

Syrian Civil Society Letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Monday, February 13, 2017

The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics in Syria



H.E. Mr. António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York

Your Excellency,

With a globe in chaos, the world needs a strong, moral, and courageous United Nations now as never before. This is particularly true for Syrians, who have long looked to the United Nations for refuge and protection, but have too often been disappointed by the results. As the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations, you have the capacity to rebuild the UN's reputation as a defender—not just of State sovereignty—but of the people that States aspire to serve. We, Syrian civil society, have long urged our government to respect our basic human rights, only to be barrel bombed, starved, and tortured in return. We hope that during your tenure as Secretary-General, we can rely on your support both to reject the atrocities committed against our people, and to secure from Member States the actions needed to protect our civilians.

Our organizations urgently want an end to the violence in Syria, which is why we support the Syrian ceasefire brokered by Turkey and Russia. We also want this ceasefire to hold, which is why we are calling for an independent monitoring mechanism led by the United Nations. Only the United Nations has the credibility needed to impartially and accurately monitor our nation's ceasefire. Both Russia and Iran are clear parties to the conflict and can neither monitor nor enforce the ceasefire with any credibility. If Syria's ceasefire is to hold and thereby serve as basis for credible political negotiations in Geneva, then it is the United Nations that must lead an independent monitoring mechanism.

No ceasefire can succeed without enforcement. As we have seen repeatedly, the violence in Syria will not cease so long as atrocities go unpunished and violations are met without consequences. Violations – including indiscriminate violence against civilians and the sieges of civilian populations – are already threatening to imperil the tenuous ceasefire. To ensure



that these violations do not continue and worsen, we demand effective enforcement of the ceasefire, through the application of credible consequences, for any party that violates the terms of the ceasefire agreement. As the UN Special Envoy recently stated, “Protection of civilians –men and women- must be a crucial priority” heading into Geneva. And indeed, any party that targets or indiscriminately kills civilians, in violation of the ceasefire, must face consequences for doing so.

Your leadership is required to make the ceasefire work. It is equally critical to ensuring the success of upcoming political negotiations. As we look to Geneva, we appeal to you and your colleagues to assume a firm command of the negotiations process, as required by Security Council resolution 2254. The UN must not permit others to dictate the terms of the talks - this is for the UN and Syrians themselves to determine. We Syrians will pay the price if the UN cedes its responsibilities to Russia and Iran—as the lack of inclusivity in Astana so clearly demonstrates.

On behalf of Syrian civil society, we therefore call on the United Nations to:

1. Lead a credible monitoring mechanism of the Syrian ceasefire, to ensure that all violations are objectively accounted for, and that any party with a stake in the ceasefire's success is not charged with monitoring it.
2. Pressure Member States to agree a rigorous enforcement mechanism for the ceasefire, including credible and pre-determined consequences for any violations.
3. Assert leadership over Syria's political process to ensure that the Geneva communiqué and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, including 2118 and 2254, serve as the basis of the basis for constructive Geneva discussions focused on political transition.
4. Build confidence going into Geneva by pressing for full and continuous humanitarian access to all areas in need, including to besieged areas, and the full protection of all humanitarian aid workers;
5. Demand progress on Syria's detainee file by securing the release of Syrian political prisoners held in detention and demanding a moratorium on all execution orders.
6. Partner with Syrian civil society to secure justice for all Syrian victims by stipulating that Syrian civil society serve in an advisory capacity to the International, Impartial and



Independent Mechanism (IIIM), rather than limiting civil society's role to the provision of evidence, as is currently the case. The constructive engagement of representatives of Syrian civil society, and cooperative information sharing between the IIIM and human rights organizations that have a proven track record in documenting violations, will strengthen trust and ensure local buy-in to the process.

7. Ensure meaningful inclusion of civil society and women in all stages of Syrian political process, as required by Security Council resolution 2254. This includes pushing for at least 30 percent representation of women within each party's negotiating delegation.

Your Excellency, upon coming to office you pledged to "make 2017 a year for peace." We Syrians know that if we are to see a peaceful end to the Syrian crisis, we need your leadership in securing a sustainable ceasefire and a credible political process leading to a democratic Syria. We cannot allow parties to the conflict to fill the vacuum and steer us away from a Syrian-led solution to the Syrian crisis. We have at this very moment a unique opportunity: when all parties to the conflict, including Russia, agree on the urgent need for a lasting ceasefire. We must not allow this opportunity to go to waste. After six years of destruction, the Syrian people cannot afford more failed attempts at peace.

