

# CSSR ONLINE REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

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## Participants summary report

### – *Turkey (Group 1)*

CSSR Turkey

June 2-5, 2020

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Virtual consultations were held with two groups of civil society interlocutors (50 participants) in June 2020. Group 1 reviewed the CSSR process (including the CSSR's civic and social values); designed future CSSR strategies and interventions (including the CSSR's role as an advocacy platform and mechanisms for disseminating its outcomes to wider civil society); and discussed links between the CSSR and the political process. Additional discussions focused on humanitarian issues; the detainees/abductees files; and issues affecting women, children and people with special needs.

Group Two focused on two main themes, the CSSR itself and issues that it should focus on until the end of 2020. Discussions on the first theme focused on the CSSR's identity; its internal procedures and structures; and its network of mutual relations. Discussions on the second theme focused on thematic issues including the economy and sanctions; the form of a future government; national, ethnic and sectarian sensitivities; and transitional justice.

## THE STATEMENT ADDRESSED TO THE SPECIAL ENVOY INCLUDED

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1. A demand for the immediate release of detainees, the enabling of access to detainees by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and efforts to ascertain the fate of the forcibly disappeared and hold the perpetrators of violations accountable.
2. A call for a ceasefire, the cessation of all hostilities, the protection of civilians, and the provision of an appropriate environment for people with disabilities that helps them to have normal lives.
3. A call for effective mechanisms to ensure that civilians are spared from the negative economic effects of sanctions.
4. A call to denounce those who take advantage of the suffering of civilians as a card of political and military pressure and blackmail, a call for the renewal of cross-border aid to include all humanitarian crossings without exception, and a call to protect the humanitarian response from political and military tensions.
5. A demand for the protection of displaced persons and steps to ensure that they have the right to a voluntary, safe and dignified return.
6. A demand for support for education in all its aspects – students at all levels, teachers and schools – and support for a well-thought-out strategy to rebuild the Syrian national identity.
7. A call for more community outreach programmes to achieve recovery from the effects of terrorism, extremism and violence.
8. A call to seek a meaningful political transition in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.
9. With regard to elections: a call to affirm compliance with all the conditions stipulated in Resolution 2254 to hold fair and transparent elections in a safe environment, and to emphasise the illegality of any elections outside of that framework.
10. A demand for the operationalization of Syrian civil society in the peacemaking process through efforts to protect the civil space and stop violations, the clear inclusion of people with disabilities, and consultations with Syrian civil society to achieve a balanced representation of the various components of Syrian society.

## THE STATEMENT ADDRESSED TO THE CSSR'S SUPPORTERS INCLUDED

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1. A demand that the concept of Syrian ownership of the CSSR be strengthened by updating its vision, internal structure, and mechanisms for organising meetings; establishing transparency standards and meta-evaluation accounting systems; and expanding the role of the CSSR to include coordination and advocacy roles.
2. A demand to continue to provide adequate financial and logistical support to ensure inclusive participation in the CSSR, especially from those inside Syria, as well as the qualification of civil society cadres and the provision of opportunities for the widest possible participation.
3. A call for the appreciation of the efforts of donors in their ongoing support of the CSSR as key actors in the peace process.
4. A demand for the protection of the civic space, the cessation of violations against civilian and humanitarian workers, and the clear inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of Syrian society.
5. A demand for consultations with Syrian civil society to achieve a balanced representation of the various components of Syrian society.
6. A call for increased advocacy with decision-makers to engage civil society on all political, civil and humanitarian issues.
7. A demand that the level of coordination and support be scaled up, especially for the Middle Third bloc of the Constitutional Committee.
8. A demand for transparency in the exchange of information on the governance, activities, and outcomes of the Women's Advisory Board (WAB).

# DESCRIPTION OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

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## *Participants:*

- ◆ Total number: 28 Syrian civil society activists
- ◆ Gender distribution: 16 women and 12 men
- ◆ Place of residence: north-west Syria and Turkey

## *Date:*

- ◆ June 2-5, 2020

## *Venue:*

- ◆ The meeting was held electronically with the provision of interpretation services

## *Sessions*

- ◆ The first session was with the SE as an introduction and update.
- ◆ The second session comprised briefings on the previous meetings of the CSSR.
- ◆ The third and fourth sessions were closed-door consultations among the CSSR participants.
- ◆ The fifth session comprised a presentation of the outcomes of the consultations to the Office of the SE (OSE-Syria).
- ◆ The sixth session comprised a presentation of the outcomes of the consultations to the CSSR's donors.

