

Civil Society Dialogue Network Meeting

INGO workshop: Assessing international responses to the Syria conflict

Monday 27 March 2017, Brussels

Outcome Document

The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) organised a meeting with representatives of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) working on issues relating to the Syria conflict, on request of the EU in advance of the Brussels Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region, on 4 and 5 April 2017. The objective of this meeting was for representatives of the 44 participating NGOs from humanitarian, peacebuilding and human rights sectors working on issues relating to the Syria conflict to exchange views and to make recommendations to co-chairs and participants of the conference, including the EU, about their response to it.

This document captures the main recommendations made during the meeting, which did not aim for consensus. The meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule. The views in this document cannot be attributed to any participating individual or organisation nor do they necessarily represent the views of all of the meeting participants, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) and its member organisations.

The participants noted the extensive and urgent humanitarian needs, the lack of progress in the political processes and the need to follow up on commitments made in London.

Summary of recommendations to the co-chairs and participants of the Conference

- **Syrian civil society:** Syrian-led processes for political transition, transitional justice must be a central priority at the Brussels conference with full and transparent participation of Syrians, including women and youth, with civil society recognised and engaged in processes of reconciliation and Reconstruction.
- **Protection:** concrete steps must be taken to protect civilians, civilian infrastructure and humanitarian workers and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) respected by all parties.
- **Accountability:** the rights for truth, reparation and justice for violations of international law, including IHL, and gross violations of human rights must be central to all discussions; the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), investigations under universal jurisdiction and appropriate transitional justice measures must be fully supported.
- **Humanitarian operations:** full humanitarian access, enabling cross-border and cross-line humanitarian operations, including to 'besieged' areas, the UN designation of these to be reviewed.
- **Conflict sensitivity:** all humanitarian, justice and Reconstruction interventions must at least Do No Harm with strong support for local efforts to build peace, further gender equality and social inclusion.
- **Refugees and Returns:** future returns must be informed, safe, voluntary and supported and rights to asylum respected in the region. Wealthy countries, including EU member states, must accept at least 10% of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees.
- **Education:** strong commitments needed to ensure the right to education is respected, sustainably funded and quality delivery monitored.
- **Health:** ensure access to health services in the region and prioritise investment in psychosocial and mental health services in Syria and region.

Detailed recommendations to the co-chairs and participants of the Conference

Political imperatives

- **Syrian-led political transition with full civil society participation, inclusive of women**, must remain a central priority at the Brussels Conference.
- Achieve **full humanitarian access, lifting all sieges** and an end to using siege as a strategy of war.
- Request **greater transparency and consistency on the UN designation of 'besieged'** areas and take this decision out of Damascus.
- Strengthen **cross-line and cross-border work**, including opening more border crossings (Iraq, Jordan, Turkey), lift restrictions on movement of people, especially medics, humanitarian and medical supplies and equipment.
- Commit to the principle of **Do No Harm, ensuring that aid does not entrench divisions or fuel conflict**.
- Wealthy countries, including EU Member States, **must honour asylum for at least 10%** of the most vulnerable refugees; otherwise they have no moral authority.
- **Demonstrate transparency by communicating the** outcomes of the conference to international and local civil society in Syria and the region.

Civil society

- **Recognise** the strength of civil society in Syria and the region and facilitate the **full and transparent participation of Syrians, particularly women and youth** in all processes that address the future of Syria, including donor conferences, Reconstruction and reconciliation.
- **Support (I)NGOs** in developing the capacities of Syrian and regional NGOs, including their ability to manage and bid for donor funds. Hold INGOs to account for progress in this.
- Commit to **multiyear funding** for local civil society organisations, so they can work sustainably.
- **Ensure adequate funding** for human rights organisations in all parts of Syria, including monitors, and not to limit funding to organisations working on 'migration control'.
- Review **anti-terrorism financing measures** to lift barriers for funding to civil society organisations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- Engage the **cultural sector** in Reconstruction and reconciliation, ensure conflict-sensitive cultural preservation, and **fund conflict-sensitive media** programming and training.
- **Donors should review their risk frameworks**, EU and Member States should take on more risk rather than outsourcing it to NGOs.

