

Effective Participation of Syrian Women



Center for Civil Society and Democracy

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1. Introduction:

On February 23, 2017, the opening session of the fourth round of Intra-Syrian negotiations was held in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations. An agenda for negotiations was reached based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and Geneva 1 Statement.

We are a group of Syrian women who have been working on developing a preliminary draft of recommendations on the best ways for gendering the political process, in order to include them in the political agreement expected to be implemented in the upcoming months, and to ensure the active participation of Syrian women in the political process. This work was followed by a wide range of consultations and discussions in more than 19 different communities within Syria and neighboring countries.

2. Women's Participation in Establishing Governance:

Since the beginning of the Syrian-Syrian talks, a group of parties has sought to establish an inclusive governance that guarantees the participation of all and enjoys credibility and legitimacy by all. Therefore, we believe that in order to reach for an inclusive governance, the gender of governance must be taken fully into account at all stages and levels of the political transition in Syria.

2.1 Basic principles of governance.

In order to ensure a real and effective participation of women in the political transition, it is necessary to ensure that a set of basic principles is achieved:

- Include the principle of representation of women in decision-making centers by 50% and by a third in institutions in general.
- To consider international principles and conventions is the main reference in the case of the amendment of any laws or in proposing of any new laws, and ensure the full equality of women in law and before the law.
- Ensure the separation of legislative, executive and judicial authorities, as well as ensuring the equal participation of women by 50 % in the three authorities and in decision-making centers.
- To establish the position of gender officer in all authorities, departments and institutions and to support this position.

2.2 New governing bodies.

To establish new, credible and inclusive governing bodies, a women's rights institution should be dedicated to ensure and monitor that women are integrated into all state institutions, and that their decisions on gender must be binding on other institutions.

A gender academy should also be established to ensure the availability of gender advisers in new institutions.

It is also necessary to appoint gender advisers for each of the leadership positions in all institutions, with a review of all decisions binding on the gender sensitivity of existing institutions.

The participation of women must be guaranteed by at least one third in the newly created institutions and equally in the leadership positions of these institutions, and providing the necessary resources for monitoring, including temporary files, especially transitional justice.

2.3 Structure and reform of existing institutions.

There are many institutions that there will be working on them in order to re-structure and reform them in order to reach transparent and credible institutions. Therefore, a gender advisor should be appointed for each of the leadership positions in all institutions and her review of all decisions should be binding on the gender sensitivity of existing institutions. The structures must be modified to allow the participation of at least one third of women in existing institutions and equally in the leadership positions of institutions.

2.4 Civil society organizations and the media.

We are well aware that various civil society organizations and the media are a key partner in the political transition and the creation of a democratic, governmental system. Therefore, we must seek to ensure the establishment of a law that make civil society organizations able to act freely and safely, to lobby and advocate with decision-makers, and to ensure a law that protects media and ensures the freedom and independence of the media in all its forms.

It should also ensure the availability of ongoing support programs for civil society organizations and the media, especially women's organizations, human rights organizations and media organizations.

2.5 International laws and charters.

- Ratify all international conventions on women.
- Work on a national plan for Security Council resolution 1325 and its annexes.

3. Participation of women in drafting the Constitution.

3.1 Constitutional principles.

In the event of reaching an agreement on any constitutional amendments, a new constitution or a declaration of constitutional principles, this agreement must ensure equal rights and freedoms for all Syrians in a way that guarantees the full citizenship rights without discrimination for all, and to reach an inclusive social contract for the Syrians agreed upon it by all without exception. This agreement should also insure the inclusion of gender in all stages of the constitutional process and guarantees full equality between both sexes.

3.2 The committee responsible for drafting the draft of all that is relating to the writing of constitutional articles.

The participation of women must be guaranteed by at least one third of any committee charged with drafting a constitution or constitutional articles. A gender adviser should be appointed to the Constitution Drafting Committee and her review shall be binding on anything related to the Constitution.

3.3 Advisory Committees of the Constitution.

- Ensure effective participation of Syrian women jurists by at least one-third in any legal advisory committees.
- Ensure effective participation of women by at least one third in all constitutional advisory committees.
- Ensure that the Charter of the formation of legal advisory committees or any other committees taking into account the gender sensitivity.

3.4 Community consultation process on the Constitution.

- Ensure at least one third of the community consultations on the constitution and the comprehensiveness of the topics.
- Supporting women's rights organizations and women's organizations, especially local ones, to play an active role in community consultations on the constitution.
- The entire community is consulted to reach full agreement of Syrians on the constitution and the participation of women in consultations is not less than 50%.
- Support the space of rights and freedoms and facilitate the movement of women involved in the consultation process.

3.5 Process of codification and legitimization of the constitution.

- Ensure the existence of free and transparent monitoring mechanisms for the process of codifying and legitimizing the Syrian constitution and ensuring the effective participation of women by not less than 50% in the process of codification (referendum).
- Supporting women's organizations, feminists' organizations, especially local organizations, and civil society organizations to play a role in ensuring effective participation in the constitution-legitimizing process.

4. Women's participation in elections.

Free and fair elections are held in accordance with the new constitution under the supervision of the United Nations, which responds to the requirements of governance and the highest international standards in terms of integrity and transparency, including all Syrians who are entitled to participate, including those living in the diaspora.

4.1 Basic principles in the electoral process.

Transparency, integrity, access to information, participation, justice, equality and inclusion must be guaranteed at all stages of the design and implementation of the electoral process. An effective participation of women must be guaranteed through:

- Ensure that the principle of full equality between both sexes is included in electoral laws, candidacy, voting and participation in the design and monitoring of the electoral process.
- Ensure positive discrimination of women in the candidacy process and ensure to get at least one third of any elections results held at the local and national levels.
- The appointment of a gender counselor in each body concerned with any part of the electoral process and ensuring the participation of at least one-third of women in each of these bodies and entities.

