



Syria: Five years seeking democracy and accountability

16 March 2016 13:00 – 15:00
Room XXIV, Palais des Nations
United Nations Office in Geneva

Program

Welcome and refreshments

Co-Chairs: Hussein Sabbagh, Secretary General of Euro-Syrian Democratic Forum
Niccolò Figà-Talamanca, Secretary General No Peace Without Justice

Welcome remarks: H.E. Ambassador Mark Matthews, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN
H.E. Ambassador Reinout Vos, the Netherlands Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN

Panelists:

- Rami Nakhla, NPWJ Syria Project Coordinator
- Salma Jalkhi, Women Now for Development
- Fadel Abdul Ghany, Syrian Network for Human Rights

Respondents:

- Gareth Bayley, UK Special Representative for Syria
- Mouaffaq Nyrabia, Vice President, National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces
- [Alise Mofrej, Syrian women activist, HNC negotiation delegation]

Interventions from the floor and discussion

Co-Chairs' Conclusions

The side-event is an opportunity for a chair-moderated debate where Syrian human rights leaders and democracy activists will convey the priorities for peace from communities and civil society across Syria to the organised opposition and to the international community, as guarantors of the Intra-Syrian Geneva Talks. The discussion will address the impact on the ground of the declared cessation of hostilities, perspectives for accountability and redress for the victims as a basis for durable peace, the role of women in peace building and in Syrian political and civil society, and how documentation of past and current crimes can contribute to the negotiations.



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Concept Note

After five years of war in Syria, the conflict has claimed staggering numbers of lives. The entry into force of UN Security Council Resolution 2268, the commencement of a “cessation of hostilities” in Syria and the announcement by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura of his intention to resume the political negotiations in March offer some hope that the violence will abate and that humanitarian aid will finally reach the civilian population.

It is not clear what will happen next: notwithstanding the establishment of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) on 30 October 2015 and the opening of a new round of intra-Syrian negotiation on 29 January 2016 by Mr de Mistura, the range of violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes continued to widen and the number of parties to the conflict allegedly involved in the violation of international norms continued to grow. Even since the beginning of 2016, the report on the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2139, the report of the Commission of Inquiry, as well as the Secretary-General’s letter of 17 February 2016, all paint a tragic and harrowing picture of the desperate conditions of civilians, including women and children. Attacks against civilians and civilian installations such as hospitals and schools actually increased since the end of January 2016. Unprecedented levels of internal displacement and the growing number of Syrians embarking on often a fatal journey across land and sea to seek safety and asylum only add to the dire situation.

The events at the end of February nonetheless represent the most realistic prospect for peace that Syria has seen for half a decade. To consolidate those efforts and avoid spiralling back into disaster, more needs to be done. After five years of war the root causes of the war and the call for freedom of the Syrian population still remain to be addressed. While the cessation of hostilities is a necessary and needed step, any realistic prospect for a political solution to work needs to address accountability and redress for the victims of the brutal atrocities committed against them and promote a political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and enables them independently and democratically to determine their future.

Against this backdrop, this side event in the margins of the United Nations Human Rights Council looks at the fundamental issue of accountability and democratic transition as essential components of any negotiation on Syria. The meeting also serves as a reminder that the urgent priority of reaching a lasting political solution to the Syrian war requires an inclusive and participatory process capable to ensure that the root causes of the war be addressed and the request for freedom, democracy and accountability for the violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, irrespective of their ethnic, religious and political affiliation, be met to foster national reconciliation and a political solution fully in line with the requests and demands of the Syrian democracy activists and human rights defenders.



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