

SYRIAN CIVIL SOCIETY: REFUGEES RETURN CONFERENCE IS AN INSULT TO THE SUFFERING OF 13M DISPLACED SYRIANS

Press Release, 13.11.2020

The internationally-boycotted conference on returns to Syria organized in Damascus was **an insult to the suffering of Syrian refugees and displaced persons**, Syrian civil society organizations said on Friday, stressing that the **conference has failed to address the humanitarian conditions and the real obstacles** that prevent refugees from returning to their home.

The 122 civil society organizations stressed that **the conference was largely political**, did not address the legitimate demands and concerns of civilians to safe returns, did not include any attempts to building peace nor attempted to hold perpetrators of war crimes and human rights violations to account over more than a decade of the armed conflict.

It is worth noting the role that the conference organizers have played as primary parties to the conflict, which has caused the displacement of more than 13 million Syrians since 2011, and are listed for killing and maiming, forced displacement, destroying infrastructure including schools and hospitals, sexual and gender based violence and other crimes against humanity and grave violations, according to United Nations figures and data.

Only seven states attended the international conference, including: China, Iran, Russia, Pakistan, Oman, and Lebanon. Most of the neighboring countries, the European Union and the United States boycotted the conference.

You can find below the full statement

This statement expresses the position of 122 Syrian civil society organizations within the **Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum VDSF** and the other NGOs and networks below. The statement is a reaction on Russia and the Syrian regime promoting the return of Syrian refugees given the current harsh conditions in Syria by holding a conference that hosts few countries only. The undersigned are the institutions and networks of the Syrian civil society that are founded and led by displaced Syrians and refugees, which arose from the womb of the suffering caused by displacement, who are defending their rights and making their voices heard for decision makers and officials.

The displaced Syrians inside and outside Syria monitored the activities of the held conference in the capital of their countries of asylum, which discussed their return without having a representative from the affected community, to speak about their rights, suffering and priorities. The conference is organized to discuss the forced removal of Syrians from neighboring countries while the real stakeholders; the displaced Syrian refugees are absent. Most countries in the world are also absent, and the attendance is limited to a few countries, some of which are deeply involved in the suffering and blood shedding of Syrians. UN agencies, the main donors and countries hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees boycotted attending the conference.

More than 6.5 million Syrian internally displaced persons continue to live in extremely harsh conditions in places of displacement, lack of conditions for a decent life, future opportunities and basic services. The main reason for the vast majority of displaced Syrians not returning to their original areas of residence

inside Syria is the lacking of a safe environment for their return. This is confirmed by all the UN reports, research and studies.

The Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy CPSS: Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria is the most prominent international document on return to Syria issued by the UNHCR in February 2018. The document includes a series of important and basic measures before starting any process of promoting or facilitating the return of Syrian refugees to Syria. The document considers that encouraging Syrians to return now given the current circumstances contradicts the basic principles of protection. The document remains the main reference for all international and local parties to date. The displaced Syrians and the Syrian civil society are aware that reaching the minimum components of protection in order to achieve the points stipulated in the document requires political change in Syria.

There is a terrible absence of justice and accountability in Syria. Individuals that are involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity enjoy absolute freedom in Syria, and many of them remain in senior leadership positions. The absence of basic freedoms, the power of the repressive state, and widespread institutional corruption still prevail in Syria. All these factors were the main cause of the popular movement in Syria ten years ago, which has transformed into a bloody conflict that has not ended yet, leading to the displacement of more than half of the Syrian people.

The basic legislation, related to the ownership preservation of lands, properties, and the recognition of civil documentation issued by parties other than the Syrian regime, are not available in Syria. UN agencies, local and international organizations are not allowed to safely reach the returnees and inquire about their living conditions. Hundreds of thousands of detainees are still held in the prisons of the Syrian regime, thousands more continue to be forcibly disappeared. The Syrian regime continues to forcibly recruit youth to engage them in fighting battles against other Syrians.

Urging the Syrians to return now is a suicide call. Pushing them towards it and applying pressure factors on them by the host countries, donors, or decision-makers is a practice that deserves legal accountability for the perpetrators in light of the numerous documentations of the loss of life and freedom of many Syrian returnees.

