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النسوية السورية
THE SYRIAN WOMEN'S
POLITICAL MOVEMENT

Policy Paper

Transitional Justice from the Perspective of Syrian Women

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Please note this publication was drafted independently by SWPM based on the National Consultations; the views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of the aforementioned organizations.

SWPM National Consultations team members:

Dima Moussa, Lina Wafai, Rowaida Kanaan,
Sabiha Khalil, Shams Antar, Wejdan Nassif

Researcher: Amani Damerji

Design: Hani Mohammed

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Introduction:

Peace, justice, and democracy are as fundamental to human existence as air, water, and food. Today, some peoples in the world enjoy these values, while others fight for them; with people risking their lives to achieve them in their countries. These values are interconnected and intertwined, and one cannot be substituted for the other. Furthermore, losing one of them leads to conflicts and wars, as has happened in many countries around the world, which nevertheless were able to advance a step forward because of their insistence to obtain the right to a decent life and to realize their aspirations.

This advancement phase is referred to as "transitional justice", which, to be successful, must go through all its judicial and non-judicial mechanisms. This starts with efforts to establish serious political will and mutual trust among all sides and acknowledge that what happened in the past are human rights violations that cannot be ignored before moving on to the new foundational phase. Following that comes initiation of accountability procedures and reparations, and implementation of various forms of institutional reform and restructuring.

The United Nations defines transitional justice as "the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation."

These processes and mechanisms are often used in societies devastated by conflict or emerging from repressive rule to re-establish the rule of law and come to terms with large-scale human rights violations. They are critical tools for ensuring justice in cases of human rights violations and crimes against individuals, including sexual and gender-based violence. They can also address the inequity and injustice that lead to conflicts. Thereby, transforming these inequitable structures that fuel such violence.

According to the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the aims of transitional justice "will vary depending on the context, but have constant features," namely they all lead to general change at all levels, not just political, but also societal and cultural.

Syria has not yet reached the phase of political transition specified in the UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). However, the emphasis on transitional justice is an

urgent issue in a country that has been witnessing an ongoing conflict since 2011, high death tolls,⁽¹⁾ and various human rights violations committed by various sides. This necessitates exposing these violations, identifying the perpetrators and holding them accountable, and ensuring these violations are not repeated in the future. These issues must be addressed before any discussion of restoring civil peace and reviving coexistence in Syria, as well as the voluntary and safe return of Syrian refugees.

Syria is now divided into three control zones: areas under the Syrian regime's control; northeaster Syria under the control of the Kurdish Autonomous Administration; and northwestern Syria, which is contested by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army and other armed factions. This division necessitates addressing all violations committed by all sides, with a focus on those committed by the Syrian regime, because transitional justice measures are taken against official regimes due to easy access thereto compared to unofficial factions that can dissolve as groups and be persecuted as individuals.

A small group of the women who participated in the discussions demonstrated a clear understanding of the concept of transitional justice, whereas most of the participants did not indicate sufficient understanding of the concept in general, or its implementation mechanisms. Prior to posing questions and starting the discussion, and after providing a simple definition of transitional justice and its different manifestations, many participants expressed their concern that transitional justice would be impossible to implement in Syria without political transition. They believed the most important factor to focus on in this future path is holding accountable all those involved in violations from the various sides to the conflict, whether from the regime, which is responsible for the most violations, or other forces controlling areas outside regime control.

1- The OHCHR records the deaths of over 350 thousand people during the ten years of conflict in Syria.
<https://news.un.org/ar/story/20211083822/09/>

Methodology:

This document was based on analysis and classification of the results of dialogue sessions - which took the form of focus-group discussions - organized by the Syrian Women's Political Movement in October and November 2021. Despite logistical and security challenges, these sessions were held with 12 groups of roughly 120 Syrian women, from diverse cultural, societal, and political backgrounds. Five groups participated from areas controlled by the Syrian regime; four groups in areas not controlled by the Syrian regime; and three groups in areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The women were asked a series of open questions in the first part of the session, and their responses and reactions were noted with the goal of evaluating their opinions and perceptions of transitional justice, based on their experiences prior to the revolution and during the events that followed.

Executive Summary

1. Truth commissions:

The women who took part in the discussion sessions believed that revealing the truths was the first and most important step toward a new phase in Syria's future. The most important facts that must be revealed is the fate of the missing persons and detainees in the prisons of the Assad regime and other de facto forces. However, most of the participants expressed concern the commissions in charge of this process would be only local, despite their agreement that the commissions should not be entirely foreign. Therefore, they proposed forming mixed commissions, the majority of which would be Syrian men and women, in addition to foreign observers from countries not directly implicated in committing violations during the Syrian war.