4.2 The electoral system, including candidacy conditions, voting conditions and the mechanism of elections.

- Include special mechanisms to support women's participation and encourage them to run, vote and participate in election campaigns.

- Guaranteeing the right to vote and stand for Syrian women and their children without any discrimination between men and women in this regard.
- Ensure that supportive mechanisms are in place to ensure that legal papers are available for women to run and vote.
- Overcoming obstacles to women on the issue of ballot boxes and to have these boxes available in different regions and to facilitate women's access to polling centers.

4.3 Community participation in elections.

- Ensure that at least one third women is included in of all official and non-official committees responsible for encouraging Syrian citizens to vote inside and outside Syria.
- Ensure special support for women to participate in awareness programs in the electoral process and to reach the candidates and to be legally committed to the need to take gender into all the steps of community participation.

4.4 Monitoring the electoral process.

- Ensure at least one third women is included in of all official and non-official election monitoring committees.
- Legal guarantee to provide support to women to overcome family and community challenges and facilitate their work within monitoring committees.

5. Confidence-building measures.

5.1 Ceasefire.

A fragile cease-fire process has begun in Astana and it is important that the ceasefire be further strengthened and guaranteed and that participation of women in this process be ensured in line with Security Council resolution 2254.

- Appointing a gender adviser and human rights advisers from women for each of the ceasefire negotiating delegations, whether observer or notary.
- Include a special provision in ceasefire agreements that ensures that women are involved in any subsequent steps to a ceasefire, such as monitoring and ensuring protection.
- At least one third of women participated in documenting the violations they have suffered as a result of any violations of the ceasefire.

5.2 Detained, abducted and forcibly disappeared.

- All parties must immediately release all detainees and abductees, especially women, children and elderly persons. The file of detainees should not be used as political pressure papers.
- Ensure that special support programs are available for detainees, abducted and released persons.
- Ensure that special support programs are available for women and girls affected by the arrest of a close family member such as a husband or father.
- Ensure ongoing studies on the impact of detention on girls and women affected directly or indirectly.

- Ensure that detainees are legally protected from the so-called honor crimes and violence against female detainees within society.
- A legal guarantee criminalizing the exploitation of children of the detained women during or after detention, and exploitation may include the detention, forced disappearance, lack of information about the child and the physical and psychological abuse of children.

5.3 Lift the siege on the besieged areas.

- Serious action should be done not only to introduce humanitarian and medical assistance to the besieged areas and the areas that are difficult to reach continuously and periodically, but to work to lift the siege on these areas completely and criminalize any type of forced displacement.
- Conduct a special study on the situation of women in the besieged areas and the impact of the siege on women.
- Determining impacts on the health status and living conditions of women in the besieged areas and working on special programs to support besieged women.

5.4 Economic development of the destroyed and besieged areas.

- Ensure that support programs with small grants are available to women in the destroyed and besieged areas by providing small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Ensure that future development plans for women in the most affected areas are given priority.

6- Role of civil society organizations in supporting women.

There will be significant challenges for Syrian women to participate actively in governance and political transition. Civil society organizations must play an active role to empower women to do so.

There will also be significant challenges for Syrian women to actively engage in any local or national elections that will take place in Syria, even with a legal guarantee of women's participation in elections. These challenges including societal challenges such as customs, traditions and political exploitation of their voice, as well as unequal access to resources, economic or logistical facilities and the most important is the legal discrimination between men and women for decades.

There are significant challenges for Syrian women to engage in any special groups on military and security issues, including the ceasefire, for many reasons including: women refusal to participate because of their lack of self-confidence in their effectiveness in this field and the reluctance of decision-makers and society for her participation in military and security affairs, limiting women's role to stereotypical roles.

Therefore, civil society organizations must play an important role in preparing for greater participation of women within these sectors, as well as to ensure the participation of women affected by fire, siege, detention, abduction and forced disappearances. Thus, our recommendations fall into three main groups:

Group 1:

1. To allocate long-term programs by civil society organizations to work with women in decision-making centers and with those who wish to participate.
2. Supporting women to have a strong media presence and support the pursuit of gender media discourse in different media organizations.

3. Supporting women in order to enhance communication between women in various tracks and also with local, national and international decision-making centers.
4. Allocate long-term programs by civil society organizations to work on effective community participation, especially for women, on any consultation or dialogue on the constitution.
5. Civil society organizations should play an active role in ensuring the principles of human rights and women's rights within the constitutional principles.

Group 2:

1. Ensure women's participation by at least one-third in the development of electoral laws and in the design of the electoral process as a whole.
2. Enable women staff to work in electoral awareness, electoral observation, electoral campaigns and community participation in elections.
3. Monitoring violations and discrimination against women in obtaining legal documents.

Group 3:

1. Facilitate dialogues between active women and military factions.
2. Increase the knowledge of women in the protection and monitoring sectors regarding the ceasefire, security sector reform and disarmament programs to prepare for the post-political agreement.
3. Target women who have influence on military factions and women to work with them to strengthen the ceasefire agreement.
4. Working with the mothers of the victims from all sides and working to form groups and joint meetings.
5. Ensure special programs to support women affected by detention, abduction, siege, loss of parents or children, early marriage, forced marriage, marriage to a foreigner.
6. Support the committees of the detainees' families and include them in the plans for transitional justice.
7. Supporting the needs of women in the besieged areas according to special programs.

Since Syrian women were at different stages in the history of Syria at the forefront of the struggle movements and this is clearly reflected through the participation of women in the protest movements since the beginning of the revolution and played different roles, we fully believe that Syrian women can play a key and effective role in contributing in the political transition in Syria and in the establishment of a sustainable and deep peace.

The end