness of its role in the political process. The CSSR strive to remove the root causes of inequality, impoverishment, marginalisation, exclusion, and subjugation of all kinds. In doing so, the CSSR uses all available legal tools, means and activities in this regard.

c) Presentation of Results of the Working Sessions by Participants

At the end of the session, two groups of attendees were formed. One team presented the achievements of the day to the OSE-Syria, and the other team spoke to the ambassadors and representatives of donor countries.

d) Office of the Envoy's Meeting

The OSE-Syria team headed by Deputy SE Khawla Matar met with the attendees and were given a briefing on the meeting's progress and achievements. Also, the intention of the representatives of donor countries (Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) to join the meeting and the possibility of communicating with them directly were mentioned.

The team assigned to give the presentation reviewed the meeting's achievements. Some of the attendees commented on certain points, in addition to offering interventions that demanded the expansion of representation in the CSSR and that it should not be monopolised by a few participants. They also demanded support for the CSSR to play a more supervisory rather than a consultant role.

Deputy SE Khawla Matar praised attendees with supportive and encouraging words and thanked them for their achievements. Moreover, she made it clear that the CSSR is under Syrian management and ownership and that the role of the OSE-Syria is only to provide support. Also, she expressed the OSE-Syria's willingness to provide moral support to the CSSR's attempt to provide training, expertise and advice.

Furthermore, Mrs Matar asked the attendees to prepare a written, time-bound action plan, clarifying the CSSR's priorities, roles, and tasks, and the support required from the OSE-Syria.

e) Meeting with Donors

Representatives of the donor countries (Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the EU Mission in Syria) were present and began by making positive statements that included assurances about their commitment to supporting civil society and the entire process. They were clearly willing to listen to the attendees and gain a full understanding of their future expectations. Positive impressions of the development taking place in the role of the CSSR were also touched upon. Also, one representative talked about the opportunity that the meeting had offered for donors to see things more clearly from the Syrian perspective and stated that their government had committed to being one of the largest donors to peace and humanitarian efforts in Syria. The CSSR team then presented a summary of the CSSR action plan to the representatives of donor countries, after which the floor was opened for questions and interventions.

FROM THE QUESTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS OF THE ATTENDEES

The CSSR attendees:

- ◆ Demanded that the support offered by donors should be in accordance with the priorities of the Syrian people and not based on political considerations.
 - ◆ Demanded the lifting of the unjust sanctions imposed on Syria, which directly affect the Syrian people and contribute to their impoverishment.
 - ◆ Demanded that Turkey's use of Syrian refugees as a leverage against the EU be terminated.
 - ◆ Demanded that the CSSR's role should be expanded from that of a consultant to a watchdog over the political process.
 - ◆ Demanded that more pressure should be exerted on the Syrian government to expand the civil society space inside Syria and to allow the CSSR's meetings to be held in Damascus.
 - ◆ Demanded a focus on psychological support and education for all Syrians.
 - ◆ Demanded a minimum diplomatic representation inside Syria to facilitate consular work.
 - ◆ Demanded that the file of the detainees, missing and abductees should become a major focus of attention.
 - ◆ Demanded a focus on the future of the CSSR after the political settlement in Syria
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Some of the Final Ideas and Recommendations:

Some still insisted on an ambitious role for the CSSR – that it should have oversight over the entire political process, while not not being framed and institutionalised, but with the introduction of innovative solutions that result in maintaining the CSSR's gains. Everyone confirmed the Syrian ownership and management of the CSSR and the aim of maintaining it even after the end of the constitutional process. The attendees confirmed that the CSSR does not represent the Syrian people, but rather their needs, and that it is able to evaluate the performance of the actors in the Syrian file.

CSSR, 2020

The Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) was established in January 2016 by the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria as a mechanism to consult with a broad and diverse range of civil society actors. Through the CSSR, civil society actors can meet, interact and provide their insights and ideas to the Office of the Special Envoy, relevant United Nations actors, as well as international stakeholders.

This mechanism aims at rendering the UN mediation process more inclusive.

The overall supervision and guidance of the CSSR rests with the OSE-Syria. NOREF Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution and Swiss Peace foundation have been mandated by the OSE to provide methodological expertise, operational and technical support to the process.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the UN standpoint.

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