

CSSR ONLINE REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

– *Erbil*

Participants summary report

CSSR Erbil

February 23 and 24, 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The new UN Special Envoy for Syria (SE), Geir Pedersen, recently reiterated his commitment to continuing to consult widely with Syrian civil society through the Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) on issues regarding the UN-facilitated political process in Geneva. A meeting held in Erbil from 23 to 24 February 2020 brought together 27 Syrian civil society interlocutors. The meeting included one-on-one meetings and group discussions with the Political Affairs Officer of the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria (OSE-Syria), and closed-door discussions among the CSSR participants.

Initially, during discussions with the OSE-Syria the participants expressed their concerns about the stagnation of the peace process. Participants reviewed the outcome of the discussions in working groups, focusing on the positive and negative aspects of the CSSR process. They then discussed the most prominent values and principles governing the work of Syrian civil society organisations and individuals and defined the mechanisms for developing the CSSR consultation process. Finally, participants agreed on criteria for selecting people to participate in the CSSR process and for transmitting the views of the Erbil CSSR to the regional and Geneva consultations.

Initially, the participants referred to the following points and raised some questions that were discussed with the ose-syria.

- ◆ The UN team facilitates a highly irregular process, so it is necessary to have a timetable and a time-bound plan for the work of the Constitutional Committee to be drawn up by the UN team and to which the negotiating parties should adhere.
- ◆ The multiplicity of references is a positive and sometimes negative factor, so a plan must be drawn up by the OSE-Syria to prevent the constitutional process from collapsing. It is noted that the regime has evaded, through the statements made, the possible outcomes of the Constitutional Committee.
- ◆ It is now clear to the Syrians that after nine years of multiple dialogue, negotiations and consultations, nothing has been achieved.
- ◆ The new UN SE's action in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 to begin the work of the Constitutional Committee has been disrupted by formal requirements and procedures, which shows that the international community is not serious about finding a solution to stop the war in Syria.
- ◆ It is necessary for the OSE-Syria to develop alternative plans to facilitate the process. These plans should answer the following questions: in case of failure and disruption of the work of the Constitutional Committee, what steps will be taken? And what options are available? On the other hand, if the work of the Constitutional Committee is successful, what are the next steps?
- ◆ The transparency and clarity of the process, as well as the alternative plan and the mechanisms for implementing the elements of Resolution 2254, must be clarified by the OSE-Syria.
- ◆ The need was emphasised for all participants to abide by the code of conduct and civil work ethics in the rounds of negotiation and consultation. *"The video that was leaked from the meeting room in Geneva was mentioned in this regard."*
- ◆ A committee of international constitutional experts should be formed to oversee the constitutional process.
- ◆ The current constitutional process takes place among the respective political parties, so it is necessary to focus on the mobilisation and advocacy process to draw up a real constitution that meets the aspirations of Syrian society.

During the public discussion with the ose-syria the following points were made regarding the role of syrian civil society and the mechanisms for its involvement in the un peacebuilding process, as well as some gaps that must be overcome.

- ◆ There is a need to build on what has been achieved and to involve the coordination mechanisms that have been followed in previous years in the regional and Geneva consultations in order to develop the work being done and avoid the mistakes of the past.
- ◆ The regional and Geneva consultations related to the CSSR should be managed by competent people who are aware of the sensitivity of the Syrian reality and are well informed about this reality and its diversity.
- ◆ It is useful to see the initiatives taken by the Syrians without the support of the OSE-Syria during the break in consultations with the CSSR such as the meetings in Spain and Erbil.
- ◆ Encourage the broad participation of civil society actors from inside Syria. In this regard, the UN should cooperate with the authorities in neighbouring countries to facilitate transit procedures and organise travel and movement through crossings from Syria to neighbouring countries where consultations are held.
- ◆ The need was identified to use the capabilities of Syrian civil society in mobilisation and advocacy work in order to advance the peacebuilding process.
- ◆ The UN SE team should clarify the criteria for selecting the actors invited to attend regional and Geneva consultations. A clear selection criteria would reduce the disagreements and disputes related to participation, enhance the credibility of the process and build greater confidence in civil work.
- ◆ There was a request to present the outcomes of the CSSR's consultations during the previous nine years on an electronic platform that would be made available to all Syrians. Transparency and clarity in civil work are key to fostering trust among members of society.
- ◆ The idea of establishing an information bank for Syrian civil organisations and actors was put forward in order to make it easier to be aware of their activities and the role they play in Syrian society.
- ◆ It is also necessary to increase coordination and communication among civilian actors participating in other regional consultations.
- ◆ It is essential to prevent the continuation of violence in Syria and the exploitation of the humanitarian aspects of the conflict by the parties to the conflict and international actors, most recently the Security Council resolution on humanitarian crossings, where the transit of aid was extended only through two crossings and for a period of only six months.
- ◆ It is therefore useful to discuss issues related to the future of Syrian children inside Syria and in countries where they have sought asylum, as well as the basic humanitarian issues during the CSSR's consultation rounds. This is due to the nature of the work carried out by the participating civil actors and their close association with Syrian society and its needs and aspirations for justice, equality, and economic and social welfare.

DISCUSSIONS AMONG ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

At the beginning of the discussion the CSSR was introduced as a space for dialogue and consultation between Syrian actors in public affairs and representatives of the OSE-Syria. This physical space is secured by the OSE-Syria, and the CSSR provides the opportunity for Syrian civil society to network directly with its members and build trust and

cooperation, and allows them to communicate with technical experts and political officials in the OSE-Syria, as well as to highlight issues that are a priority for Syrians and to reach out to other relevant international parties and meet with the UN SE to contribute to the UN-facilitated mediation process.