2. Accountability and prosecutions

The women participants unanimously agreed that any path to transitional justice in Syria would be meaningless unless it included real and effective accountability for all parties involved in human rights violations. They also agreed this process should affect, first and foremost, the key figures in the Assad regime and everyone in charge of giving orders, as well as the individuals directly involved. This necessitates establishment of an impartial judicial system subject to external oversight, which depends on the success of the political transition process. Additionally, most of them agreed the accountability process should begin before political transition, using all available means and through judicial institutions in other countries that allow it.

3. Reparations for material and moral damages

The women participants believed it is important to grant the survivors adequate reparations for the violations they endured, but this process comes at a later stage after achieving more important steps. Such steps include revealing the facts as well as accountability, which achieve satisfaction and serve as moral reparation for the families of the victims. They all agreed material reparations should be prioritized for those who lost or were displaced from their homes, as well as for the children and families who lost their breadwinners.

4. Reconciliation and settlement

The participants emphasized that reconciliation with the perpetrators or those who supported them should also be linked to two steps: revealing the facts and accountability. There can be no reconciliation with those who committed grave violations, who were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent people, or who were involved in other types of violations such as forced disappearance, displacement, physical assault, torture, and rape. Reconciliation will not be possible unless these crimes are acknowledged, facts are revealed, and those responsible are held accountable.

5. Institutional reform

Most participants believed corruption impeded the work of most governmental institutions during the Assad regime's reign and most of those who joined the regime's security and military agencies had a criminal mindset. As a result, rather than being reformed, these agencies and institutions must be dismantled, i.e., restructured. As for the rest of civil institutions, they can be reformed through a process that ensures appointment of qualified people, effective participation of women, and non-marginalization of any component of the Syrian people.

6. Transitional justice and gender

Women, according to most of the participants, are most affected by the violations in Syria. As a result, they should be given special consideration in the various stages and procedures of transitional justice, particularly regarding reparations. The participants also believed ensuring women's representation in the various transitional justice implementing committees is essential to achieving justice for women in this process.

1. Truth commissions

One of the most important objectives of the transitional justice track is to reveal wrongdoings that occurred in the past, as revealing the facts is a fundamental right for individuals and societies alike. A group of women who participated in the discussion sessions believed the formation of truth commissions is the beginning of transition and change. A group of them indicated preference that this be taken up by international commissions, without participation by China, Russia, Iran, and Turkey. Such commissions should be specialized and experienced in this domain.

Another group expressed not having confidence in the integrity and transparency of any commission comprising only local members. On the other hand, another group was opposed to that opinion, as one of them stated, "the entire international community is corrupt and must be held accountable." As a result, several women suggested these commissions should be made up of Syrians and non-Syrians. Meanwhile, another group insisted the commissions should be local and they should consist "of our people who know our pain," as they put it. This means the task should be carried out by individuals who have experienced "this injustice and this chaos," and the commissions should be made up of locals who are qualified, experienced, and have not been involved in any violations; after all, as the saying goes: "locals of a place know best the back roads." According to this group, the commissions should include individuals from the various ethnic and religious Syrian components. In addition, each commission must include a former detainee and a relative of a missing person.

A third group of the women believed a comprehensive national dialogue should be held to define and select the tasks of these commissions, as well as the people who will oversee them. They also indicated the commissions should be under the auspices of the United Nations.

Since almost every Syrian family has either a detainee or a missing person, and many families have both, "a missing son and another detained," the women from all over Syria unanimously agreed that disclosing the fate of detainees and missing persons is especially important. They also believed the first step should be releasing the detainees, followed by opening all secret and known prisons and identifying those in charge. Facts related to missing persons must be disclosed as well, "where are they now, who kidnapped them, and what happened to them?", they wondered. They also emphasized the importance of disclosing information about the use of internationally prohibited phosphorous and chemical weapons, as well as information about armed factions that were working with the Assad regime.

The participants agreed that disclosing facts should result in acknowledging violations and crimes. If this stage is reached, it will be a "great achievement, because admitting a wrongdoing is a virtue."

For public institutions, changing their behavior and acknowledging the violations they had committed is one of the first steps towards material and moral reparations, as well as a factor in restoring trust in these institutions. This acknowledgement of past wrongdoings, however, must be accompanied by accountability and punitive measures to ensure the violations are not repeated. "To this day, Bashar al-Assad refuses to admit anything, despite existence of documents and photographs," one participant said. This woman, like other participants, believed acknowledging violations is essential for transition and change because it creates a sense of satisfaction in society as a whole, but it is insufficient in the absence of fair accountability. One participant said that nothing, whether acknowledging violations or accountability, will compensate Syrians for the lives lost. "This will ease anger and pain, and give little hope for the future," she said, "however, the acknowledgment will be of little value if reform and reparations programs are not implemented." Similarly, one of the women asked, "What is the use of acknowledgment when the other party does not want to offer anything in return and is not interested in changing the status quo?"

