**The closing press conference of the Co-Chair of the Constitutional Committee, Mr. Hadi Al-Bahra.**

**After the end of the sixth session of the Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva, Switzerland.**

**October 22, 2021**

Thanks for attending,

This is the sixth session of the Syrian Constitutional Committee meetings, more than two years after its establishment. There was a hiatus of nine months between the fifth and sixth sessions due to the lack of a methodology for discussions.

A methodology was reached with the facilitation of Mr. Geir Pedersen. From the beginning this lack of methodology had led up to fifty percent obstruction in the work of the Constitutional Committee, and additionally there is another section for which a clear methodology had not been developed to lead to a consensus.

In accordance with the methodology that we agreed upon for this session, as Mr. Pedersen advised, all delegations present important constitutional issues that they would discuss during this round, and then present daily texts of the constitutional drafts of these basic principles before each meeting.

The same methodology recommended that a new principle should be discussed every day without the condition of stopping until we agreed on the previous principle. During these four days, four basic constitutional principles were submitted, and we devoted the fifth day to discussing those four constitutional principles with the papers submitted. The representatives of the three parties were to submit papers of understanding or try to reach consensus on the papers presented after hearing the discussions.

The papers presented today are by representatives of the negotiation commission in the Constitutional Committee. They presented four papers as an attempt to reach consensus based on what they had heard in the previous sessions of the discussions by all parties.

There were texts taken from some of the papers from the other parties which were included in their own proposals. One important paper submitted by the civil society was taken, and the representatives of the negotiation commission prepared a proposal regarding this paper.

Unfortunately, the party representing the government of the regime did not submit any paper for consensus. It insisted that it did not see any papers submitted for consensus, although we included among the papers some of the proposals contained in their papers, which we thought might be possible to build upon.

Therefore, the reality we are witnessing so far is that if we want to get rapid and positive results, the methodology must be continued from where it ended. The other fifty percent of the methodology must be completed to reach the desired results. To reach these results, the three parties must want to reach an understanding and a political solution. Unfortunately, there is no such desire from at least one party. There were not even efforts to reach a consensus.

We all know the extent of tragedy that our people are experiencing inside Syria, and what the displaced and refugees are exposed to inside and outside of Syria. We also know about the violence and air raids targeting our people in Idlib and the civilians who die due to almost daily attacks from artillery and all kinds of weapons, the extent of the economic deterioration, the lack of humanitarian aid, and the Corona epidemic and its spread. All these matters place the responsibility on us to strive with all of our strength and with all of our capabilities to find a quick solution to the Syrians’ tragedy. Even Syrians in the regime areas, we know about the tragedy they are experiencing from the deterioration of their purchasing power and their inability to secure daily food. This responsibility places an obligation on us to continue searching and communicating with countries and with all parties to activate the political process.

This constitutional process cannot continue as it remains now if it does not get international consensus and real support. It should be the will of all Syrian parties to achieve a political solution. It is the only solution that can secure sustainable stability and security through the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254.

There are some parties who dream of the possibility of avoiding this decision, and there are those who talk about replicating the regime or reducing sanctions. In our opinion, after ten and a half years of the Syrian tragedy and the history of the people’s struggle in the Syrian revolution, we must impose a dynamic, sustainable solution. All other solutions that are offered cannot achieve sustainable security and stability. Therefore, it will not convince the Syrian refugees to return to Syria, nor will it convince the national capital and Syrian businessmen to return and invest their money inside Syria. Other states will not be persuaded to invest in a country where there is no security and permanent stability. Hence, solutions other than the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 2254 can only prolong the tragedy of the Syrian people.

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**Press questions:**

**In response to a question as to whether the delegation of the negotiation commission in the Constitutional Committee will return to Geneva if the methodology is not developed, and if there is no real ceasefire.**

**Answer:**

The hiatus between the fifth and sixth rounds was nine months. The sixth session could not be held unless there was a methodology that would first start the process of drafting a new constitutional draft, and also that lead to tangible results. The first section was actually achieved, and the Constitutional Committee ended the phase of open constitutional discussions and entered the stage of drafting the constitution. Therefore, the discussions were limited to the constitutional articles and the articles that were presented, and the margin of movement and evasion was reduced for those who wanted to waste time for the Constitutional Committee. Now, it is not possible to repeat a new round in the same manner, as without changing the method we will have the same results, and the remaining fifty percent of the methodology must be agreed to ensure that the next round is productive and produces results.

Certainly, we heard about the crimes that were committed against our people in Idlib, causing casualties among civilians, children, and women. At the opening of the Constitutional Committee meeting, the members of the Constitutional Committee prayed for the martyrs who were killed in Idlib and prayed for the civilian martyrs killed over the last ten and a half years throughout Syria. At the same time, they indicated the extent of their insistence that this in itself is a motive in order to continue efforts to stop the blood shedding in Syria.

