

# CSSR Regional Consultations

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## Outputs and Recommendations

### – *Second Group*

June 21-23, 2021

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# FIRST PILLAR: THE POLITICAL FILE AND THE CONSTITUTION

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The group discussed the role of civil society and its institutions in moving the political process forward on several levels. The following key points emerged from this discussion:

- ◆ Achieving progress in the detainees' file as a preliminary measure to build confidence in the political process: We believe that the international community has not really worked on the detainees' file and has not achieved anything of significance.
- ◆ The need for civil society to choose the topics to be discussed: As members of civil society we accept that we are not the strongest party, but we have one of the most important voices in the peace process, and this voice should not be ignored. We shall not forget our detainees or the blood of our martyrs. This revolution will not be in vain. We must learn from our mistakes and draw up a list of the most important topics that must be discussed until we reach an acceptable solution. Even if it takes a long time, we will continue to work in support of our causes.
- ◆ Creating new dynamics for civil society action: To ensure the effectiveness and productivity of civil society, a solid nucleus of civil society volunteers should be created and representatives of civil society should be appointed who meet permanently. We have the confidence of society, because we have worked with people in difficult economic circumstances and played the role of the government many times. Civil society is able to create human, social, and educational dynamics that will put pressure on the political and constitutional process.
- ◆ Expansion and protection of the civil space: The civil space should be expanded and protected through the establishment of effective gatherings of civil society capable of influencing and working regionally to ensure its effectiveness and development and linking local civil society formations with other communities. To build confidence, we must also actively participate in the dialogue that Syrians are working on and promote this dialogue with the support of organisations working alongside civil society.
- ◆ Presenting common needs and priorities for civil society: The diversity of Syrian civil society is a source of strength that helps to unite its institutions through bodies that organise their work among themselves and choose their own representatives.

Our supposed “representatives” in the international community do not belong to this revolution or to Syrian society; they are the choice of the international community, which we already know stands against, not with, Syrian society. Syrian civil society must work to preserve the fabric of our beautiful society and exclude political Islam from the revolution. In addition, we should work to exclude the organisations that falsely claim to represent us, because we have not chosen them, and they should be replaced by organisations that we choose ourselves and will therefore trust. The question we always ask is: “Why does the international community continue to select persons to represent civil society without reference to the will of the Syrian people, who have the sole right to choose who represents them?” Civil society institutions are the ones who should influence the drawing up of the new constitution, so they must be appointed by a

legitimately organised system of candidacy or popular acclamation.

- ◆ The need to develop civil society institutions and roles: Spaces need to be created that ensure diversity, consensus-building and continuous learning through past experiences.
- ◆ The voluntary and safe return of displaced persons and refugees after finding a political solution that guarantees a safe environment for their return: Participants said that the file of displaced persons and refugees cannot be included only as a humanitarian file, since it is a highly political issue that involves, for example, the file of detainees and the forcibly disappeared. It is not possible to separate politics from human beings, because politics is the cause of many of the disasters that happen to human beings. We are talking about 500,000-600,000 displaced persons who have been subjected to violent social and demographic change. In addition to the economic and expropriation issues, this issue goes beyond the humanitarian issue and questions of practical humanitarian protection. Regarding the issue of the return of refugees, we must first ask who wants to return in light of the chaos, the arrests, the lack of security and safety, and the poor economic conditions in all

Syrian regions. There can be no voluntary return without a safe environment that guarantees a decent life for all Syrians. We are sure that this safe environment will come into existence if the Assad regime is no longer in power, since it is the one that seeks to promote chaos, poverty and instability. A demographic change has been occurring recently that is related to the refugee issue. The exit of young people from Syria has been facilitated by the provision of travel authorisations to those who do not wish to serve in the military. The question is: "Who will take their place and why has this been facilitated?"

- ◆ All the topics that we have discussed feed directly into the constitutional process: All relevant topics are subjects for discussion, because the displaced persons and detainees, safe voluntary return, and other topics that we have previously stressed are priorities for Syrian society and are of concern to all Syrians, both at home and abroad. These topics should be a central focus in the constitutional process. We, as a civil society room, should play the role of observer of the political process and work in parallel with other civil society rooms on the political issues under discussion.
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## SECOND PILLAR: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

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Transparency: There have been many suggestions and interventions on this topic, of which the most important are as follows:

- ◆ Syrian society has no confidence in politicians or military personnel. In order to build confidence, something concrete needs to be established that people trust, so we suggest the creation of a media platform on networking sites.
- ◆ There is a need to control Syrian funds in Lebanese banks.
- ◆ There is a need to monitor the work of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Lebanon and Jordan.
- ◆ The collapse in the value of the Syrian pound is not caused by sanctions and the Caesar Act. The reasons for the economic deterioration must be carefully studied because sanctions are the remaining source of pressure to guarantee the return of Syrians to the country and the return of their property to them. Apart from the humanitarian aspect of the sanctions, they have only an indirect impact on the population.