Participants reviewed the outcome of the discussions, which took place in working groups, as follows:

The positive aspects of the CSSR's consultations:

- ◆ The CSSR's consultations have introduced a common interactive space for cooperation among civil society forces from different geographical areas and created a degree of harmony, interaction and exchange of views, and thus were able to communicate visions and ideas from the local reality to public opinion.
- ◆ The consultations created a space for dialogue away from violence and the language of weapons.
- ◆ The CSSR's work helped to open the door to dialogue across the spectrum of Syrian society.
- ◆ It has contributed to the international recognition of the need and effectiveness of civil society in building Syria's future.
- ◆ It has also contributed to conveying the diverse concerns of Syrian society to political and international frameworks.
- ◆ It has also contributed to pressurising the international community to respond to the humanitarian needs resulting from the successive crises faced by Syrians.

The negative aspects of the consultations of the CSSR included:

- ◆ The lack of media monitoring and lack of appropriate tools to access the information, outputs, recommendations and schedule of events issued by the CSSR, in addition to the lack of clarity of the criteria for invitations to attend meetings, as well as the short period for participants and supervisors to prepare for CSSR meetings.
- ◆ The non-inclusion of all components of Syrian society in a real way that reflects the diversity in Syria (including Kurds, Yazidis and other components).
- ◆ The lack of international facilities for the movement of civilian actors, especially those coming from inside Syria.
- ◆ The CSSR's weak female representation, especially the Kurdish feminist component.
- ◆ The difficulty of linking the CSSR's consultations with the political process if that process's objectives, vision and programme remain unclear.
- ◆ The failure of some participants to comply with the code of conduct.

The presence of an active civilian working nucleus in north-eastern Syria and the Iraqi Kurdistan region that has not been effectively involved in the CSSR's consultations, and the need to prevent this from happening. Furthermore, the communication, coordination and exchange of information between the various regional and Geneva consultations should be increased.

The participants then discussed the most prominent values and principles governing the work of syrian civil society organisations and individuals, as follows:

- ◆ Tolerance, reconciliation with oneself, and acceptance of others.
- ◆ Respect for the rights and aspirations of all Syrian society components to reach the best solutions for achieving peaceful coexistence.
- ◆ Defence of the fundamental values of justice, equality and human rights.
- ◆ Credibility and experience in the relevant fields.
- ◆ The need to renounce violence and hatred.
- ◆ Compliance with humanitarian and international laws and conventions.
- ◆ Transparency and flexibility in the CSSR's work and communications.

Finally, the mechanisms for developing the consultations of the CSSR were worked on:

- ◆ The OSE-Syria and the organisations responsible for the logistics of the CSSR's consultations should work to facilitate the freedom of movement and safety of the individuals involved.
 - ◆ Mechanisms should be established to prevent any breaches of the code of conduct, civil work ethics and human rights principles.
 - ◆ The OSE-Syria should allow representatives from the CSSR's consultations to monitor the process at the negotiating table.
 - ◆ The CSSR should continue to hold regional consultations in Erbil, as in neighbouring countries, and to draw up a timetable for such consultations.
 - ◆ The feedback process (between regional and Geneva consultations) should be ensured.
 - ◆ CSSR members should not compromise the specifics of Syria's national, ethnic and religious components and should reject hate speech.
 - ◆ The circle of CSSR consultations and should be expanded and access should be secured to the largest possible segment of Syrian society inside Syria and also in the camps and main assembly centres in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.
 - ◆ If possible, seminars and meetings and follow-up committees should be established in the various refugee population centres and areas under self-administration inside Syria to convey their concerns and aspirations, and to ensure their participation in the decision-making process.
 - ◆ There is a need to represent the population components of the areas occupied by Turkey as much as possible or to ensure communication with these areas through the regional office in Erbil.
 - ◆ The Women's Advisory Board should be supported with expertise, and Kurdish women should be included.
 - ◆ A room or advisory office should be established for Kurdish civil society and attached to the CSSR in order to identify the aspirations, concerns and worries of the Syrian Kurdish society.
 - ◆ Pressure should be exerted on donor countries and specialised international organisations to secure the support for the organisations and projects needed for the region, especially in the field of civil peace and political transition, in order to be in line with a future transition.
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COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

Participants stressed the importance of continuing coordination and communication between the members of the group and the OSE-Syria, as well as expanding the scope of participation in the consultations of the CSSR in Erbil, in addition to the need for communication and coordination between regional consultations and those held in Geneva.

Participants agreed on a set of criteria for selecting people to participate in the consultations of the cssr in erbil and to transfer the knowledge and opinions of participants to the regional and geneva consultations, as follows:

1. The ability to travel (having the legal documents for travel and return).
2. The ability to communicate and coordinate activities.
3. The need for knowledge of the English language (but not as a binding requirement, since most regional and Geneva consultations are held in Arabic).
4. The need for the rotation of persons representing these consultations in the relevant meetings.
5. The need for a fair balance of actors from inside Syria with regard to participation.
6. The requirement that candidates to attend these meetings should not be politically polarised.
7. The need to achieve a gender balance.
8. The need to represent a wide range of Syrians.

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.

CONTACT

CSSR Team

Email address:
contact@cssrweb.org

www.cssrweb.org