

CSSR Regional Consultations

Outputs and Recommendations

– *Fourth Group*

June 21-23, 2021

SUMMARY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT POINTS MADE IN FOUR SESSIONS

To the Special Envoy and his Deputy, our friends in the Office of the Envoy and in swisspeace and NOREF, and our colleagues and partners from Syrian civil society wherever you are: we are pleased to present a summary of what has been discussed during the two days of dialogue during our regional meeting. This summary is a synthesis of the ideas that were put forward, and sometimes takes the form of recommendations. We were keen to briefly present all the ideas put forward due to the specificity of each idea and the differing priorities affecting them, depending on the various regions, roles, needs, etc.

Sanctions were one of the main issues that were discussed, particularly in terms of their negative effects on the deteriorating economic and social realities of Syrians, as well as on civil society, either because of their direct effects or through over-compliance with them, which results in the difficulty of transferring and delivering remittances, materials and needs to Syria. We demand the lifting of these sanctions, and that Syrians should not be used as a tool of the policy of extreme confrontation adopted by those who imposed such sanctions.

Emphasis was placed on the withdrawal of foreign forces from Syria, the unity and integrity of the Syrian territory, the protection of the Syrian state and its institutions, and the protection of all of Syria's resources, ranging from underground to natural resources, including water.

Many interventions have intersected with the importance of administrative decentralisation as one of the means to achieve a political solution in the country. Related issues include the need to strengthen the relationship between civil society and local administrations, and to work together within the framework of preserving the privacy and needs of

municipalities and identifying local resources and projects in order to achieve equitable development.

In addition to emphasising the role and presence of women in the current political process and in the future of Syria, we need to ensure their permanent representation through quotas, take into account the quality and geographical diversity of their representation, and ensure that the constitution and laws reflect these needs. We also emphasise the need for a similar role for Syrian youth, who have suffered greatly during the war. We are currently witnessing a new wave of emigration of "young minds" in search of a better future and to escape the lack of livelihoods.

The continued deterioration of the economic situation in Syria has a negative impact on Syrians' relationship to politics and the political file and undermines their interest in following up on political discussions, the outcome of these discussions, and the solutions that are offered. This weakens citizens' interest in public affairs. Furthermore, this state of political inertia and loss of hope has contributed to the high rates of suicide and psychological crises affecting Syrians and threatens the structure of Syrian society and the family.

Channels of communication and knowledge exchange should be established between civil society, the Constitutional Committee and the Women's Advisory Board. Partnerships, networking and transparency between the parties representing civil society must be achieved, and a unified civil bloc, and cooperation and coordination between civil actors in various Syrian regions either under or not under the umbrella of the CSSR must be supported. The aim should be to bridge any gaps that divide civil society, eliminate divisions and work to represent the interests of Syrians. The divisions between political parties should be eliminated from this process, and civil society in all its forms should be

protected from the effects of the legal and community environment in order to ensure freedom of movement and action. The grip of the security apparatus should be removed from civil society actions, the independence of trade unions and federations should be ensured, and the effectiveness any political process initiated by civil society should be ensured by protecting the ability of those implementing this process to play their full role.

The humanitarian files should be immediately removed from the political negotiating table. These files include: detainees, abductees and missing persons; reconstruction (of buildings and human lives); the return of refugees; immediate work to provide infrastructure and reconstruction to war-affected areas or those hosting displaced persons; and efforts to establish the necessary requirements for every Syrian to return to his/her home and neighbourhood.

The political process and political solutions are major ways to solve the many problems facing Syria. However, the crisis cannot be resolved without recognising the existence of an identity crisis and returning to the roots of the problems that existed before 2011. The role of the international community is to support and facilitate a political solution.

The capacity of civil society to carry out advocacy and mediation should be improved in order to strengthen its role in the political process. Furthermore, the Law on Associations should be modified, because in its current state it has contributed to the violation and weakening of civil society and prevented it from playing its role, especially in the political and constitutional process.

The United Nations should provide a clear definition of civil society's role in the political process in order to force the political parties participating in this process to give civil society appropriate space to play its role.