The Syrian civil society and the displaced Syrians urge donors and supportive countries of the Syrian people to continue applying the available pressure tools to achieve favorable conditions for return to Syria that guarantee basic rights and protection for the displaced, which will not be achieved before reaching a comprehensive political solution that addresses the roots causes of the conflict in Syria, secures justice for Syrians and accountability for the crimes perpetrators, after which a transparent and honest development and reconstruction process will start, in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

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For more details, please contact

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Signatories:

1. Networks (7 networks with 122 unique organizations):
 - Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum (35 organizations).
 - **Syrian Networks League (SNL), including:**
 1. Ellaf Union for Relief and Development (12 organizations)
 2. Union of Syrian Civil Society Organizations – USCSO (19 organizations)
 3. Syrian Women humanitarian network- SWHN (17 organizations)
 4. Women's Protection Network – WPN (24 organizations)
 5. Watan Network (28 organizations)
 6. Syrian NGOs Platform – SNP (27 organizations).
2. Individual NGOs:
 1. Bonyan Organization
 2. Baytna Syria
 3. Syrian Women Association
 4. International Humanitarian relief - IHR
 5. ATAA humanitarian relief association
 6. Violet for relief and development
 7. Access Center for Human Rights ACHR
 8. Bousla Development & Innovation
 9. Horan Foundation
 10. PAC Turkey
 11. Lawyers and doctors for Human Rights LDHR
 12. White Hats Organization for Sustainable Development
 13. Door Beyond War
 14. Sewar
 15. Lamsat Ward
 16. Syrian Expatriates Medical Association - SEMA
 17. Basamat for Development
 18. Jana Watan
 19. International Relief and Development
 20. Amals Healing and Advocacy Center
 21. Syrian Society for Relief and Development SSRD
 22. Zenobia ORG
 23. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
 24. IYD
 25. Nasaem Khair
 26. Kareemat
 27. Unity and Cooperation Organization
 28. Mercy Breezes Association
 29. Asil Izzet
 30. Maintenance Benefits Bestowal
 31. Abrar
 32. Rawad for Charity
 33. Charitable Act Organization

34. Alghad Charity
35. International Agricultural Cooperation Organization - IACO
36. Future Light Organization
37. Himma Youth Organization
38. El-Vefa Association For Relief And Development
39. Damascene house Forum
40. Adaleh For Relief And Development
41. Baraka Humanitarian Organazation
42. White Hands
43. Ayadee For Relief And Development
44. Mercy Without Limits
45. Space Of Peace
46. Takaful Charity
47. Zidne
48. The Establishment For Human Care And Development – MASRRA
49. Local Development Organization
50. Freedom Jasmine
51. Muzn
52. Rahma relief foundation
53. Rfkaa organization
54. Civilians For Justice And Peace
55. Peace Road
56. Syrian Social Forum
57. Independent organization
58. Bader Humanitarian Organization
59. Country Word Forum
60. Zomord Volunteer Team
61. Safa Developmental Organization
62. The Syrian Women's Committee in Rihaniyya
63. Hawa Women Empowerment Association
64. Amenat Center
65. Justice and kindness Organization
66. Syrian and Turkish Women Forum
67. Civil Society Development Organization
68. Gaziantep New life forum
69. Wedad Organization
70. Watan Cloud
71. Rawda Noor Organization
72. La Tahzan Charity
73. Ibdaa for development
74. Jasmine Dream
75. Smile of Hope for Relief and Development
76. Watan Hands organization
77. Salsabeel charity

78. Grass of Human Goodness
79. Faith charity
80. Syrian Alresala Organization
81. Multaka Albait Alhalabi
82. Bennish Charity Committee
83. Child Care and Protection Of Women organization
84. Al-Hayat for Humanitarian Relief
85. Albonian Almarsos Humanitarian Organization
86. Shaba Algad association
87. Ulfah Human Relief
88. Ufuk International Relief and Development
89. Restor Hope Organization
90. Zaid bin Thabit
91. Alsham Association
92. Association together
93. Al Sham Humanitarian Foundation – AHF
94. Sham Sherif
95. Social Development International – SDI
96. Association of brotherhood group
97. Rahma Worldwide Aid &Development
98. SENED For People With Special Needs
99. Knowledge Society for Development and Education