## THIRD PILLAR: HUMANITARIAN AND PROTECTION ISSUES (DISPLACED PERSONS AND FORCED MIGRANTS)

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- ◆ The repeated displacement of people to more than one region impacts individuals both psychologically and economically. Effectively, a process of ethnic cleansing and demographic engineering is under way. This happens by virtue of a political decision and not a humanitarian one.
  - ◆ Those returning to Syria, especially in the southern regions and Rif Dimashq, face the risks of execution, revenge, arrest, and compulsory military service that drive young people to flee the country.
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## FOURTH PILLAR: INCLUSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS, PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

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- ◆ Women's economic emancipation forms the basis for their inclusion in the political process.
- ◆ There is a need to focus on women's quotas to ensure women's participation in all platforms and committees, and work should be undertaken to increase the capacity of women so as to ensure their effective participation in all sectors, especially the political, civil and human rights sectors.
- ◆ Emphasis should be placed on the equal participation of woman intellectuals within such a quota system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. A media platform should be created on networking websites that connects civil society in its political work, can be trusted as a reliable communication channel, and functions permanently to provide feedback in order to clarify developments in the political and constitutional process and the results achieved. This will help to foster social understanding of new political and constitutional terms and increase people's knowledge of the political and constitutional process.
  2. A guide to the definition of civil and political action terms should be developed and used as a reference for the parties to the political process and the intra-Syrian dialogue. It should include definitions of key terms and an analysis of the parties that are both influencing and influenced by the political process
  3. We propose the establishment of a fifth pillar to deal with confidence-building measures.
  4. The CSSR should produce a paper on constitutional principles that should be submitted to the Constitutional Committee through the Office of the Special Envoy (OSE).
  5. A strategy should be developed to ensure that the issue of community development is included in the political process, which would increase the credibility of that process.
  6. Civil society institutions should be unified and a unified body should be established for these institutions that is designed to prevent them from being politicised so that they do not become affiliated with a particular party.
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7. Civil society should be directly involved in the process of designing a political solution to the Syrian issue.
8. The opening of the thematic working groups on the CSSR platform should be speeded up in order to provide a space for free discussion.
9. The OSE should demand to be informed of how funds are being spent on the Syrian file. It could ask the following questions in this regard: Where do the funds go? How much of these funds has been spent on employees? How much has been spent on Syrian aid? Are funds spent as they should be, especially in Lebanon and Jordan? Since there is no control over the Syrian file, there must be transparency in the disbursement of all funds assigned to it.
10. There must be oversight over the OHCHR's work, because many human rights violations occur, and this is besides violations committed by the Lebanese government.
11. The reality of the camps after ten years, such as the Rukban camp, is that they have no medical facilities, inhabitants have difficulty accessing food and relief, and there is a lack of education.
12. We want a recommendation from the UN that enables us to identify the needs of refugees by working directly with them
13. We recommend the creation of WhatsApp groups that focus on a number of topics or files that we would like to work on, e.g. transitional justice, a safe environment, and the return of displaced persons and refugees. These groups should function as follows:

Each group should include three to five members working on a particular topic. When a group is created, the appointment of members should firstly take into account their competence and secondly their geographical distribution.

Each group should first collect research and articles related to the topic it wishes to raise.

Then, each group should draft a report on the topic it is studying.

The draft should then be sent to all members of the CSSR, who should be given a period of a week to ten days to comment on the draft.

The group should then discuss the comments and set a specific date to meet members and respond to the comments (we may need more than one session for this purpose, depending on the number of comments that are received).

Finally, a joint paper should be drafted in line with the majority opinion, but with a clear indication of the opposing opinion and clarification of the reasons for any opposition to the majority opinion.

After this, the study should be sent to the OSE to add any comments and notes for discussion, or to publish the study if the OSE has no reservations.

The paper should then be published on the CSSR's website and social media pages, and a summary should be sent to international newspapers with a request that it should be turned into an article on behalf of the CSSR.

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14. An umbrella system should be created to protect members of civil society and enable them to work freely. Such an umbrella could take the form of physical CSSR offices located in all areas inside Syria and in neighbouring countries hosting refugees.
15. Through the OSE, civil society activists should directly supervise the distribution of UN aid and play an oversight role.

## **CSSR, 2021**

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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