## *Organisation and facilitation of the meetings*

- ◆ The meeting was organised and facilitated by the OSE-Syria, swisspeace and NOREF.

# PREPARATIONS

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As part of the virtual regional consultations with the CSSR conducted by the SE to Syria under UN Security Council Resolution 2254 in order to interact with Syrian civil society, a virtual consultation was held with CSSR actors based in Turkey. Two consultations were subsequently held to accommodate the large number of actors.

An invitation to Group 1 consultations was extended for the period June 2-5, 2020 on the following topics:

1. A review of the CSSR process and a discussion of the civic and social values of the CSSR.
2. Future CSSR strategies and interventions (proposals included considering communication mechanisms to present the CSSR's outcomes to a broader spectrum of civil society, participating in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and the role of the CSSR as a platform for advocacy and to build trust among participants).
3. The links between the CSSR and the political process, which includes but is not limited to the Constitutional Committee.

Certain additional proposals such as humanitarian issues, the detainee/abductees file, and issues regarding women, child, and people with special needs.

Syrian participants in the previous CSSR meetings in Geneva, Erbil, Beirut, and Amman provided briefings on these meetings, as well as a briefing from colleagues from the WAB. The roles and governance of the WAB were also discussed.

An electronic meeting attended by a majority of Group 1 participants was held for approximately four hours. A facilitator and moderator were selected for the session. The session management mechanism was agreed on as follows:

- ◆ A brainstorming session to determine all the priorities that need to be discussed.
- ◆ Discussions to identify points that achieve consensus among participants.
- ◆ Discussion of the remaining points in an attempt to reach consensus.

Thirty-three points were put forward on ten different topics, 25 of which were agreed upon by participants and eight of which required further discussion.

A subsequent virtual meeting attended by the majority of Group 1 participants was held for approximately five hours. At the beginning of this meeting the results of the previous session were presented, as well as the points that were agreed on. Then the remaining eight points were discussed. Colleagues were able to agree on six points, and only two points remained without agreement.

A team from the group volunteered to formulate the points that were agreed upon in two statements – the first was presented to the SE and the second to the donors of the CSSR.

The Group facilitator presented a summary of the consultations of the previous two days to the SE.

- ◆ Emphasis was placed on the importance of the participation of colleagues from inside Syria in the consultations.
- ◆ Two members of the group read the Group 1 statement. The statement is contained in Appendix 1 to this report.
- ◆ A female participant pointed out the importance of preserving the Syrian antiquities, either those present in Syria or those subject to sabotage or smuggling outside the country. The SE emphasised the importance of this matter and the necessity of working on it.
- ◆ The SE emphasised his focus on the points outlined in the statement and the continuous efforts made to achieve these demands within the scope of his mandate.
- ◆ Participants called for the need to find a mechanism to follow up on the meeting's outputs in order to learn about updates and how civil society can provide support. The SE stressed that there will be appropriate and periodic mechanisms for meeting and updates.

The Group facilitator presented a summary of the consultations of the previous two days to the SE. Then two colleagues read a summary of the statement addressed to the SE.

- ◆ A colleague from the group read the statement to the CSSR's donors. This statement is contained in Appendix 2 to this report.
- ◆ Donors (the European Union, Switzerland, Sweden and Norway) reaffirmed their continued support to the CSSR, and also touched on the support to be provided through the upcoming Brussels Conference on how to support the efforts of Syrian civil society.

After the last meeting, contacts were made with colleagues in Group 2 for consultations in Turkey and the sharing of data in order to facilitate greater coordination within Syrian civil society.

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# Appendix 1: Statement to the Office of the Special Envoy

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Mr Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy to Syria,

## (1)

The Assad regime has imprisoned tens of thousands of innocent political opponents for long years in prisons and detention center where the utmost brutal and barbaric torture is practised. Neither the children, the elderly nor the sick are exempted from this repression. The regime also confiscates the property of detainees and conceals their fate as a means of blackmailing their relatives, taking revenge against their loved ones and friends, and deterring and silencing opponents. This suffering has been continuing for many years and the international community stands idly by, witnessing this tragedy but largely doing nothing to stop it.

