

CSSR DIGITAL TOWNHALL MEETING

Summary Report

5 December 2023

BACKGROUND

The UN Office of the Special Envoy for Syria (OSE-Syria) sent an open invitation to all Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) participants to a digital townhall on 5 December 2023. 261 participants had registered in advance and 134 connected to the Zoom meeting. Participants registered a total of 180 questions during the meeting, and approximately 120 questions during the live interaction.

During the two-hours meeting, Special Envoy Pedersen (SE) and Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi (DSE) addressed over a hundred questions received through an online survey prior to the meeting and through a live chat box. The meeting was divided into three thematic segments based on participants questions.

DISCUSSION

- ◆ The first segment addressed questions related to the status of the political process, the impact of the war in Gaza on Syria, the status of the Constitutional Committee and the steps-for-steps proposal. The SE highlighted the unsustainability of the status quo in Syria, the sharp increase in violent conflict over 2023 in different parts of Syria, the alarming humanitarian situation, the economic collapse and, despite new diplomatic efforts in 2023, a lack of progress towards a political settlement.
 - ◆ He briefed on his diplomatic engagement with all parties and reminded his call for de-escalation within Syria and the region, for all parties to exercise maximum restraint and operate in full compliance with IHL, and for international cooperation to refocus on the neglected political process.
 - ◆ On the Constitutional Committee, he noted the lack of consensus on an alternative to Geneva and the importance for this body to make substantial progress. Regarding the Steps-for-Steps proposals, he recalled the approach was based on identifying reciprocal, measurable and verifiable steps and his in-depth engagement with both the GoS and the SNC as well as key member States.
 - ◆ In the second segment, SE Pedersen responded to a range of issues covering the dire economic situation and the impact of sanctions, the discussions around the conditions return of refugees, human rights and the file on the detained and missing. The SE deplored the lack of progress on the missing and detained Syrians despite years of advocacy and negotiations but welcomed the decision to setup a new mechanism on the missing as an important positive development. He congratulated the leadership of civil society in that regard.
 - ◆ On the return of refugees, he clarified the UN had no plan to return refugees and that UNHCR and partners were working with the Syrian government, host countries and other stakeholders to address the refugees' main concerns, such as safety and security, livelihoods and housing. On sanctions, the SE clarified that sanctions did not prevent the provision of basic services and millions of dollars continued to flow in Syria from donors. Nevertheless, overcompliance had an impact on the ability of NGOs to receive funds.
 - ◆ The last segment addressed questions related to the achievements and impact of the CSSR and WAB. Responding to participants, the Deputy Special Envoy highlighted the importance of an inclusive process involving all Syrians no matter where they are – a message reaffirmed every month by the Special Envoy in his UN Security Council briefings. She underscored the work of the CSSR Thematic Working Groups where Syrians had been able to bridge gaps and find common ground.
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- ◆ These discussions contributed to promoting social cohesion and building trust, and provided valuable insights and expertise that informs the broader political process and OSE-S engagements with the parties. She also updated on the WAB achievements and rotation.
- ◆ In closing, the Special Envoy thanked the participants for their questions and interest and while acknowledging the challenges of inclusion when the parties were not formally meeting, reaffirmed his commitment to consult with women and men representatives of civil society, including through the CSSR and the WAB.

CSSR, 2023

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. Swisspeace Foundation has been mandated by the OSE to provide methodological expertise, operational and technical support to the process.

CONTACT

CSSR Team

Email address:
contact@cssrweb.org

www.cssrweb.org