Humanitarian Principles, Conflict sensitivity and gender equality

- As a bare minimum, all interventions **Do No Harm**, which means being based on rigorous and up to date **context analysis**, in which **gender analysis is fully integrated**; monitoring the impact of the intervention on the context, and vice versa, and adjusting accordingly.
- Identify and make use of **opportunities** for development interventions to contribute to **building peace and promoting social cohesion and gender equality**.
- **Humanitarian aid must continue**, regardless of progress at political level, based on joint operating principles (i.e. humanitarian principles using whole of Syria approach, which requires cross-line, cross-border access).
- Donors should support **peace builders in all parts of Syria and the region, and protect civic space** for them.
- Cultivate **transparency** and openness by **improving coordination, cooperation and communication** between donors, international implementing agencies, local implementing agencies and beneficiaries at local, national, regional and international levels; including improving connections between the various tracks of the peace process. **Equity of assistance** is key.

Protection

- **Ensure IHL is respected** and no impunity for violations.
- **Facilities**, especially schools and hospitals, must be protected.
- Commitment to **protection** must be fundamental and the precursor for education, economic development (not vice versa), including protection within schools, health care facilities and camps.

- Take concrete steps to **ensure the safety** of civil society, humanitarian and medical actors, and human rights defenders in all parts of Syria and neighbouring countries, ensuring that **funding supports the necessary Duty of Care provisions** for this, such as insurances, security, particularly for local Syrian organisations.
- **Mine** marking and clearance, mine awareness education, programming for victims including **people with disabilities** are all key in the short and longer term.

Ending impunity

- **The right to truth, reparation and justice for violations of international law, including IHL, and gross violations of human rights** must be clearly articulated as central to all discussions, including peace talks, on the future of Syria and reconciliation, and Rule of Law to Reconstruction.
- **Support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism** to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (IIIM), ensure the participation of independent Syrian professionals and experts, civil society and victims organisations, and emphasise the need for outreach to the Syrian population.
- **Support Syrian-led transitional justice** measures that deliver truth, justice and reparations.
- Ensure that the EU and its Member States fully implement the **EU guidelines on Human Rights Defenders**.
- Ensure **access for independent monitors**, including doctors, to places of detention.
- Support and protect evidence gathering and investigations (including through **universal jurisdiction**, where applicable).

Refugees, Asylum and Returns

- Ensure **right to asylum** in the region and Europe. Provide safe, legal pathways to the EU, including humanitarian visas, private sponsorship and resettlement.
- Make EU-Turkey deal more **rights compliant**, and resettlement be determined by need not political expediency.
- Within the narrative of Reconstruction and if considering the creation of 'Safe zones', the EU and its Member States must acknowledge the continuing extensive humanitarian and protection needs, call for full humanitarian access and remain firmly committed in principle and in practice to **non-refoulement**.
- **Returns must be informed, safe and voluntary and supported** with adequate local services and justice mechanisms.
- Camps are not sustainable and therefore weaken resilience. To strengthen resilience, donors and neighbouring hosts must facilitate the **registration, residency and civil documentation** of all refugees.
- **Protect right to employment** through more flexible **work permits** and **decent work**; donors and host governments must pay particular attention to improving the access of women refugees to work permits, and also ensuring adequate protection so women can leave their homes and families. **Lack of progress in job creation, particularly for women**, in neighbouring countries must be addressed. **Support entrepreneurship** through Micro SMEs, and particularly by women.

Education

- **Ensure the right to education** in neighbouring countries, regardless of registration status and remove barriers (e.g. legal, language, cost).
- Commit to **sustainable funding** for No Lost Generation.
- Develop **transparent tracking mechanisms** to monitor education spending and delivery (including timing) and refugees' access to education.
- **Quality education** is key, including regionally recognised and transferable secondary, tertiary and professional qualifications. The **brain drain** needs to be tackled.
- Ensure teachers receive and are able to use and teach **conflict resolution skills and approaches**, as well as include them in curricula for students.

Health

- Ensure **access to health** services in the region, including in the refugee's language.
- Facilitate and scale up support to **training and education** of healthcare professionals in Syria.
- Recognise and develop the **low capacity of psychosocial and mental health care** in Syria.