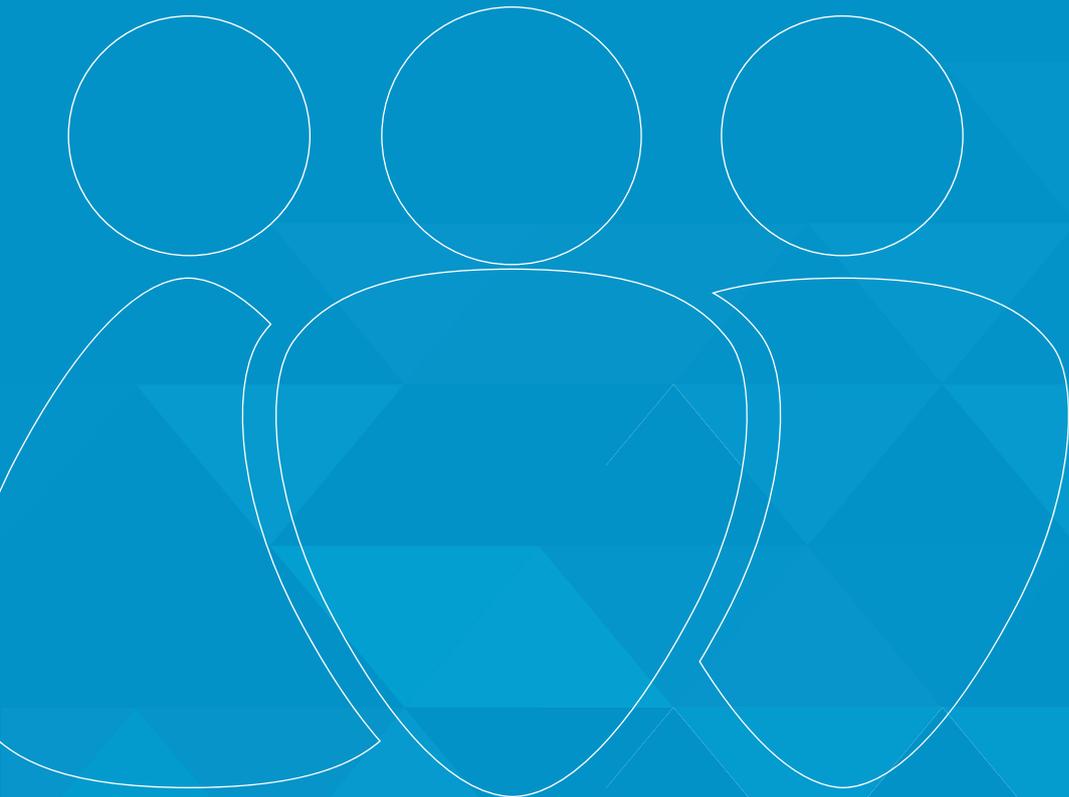
Sincerely,

1. Baytna Syria
2. The Day After
3. Rethink Rebuild Society
4. Foundation of Syrian Civil Society Organizations
5. Foundation to Restore Equality and Education in Syria (FREE-Syria)
6. Sawa Foundation, UK
7. Sawa for Development and Aid, Lebanon
8. Syrian Network for Human Rights
9. RMTeam
10. White Smile NGO
11. Sonbola Group for Education and Development
12. Syria Relief and Development
13. Syrian Nonviolence Movement
14. Independent Doctors Association
15. Syrian Association of Yorkshire
16. Ghiras Al Nahda



17. Bahr Organization
18. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
19. Badael Foundation
20. Basamat for Development
21. Syrian Women's Network
22. Syrian Civil Defense (White Helmets)
23. Syrian Christians for Peace
24. Young People Toward the Future
25. Kurds House
26. Syrian Community of the South West (SyrCom)
27. Syrian Society of Nottinghamshire
28. Scotland4Syria
29. Syrian Platform for Peace
30. Syria Solidarity UK
31. Justice for Syria
32. Bihar Relief
33. Syrian Legal Development Programme
34. Palestinian League for Human Rights – Syria
35. Najda Now International
36. Emissa for Development
37. Jasmine Dream





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