Civil society inside Syria demands that donors should not negatively discriminate against it by setting complex conditions for supporting it and classifying and stereotyping it negatively. Civil society is also seeking to promote the role of local donors and advocate for sustainable projects to be supported in parallel with the relief efforts needed because of current economic

conditions, with the goal being longer-term development relief rather than a transitory relief basket.

Many civil society organisations (CSOs) have refused to implement projects proposed by UN organisations that are inconsistent with Syrian needs. These CSOs demand that civil society be involved in planning, implementing, and selecting the projects; that it should be consulted when needs are being identified; and that it should be involved in monitoring and evaluating funding for Syria and funding disbursement mechanisms.

A unified database of civil action in Syria should be established, including beneficiaries and a roadmap of programmes and projects, so that we create grounds for cooperation and networking. Programmes and projects should be complementary, and not duplicated, to prevent beneficiaries from receiving the same type of assistance from several sources.

There was much discussion about the poor conditions of the countryside and the need to support Syria's rural areas, which are witnessing an exodus to the cities and an absence of development and agricultural projects. Rural development is needed in order to stabilise people in their local areas, promote and diversify local production, and bridge the gap between the countryside and the city.

We call on the international community and donors to resume supporting the areas they used to support before 2018, such as Eastern Ghouta and the northern countryside around Homs. Support to these areas has been reduced after they returned to Syrian government control, even though they include millions of people living there who need immediate support and reconstruction.

All barriers between the various Syrian regions need to be opened and freedom of mobility and human and economic movement between these regions needs to be restored. The current lack of freedom of movement has contributed to reinforcing the many social and economic divisions and crises afflicting Syria.

The control over national resources by foreign forces and some local parties and the absence of equitable

distribution of local resources have also contributed to the consolidation of livelihood problems and societal divisions.

We desperately need a national reconciliation programme to save the country from the divisions it is experiencing. Such a programme should take various forms, contribute to reparations and the establishment of a new social contract that embraces all Syrians, and end the possession of weapons apart from those in the hands of the state (widespread weapons ownership has contributed to the increase in crime, including honour crimes).

Programmes should be supported that limit violence and hate speech and entrench a new non-violent culture that contributes to dismantling the structure of violence in the country.

We call for an end to the human rights violation of the sponsor system imposed by the authorities in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor on Syrians coming from government-controlled areas, so that they can enter these Syrian governorates.

Syrians have the right to choose the vaccine they prefer. They should be given the opportunity to choose their vaccine instead of being forced to take whatever vaccine is available.

In light of the prevalence of drug use and addiction, there is a need for clinics and treatment homes. There is little awareness of the risks posed by this issue, and there are few programmes in place to assist addicts and those returning from combat, including young people.

Protecting civil action requires non-intractable conditions for cooperation by partners and donors. For example, funding currently offered by EU countries sets intractable conditions, such as the need for licences and

clarification of the mechanism for transferring funds to Syria. But licences are unavailable and sanctions make it extremely difficult to identify mechanisms for transferring funds to Syria. Direct transfers are not available, transfer companies do not transfer funds to Syria, and the ability to obtain financial support for projects becomes complicated once the word "Syria" is mentioned.

As CSOs, we cannot abolish the state, and must therefore regularly communicate with the Ministry of Social Affairs, open the doors of dialogue and coordination with it, and take advantage of every positive initiative it launches, within the framework of the provision of full protection to those implementing such initiatives and of a local umbrella for civil action.

A map of local resources should be produced and distributed in order to establish a national agenda with a view to improving Syria's economic and social realities and clearly and transparently apportioning the resources that are available.

We support the establishment of a political and economic council comprising a group of experts that is able to describe the country's economic and social conditions and act as an independent institution for the expression of opinions in this regard.

Civil action at home must be strong, real, public, and coordinated with the Syrian government, otherwise it will remain in the shadows and have limited impact.

It is an undoubted fact that societies that have recently emerged from war suffer serious effects from the level of extremist ideology in circulation, on the one hand, and from the lack of psychological and development support and reconstruction, on the other hand. Syrian society is no different in this regard.

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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