

INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE

10-11 APRIL 2014

BRUSSELS



RECOMMENDATIONS

PROMOTING NONVIOLENT
TRANSITION TOWARDS
DEMOCRACY THROUGH
ENGENDERING CONSTITUTION
BUILDING PROCESS



This program is supported by Sweden

RECOMMENDATIONS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PROMOTING NONVIOLENT TRANSITION TOWARDS DEMOCRACY IN SYRIA 10-11 April 2014 Brussels

INTRODUCTION

All developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have demonstrated that women's rights and gender equality are at the core of political transitional processes. Women's rights and gender equality have been further highlighted in the ongoing debates on their inclusion in the constitutions in order to oppose discriminative legislation and cultural social patterns that justify and perpetuate women's exclusion and discrimination.

In Syria, women's rights activists claim, from lessons learned, that women's rights are inseparable from the national project and the overall building of a democratic society. Functioning in a highly controlled and repressive political climate, they have actively contributed to the building of a civil society by campaigning for women's human rights, broader democracy and greater freedom and by exploring new opportunities for international solidarity and forging links with the women's movement in the region and the rest of the world.

The ongoing conflict has imposed new limitations on organizing as violence and social oppression have been exacerbated and social tensions are on the rise. Pressure has been put on women's rights and human rights activists to leave Syria but they continue to organize abroad. However, the conflict has also opened up new opportunities for civil society to start mobilizing and searching for its role within the context of a political transition towards democracy, identifying non-violent ways of resolving the crisis.

In this political context, Syrian women's rights and human rights activists and representatives of civil society organizations from 21 countries of the Middle East, Mashreq, Maghreb, Europe and the Caucasus met in Brussels on 10-11 April for the international conference "*Promoting Non-Violent Transition Towards Democracy Through Engendering a Constitution Building Process*". It was organized by the European Feminist Initiative (IFE-EFI) and the Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy (CSWD) and supported by Sweden.

The aim of the conference was to discuss, in an open and mutually beneficial way, how cooperation and exchange of opinions among women's rights and human rights organizations in Syria could be strengthened. Its purpose was also to envision how the international civil society could provide support for the widening of the ongoing constitution building process, inclusive of women's rights and gender equality, and to launch the basis of a civil society platform for mobilization towards democracy, with women's rights and gender equality as an indivisible part.

The two days included in-depth discussions, exchange of experience and expertise by delegates from Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Iraq and Palestine. International NGOs and representatives of the UN and the EU participated and gave due consideration to Syrian demands. Three working groups prepared recommendations for further steps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TOWARDS SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE TRANSITION AND CONSTITUTION BUILDING PROCESS

The participants agreed that resolution of the Syrian crisis cannot be military. The United Nations, the European Union and the international community should make all efforts to examine all non-violent, political ways of resolving the Syrian crisis.

The international powers should also recognize that in the context of tragedy and massacre of the Syrian population, it is not possible to consider the opposition in Syria as ONE single body. All democratic and progressive movements, in addition to the National Coalition, should have access to the negotiation table and should be provided with opportunities to express their views.

What are the United Nations, the European Union and the international community offering as an alternative vision and how can civil society contribute to the resolution of the Syrian crisis?

In this regard, the engendering of the next phase was seen as being of utmost importance for the establishment of sustainable democracy and lasting peace. The efforts and demands of civil society organizations in Syria that have gathered to promote women's universal rights and gender equality in the transitional phase of constitution-and–democracy building should be acknowledged, promoted and used as a basis for UN analyses and actions.