We call on the Special Envoy to keep this file at top of his list of priorities and support our appeal to the International Committee of the Red Cross to play its role in **reaching out to the political detainees in the regime's prisons** and investigating the conditions of their tragic detention.

We also call on the international community **to exert pressure on all parties to the conflict to disclose the fate of forcibly disappeared** people in all areas of Syria and to justify their detention. Furthermore, we demand accountability for perpetrators of crimes against humanity and human rights violators in terms of the legal frameworks available.

## (2)

The world has documented the bombing of innocent civilians in cities and villages; the deliberate targeting of hospitals, children's schools and crowded markets; and the use of prohibited weapons against the civilian population.

We reiterate our call for **support of the ceasefire and the cessation of all acts of hostilities** on all fronts and for the **protection of civilians, hospitals, schools, humanitarian facilities and humanitarian workers**.

We further call for support of our endeavours so that we can provide an appropriate environment for people with disabilities that help them to have normal lives in the midst of this relentless conflict so that they can carry out their role of supporting the community and themselves.

(3)

The rapid and complete collapse of the exchange rate of the Syrian pound has led to an astronomical rise in the prices of essential and luxury commodities in all Syrian regions. Today, more than 80% of Syrians are living below the poverty line.

As Syrian civil society, we call for the implementation of **effective mechanisms to ensure that civilians are protected from the negative economic effects** of sanctions imposed on the regime, its allies and groups on the terrorist lists in order to avoid the further suffering of innocent civilians.

(4)

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation has reached a peak in the north-west after the displacement of more than one million people last December towards the Turkish border in order to escape from the oppression of the recent military campaign of the regime and its allies in Idlib, thus forcing 600,000 children to spend a harsh winter in the open. However, the regime's allies in the UN Security Council are seeking to prevent the renewal of Resolution 2165 supporting cross-border assistance, which is the only lifeline for these displaced persons and their host communities.

**We condemn the exploitation of the suffering of civilians as a card of political and military pressure and blackmail** in order to subjugate communities that demand their rights to freedom and dignity and push them towards surrender, as happened previously in Homs, Daraa and Ghouta.

We demand, through the Special Envoy, that the Security Council assumes its responsibilities to alleviate human suffering by **renewing the resolution on cross-border assistance and extending it to include all humanitarian crossings without exception**, and by working to free the humanitarian response from all procedural restrictions that could hinder aid reaching all Syrians in all Syrian regions.

We also call on the international community not to yield to arbitrary actions that Russia is seeking to impose on the humanitarian response, as well as to continue to stand beside Syrians, ease their suffering, and **spare the humanitarian response from the political and military inducements from which it suffers**.

(5)

We also call for **the protection of displaced persons, ensuring that they have their right to a voluntary, safe, and dignified return** to their original areas of residence without any pressure, maintaining their property, improving their situations, and facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance to them.

(6)

The nine-year state of war and the repeated displacement and migration of millions of people have caused the dropout of hundreds of thousands of male and female students in Syria from the education system, which has led to high illiteracy rates, academic underachievement, and a large number of children not obtaining their right to education. Moreover, the randomness of education and the weak absorptive capacity of persons with disabilities, not to mention the systematic targeting of educational infrastructure, have brought the entire educational process to a precarious reality, which may result in the formation of an environment that incubates extremism, crime and other risks. This is in addition to the multiplicity of school curricula and the poor focus on the concepts of peaceful coexistence, good citizenship and human rights.

Therefore, we demand that the Special Envoy and donor agencies/countries should cooperate with the Syrian bodies overseeing the educational process in Syria **to support education in all its aspects, including students at all levels, teachers, and schools. They should also support the development of a well-thought-out strategy to rebuild the Syrian national identity** that is inclusive of all the multicultural components of the Syrian people and would contribute to strengthening the social fabric that forms the basis for the advancement of science and knowledge.

(7)

In addition, Syrian civil society is seeking to **establish more community outreach programmes to achieve recovery from the effects of terrorism, extremism and violence.**

(8)

The only way out for Syrians after many years of suffering is to **achieve a meaningful political transition** that meets everyone's aspirations for freedom, dignity and justice in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2254.