As for some of our brothers and our people in Idlib and the rest of the Syrian regions, due to the feelings some of which we also share with them, they demand to withdraw from the Constitutional Committee, or to stop the work of the Constitutional Committee.

We affirm that this will not serve the revolution and will not lead to stopping the killing or bloodshed. The only opportunity and international platform representing the revolution and conveying the voice of the people of Syria who have revolted for ten and a half years is in Geneva. The Geneva platform is an international platform that must be preserved and strengthened as much as possible.

As for those who say that our problem is not in the constitution - yes, the first problem is to stop the killing and the destruction and start a serious political process, of which one section has begun, and this is the constitution. The constitution is one of the reasons we have aimed for because the current constitution legitimizes the dictatorial regime. Moreover, it legitimizes the control and domination of the executive authority over the rest of the authorities in Syria.

It is the constitution which made the president the General Commander of the Army and armed forces. It made him the president of the High Constitutional Court, and he is the one who appoints the judges in the High Constitutional Court. Therefore, there is no separation of powers anymore. Hence, the executive authority has been able to dominate the rest of the authorities in Syria.

A major part of our problem is the constitution that legitimizes the dictatorial regime, and the second part is the implementation of the constitution on the ground. Any constitution can be written in the finest language, but if there are no mechanisms that guarantee its implementation on the ground, it becomes zero. Therefore, the task of the Constitutional Committee is not only to formulate a new constitution for Syria, but to draft a new constitution and to consider and reform constitutional practices. This means the implementation of the constitution. The task of the Constitutional Committee is to reform these mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the new constitution.

**In response to a question on what does the Constitutional Committee rely on if there is no response from the Syrian government delegation,**

**Answer:**

First, there is international pressure, and this pressure is what brought the regime’s delegation to Geneva. If it was according to their desire, they would not want a political solution or a political process, but there was enough pressure for them to come to Geneva. We must work to increase the level of pressure for the political process to proceed as it should be.

There are several factors that contribute to this, which includes the economic situation in Syria and the lack of a permanent state of stability in Syria. It is true that the regime may not care that there is stability and security, but there are foreign countries that have forces in Syria and these countries do not want to sink into a quagmire and find themselves in a country where there is no sustainable stability and security. Therefore, these same countries seek to find a solution to restore stability in Syria.

The other element is the presence of multiple countries in a narrow geographical area. We are talking about the largest global countries, the United States, Russia, and the largest regional countries such as Turkey and Iran, in addition to the military actions carried out by Israel. All of these countries seek not to clash with each other, they are afraid that this intensive presence will lead to clashes. Some of them want to withdraw from Syria as soon as possible, while others want to continue, but they will not be able to if things remain as they are.

**In response to a question about the regime's delegation's claim that the opposition group legitimizes foreign occupation.**

**Answer:**

All of this is absolutely untrue, and all the Syrians in the room are against foreign occupation of any kind. There are forces in Syria because of the regime’s failure to engage in any political solution that leads to the withdrawal of all these foreign powers. There are agreements signed by the regime that allow foreign powers and give them the right to enter Syria. Russia has signed an agreement with the regime. The regime had signed with Turkey the original and additional Adana Agreements, which gave it the right to intervene at any level it sees as a threat. Therefore, it is not possible to consider countries such as Turkey which is hosting about five and a half million Syrian refugees, 3.5 million registered refugees, as well as businessmen and other classes that do not have refugee status, living in Turkey. The extensive border between Turkey and Syria and the impact of security in Syria on Turkey created this situation.

The solution to getting all these forces out of Syria is to implement Security Council Resolution No. 2254. We demand, seek and work to implement it, while the regime seeks to hinder it. We are against all kinds of occupations, whether with the submitted papers and in our declared positions and what the regime claims are completely untrue.

**In response to a question about naming the country.**

**Answer:**

If we do not learn from our history and the tragedy that we have lived through for ten and a half years, we will certainly have wasted all these sacrifices we have experienced. The blood of more than a million martyrs will be wasted in vain and more than 200 thousand detainees in prisons. The first lesson is that we do not have to dictate conditions to each other, neither the Arab nor the Kurdish to the Arab and the Assyrian. It is our duty to listen to each other, put myself in your shoes and see your concerns and your opinion, to see why you are demanding this and vice versa. If we start to listen to each other without intolerance, there will be no problem.

Then what is the significance of the republic’s name in the presence of a tyrannical, dictatorial regime that commits crimes against all Syrians? All of this is of no value, and it is not a shame to see our constitutional history from 1920 until the present time and to listen to constitutional discussions between Syrians. Every time they discuss together the name and language of the state, the way of dealing with other languages, I think there is sufficient heritage, especially for the advanced open-minded avant-garde to listen to each other to develop solutions to all of these issues.