The participants emphasized the role of the different international actors and issued the following recommendations to the United Nations, the European Union, the international community and Syrian civil society.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UNITED NATIONS

TO DEMOCRATIZE THE FORMAT OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND THE PLANNING OF THE SYRIAN TRANSITION

1. To demand and ensure that civil society activists, representing both women's rights and human rights organizations, are enabled to maintain a dialogue with international and regional institutions with decision-making power and that their analyses are taken into account in the process of resolving the Syrian crisis in a political, non-violent way.
2. To admit representatives of women's rights and human rights organizations to the negotiation table as independent participants in the overall process of peace building.
3. To use all existing UN tools (and especially UNSCR 1325) to protect Syrian women from violence, rape and murder; to promote women's equal representation and participation in all decision-making bodies, throughout the peace negotiations, the reconstruction phase, and after a peace accord has been reached.
4. To support, in word and deed, the principle of substantive equality for women in all political processes and recognize women as full-rank political actors; to demand and ensure the participation of 50% women in all negotiation teams and introduce a women's rights and gender equality perspective into the overall transition process towards democracy.

5. To appoint a Syrian gender consultant within the mediation team, and build channels of communication with the international mediator and his/her team.
6. To discuss and research, in a broad participatory manner, all means of ensuring a non-violent resolution of the crisis and a peaceful transition towards a democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

TO PLAY A MORE VISIBLE ROLE AS AN AGENT OF PEACE, GENDER EQUALITY, HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND MEN

1. To reconsider the economic blockade on Syria and find a different strategy of putting pressure on the regime, without affecting civilians.
2. To recognize as representatives of the opposition all progressive and democratic groups and movements and not only those belonging to the National Coalition; such groups and movements should be given support and included in the peace negotiations and the political transition process.
3. To support the issuing of EU visas to Syrian activists who fight for a non-violent transition towards democracy in order to enable their participation in different international forums and make their voices heard.
4. To support the creation of a space where all democratic and progressive forces have the chance to meet and discuss key issues on their own.
5. To develop one clear vision and a long-term strategic solution for Syria, facilitating nonviolent conflict resolution.
6. To protect refugees and provide humanitarian aid as well as pay special attention to the protection of women from discrimination, rape and other forms of violence.
7. To apply UNSCR 1325 more effectively as a tool of pressure on the opposition to implement it and include women in their negotiation teams as well as to place women's rights and gender equality on their agendas.
8. To exercise pressure to stop the supply of arms to all parties in the conflict and to provide protection for civilians.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND CAMPAIGN FOR THEIR INCLUSION INTO ALL PARTIES' AGENDAS

1. To encourage solidarity and support civil society organizations struggling for women's rights as universal human rights.
2. To support Syrian feminists and help them to define their priorities which are then to be included in the overall political process.

3. To exert pressure on governments to push for a political and non-violent solution and for the recognition of the validity of a women's rights perspective throughout all phases of the transitional process.
4. To use their powers effectively to put pressure on all parties to start thinking about a political solution; to provide forums and a supportive environment for that purpose.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE BUILDING OF A BROADER DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM SUPPORTIVE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND TO "KEEP SYRIA UNITED IN TERRITORY AND PEOPLE"

1. To design awareness-raising activities focusing on the importance of the integration of women's rights and gender equality into the agendas and actions of all CSOs and political parties.
2. To use the media, and especially television, to promote universal women's rights and develop strategies for strengthening the cooperation between CSOs and media institutions.
3. To strengthen feminist organizations, develop networking and mutual information sharing among coalitions and initiatives working on peace and non-violent transition.
4. To build common strategies to reach out to grassroots level to debate women's rights and democracy building; to build alliances at local level, using the constitution building process to debate women's rights and gender equality.
5. To develop a sustainable plan for the integration of young people and to communicate with them by, inter alia, social networks.
6. To seek cooperation with progressive and democratic movements and organizations, political leaders and activists both inside Syria and internationally.
7. To develop mechanisms for women's empowerment with regard to their participation in political, economic and social activities; to involve especially refugees and displaced women in this process.
8. To organize hearing sessions at the European Parliament and the UNSC in cooperation with international organizations; such sessions are to focus on the need of a non-violent resolution of the crisis.
9. To organize awareness-raising activities on women's rights and other related issues in refugee camps and other temporary settlements in order to promote gender equality for the day after.
10. To include Kurdish minority in the constitution building process in order to promote their needs and rights as full-rank citizens.
11. To support the building of a broad network to work on broadening the constitution making process under the name of **Alliance for the Engendering of the Constitution**.