(9)

We appreciate the assurances given by the Special Envoy and his associates in the previous dialogue sessions such **as their commitment to all of the requirements laid down in Resolution 2254 to conduct transparent and fair elections in a safe environment** and their emphasis that they will not recognise the legitimacy of the actions of the Assad regime to perpetuate political despotism, which ignores the demands of Syrians and their rights. We affirm our own commitment to all the provisions of Resolution 2254 in this regard.

(10)

Syrian civil society appreciates the efforts made by the Special Envoy and his Deputy to preserve and expand this civil space, which in turn requires of us to make greater use of that space and focus more effectively on the community structures that are so necessary for the implementation and application of any sustainable solution to achieve peace.

In this regard, we demand the following from the Special Envoy:

- ◆ He should support our demands that the international community make greater efforts to **protect the civil space and stop human rights violations** against activists.
- ◆ **He should fully support the clear inclusion of people with disabilities** in all civil platforms as representatives of their own issues and those of Syrian civil society.
- ◆ He should hold consultations with Syrian civil society on how best to achieve a **balanced representation of the various components of Syrian society** and to ensure that no geographical area or minority is marginalised.

## Appendix 2: Statement to the CSSR donors

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Ladies and gentlemen, representatives of donor countries of the CSSR,

We appreciate your great efforts to support this Room and other civil society initiatives for the last four years, and affirm our belief that the resulting outcomes of this Room will benefit Syrian civil society.

Since its inception, the CSSR has played a pivotal role in bridging gaps and creating common spaces among Syrians. However, it is time to play a larger and broader role in the next stage of the peace process beyond the scope of merely consultations and discussions. We confirm and support the potential roles of the CSSR provided for by the Special Envoy and his Deputy after Geneva Round 10.

### (1)

The most important thing we ask is for the concept of Syrian ownership of the CSSR to be strengthened. Therefore, a realistic assessment of the work of the CSSR during the past years should be undertaken through the holding of special workshops on this issue.

As members of the CSSR have agreed, this will include an update of its vision, internal structure, and mechanisms for organising meetings, and will establish transparency standards and meta-evaluation accounting systems that allow the quality of the CSSR's work to be properly assessed. It is important to expand the role of the CSSR to include coordination and advocacy roles in addition to its current consultation role. We believe that it is time for the CSSR to take on a supervisory role.

### (2)

With our focus on strengthening the role and track of the CSSR, we call upon donor countries to provide CSSR participants with the necessary logistics and facilities to provide opportunities for wider participation and implement alternative and innovative solutions to include participation from inside the country, as well as to qualify civil cadres and provide opportunities for the widest possible participation.

### (3)

We appreciate your continued support for efforts to preserve and expand this civic space, which in turn requires us to make greater use of that space and focus more effectively on the community structures that are so necessary for the implementation and application of any sustainable solution to achieve peace.

(4)

We wish to ask for more support for our demands in order to make greater efforts to protect the civil space and stop the violations that affect civil and humanitarian workers, as well as for the clear inclusion of people with disabilities in all civil platforms as representatives of their own and all Syrian civil society issues.

(5)

We wish to emphasise the need for consultations with Syrian civil society on how best to achieve a balanced representation of the various components of Syrian society and to ensure that no geographical area or minority is marginalised.

(6)

In this context, we also hope that donor countries will act as a mediator between civil actors and decision-makers in Syria, and that they will contribute to advocacy and lobbying among all concerned parties to involve civil society in all political, civil and humanitarian issues that are managed in international spaces.

(7)

Ladies and gentlemen, based on the recommendations of the CSSR drawn up in its recent meetings, members of the Constitutional Committee have been contacted and many consultative meetings have been held to raise the level of coordination and support, especially among the Middle Third block of the Committee. In order to develop the CSSR's relationship with the Committee, we seek to benefit from regional meetings, provide more safe spaces for our work, and network with members of the select Constitutional Committee, and to seek your support and the support of the UN Special Envoy for the CSSR's desire to go beyond the consultation role and to adopt a supervisory role over the work of the Constitutional Committee so as to achieve more of the goals we all desire.

(8)

In the context of coordinating civil society efforts, we will seek to create broader frameworks and more inclusive dialogue spaces with the WAB. In order to support this coordination process, we call for transparency in the exchange of information on the governance, activities and outputs of the WAB.

We wish to ask for your continued support for Syrian civil society, which has suffered and is still suffering from numerous misfortunes and injustices.

## **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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