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2. Accountability and prosecutions

Accountability refers to the set of mechanisms that prevent impunity or evasion of responsibility. Accountability is within the jurisdiction of the judicial authority, which is supposed to comprise judges who did not participate in the previous era or regime, or judges who were not involved in trials of a political nature, provided they receive special training in the field of transitional justice.

The judiciary looks into "gross violations of human rights" as defined by the transitional justice law. For example, at the start of the transitional justice phase in Tunisia, grave violations were defined as "any gross or systematic attack on a human right, committed by state agencies, or by groups or individuals acting on their behalf or under their protection, even if they do not have the authority to do so. They also include any gross and systematic attack on a human right committed by organized groups. International treaties define these attacks as willful killing, rape, and any form of sexual violence, torture, enforced disappearance, execution without the guarantee of a fair trial. In addition to other violations, such as electoral fraud, financial corruption, assault on public funds, and forced migration for political reasons."⁽²⁾

Most of the women participating in the discussion sessions were emotional when they spoke about violations that they and those close to them had endured. In each session, from the different regions, at least one woman asked the same question: "Where do we begin? Should we talk about human rights violations committed by Hafez al-Assad or his son, Bashar? Or about violations that occurred in all the regions and committed by all de facto forces? We'll need days and months to list everything that had happened, is happening, or will happen in the future as long as the Syrian regime remains in power." One woman said: "collecting documentation? What will you write? We will not be able to write down everything that happened."

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The participants spoke about the violations and harms they themselves, or their families and friends had endured. They also told stories about the people who lived in the communities of origin or where they currently reside. They described a wide range of violations, some of which were grave beyond imagination; as the breach of one right leads to the breach of other rights.

2- <https://legal-agenda.com/أفخاخ-الماضي-في-مسار-المحاسبة-هل-يعود-إلى-https://legal-agenda.com/>

We will cite specific examples of such violations, including violations of civil and political rights, violations of societal and cultural rights, and violations of economic rights.

Violations of civil and political rights:

- **Mandatory military service:**

Many young men have fled Syria because they had been summoned for mandatory military service, which currently could last up to ten years. Many Syrian families were also forced to flee their homes for fear of their sons being arrested and dragged into the war. Some students even postponed their graduation from university for several years to avoid being summoned for military service. If a young man wants to be exempt from military service, he must pay a ten-thousand-dollar fine. However, if he joins the military, he will suffer either physical injuries, such as loss of limbs during service or battles, or psychological traumas resulting from constant fear and constant insults and humiliation by their superiors, as well as a sense of guilt as a result of committing crimes against civilians.

Furthermore, some de facto forces in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime have used the same tactics. These forces imposed forced conscription, as in areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration, which forced young men living in areas it controlled in northeastern Syria to carry arms, and even conscribed children⁽³⁾ during its battles against the Islamic State (ISIS), and later against the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army.

Many young men risked their lives and used illegal channel to flee, because the Syrian regime refused to give them passports; some of them were killed or died along the way.

- **Shelling and chemical weapon attacks:**

The Syrian regime bombed residential areas with a variety of weapons, including internationally prohibited chemical weapons.

A report released by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) in November 2020 documented a total of 222 chemical weapon attacks in Syria since recording the first

3- <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2018320976/03/08/>

documented use of chemical weapons in the SNHR's database on 23 December 2012 and through 20 August 2020. The report confirmed that 98% of these chemical attacks were carried out by the Syrian regime forces, while 2% were by ISIS. The report also reviewed the distribution of these attacks by year and province.⁽⁴⁾

One participant recalled being terrified when she would hear the regime warplanes. She used to look out her balcony to guess where the barrel would fall. Moments later she would hear people screaming and children crying. She would then rush to call her friends to check in on them, but communication networks would be down. "There were no hospitals because all supplies had been cut off," she said, "no medicine, no water, no food." Another participant said, "my husband, my brother, and I were in the house when we heard the sound of warplanes; moments later, one of the shells hit my house, killing my husband and brother." Another woman said, "our hearts are broken in every sense of the word. My brother, a taxi driver, was killed when a rocket struck his car; may he Rest in Peace, he had three children." Another woman said with a choke, "during a Russian attack, one of the missiles hit my uncle's car. At that time, my cousin and his seven-year-old son were standing near my uncle's car, which exploded, and the shrapnel hit my cousin, who was holding his son's hand. This child witnessed the death of his father in a most terrible way."

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There were no hospitals because all supplies had been cut off, no medicine, no water, no food.

- **Violations against peaceful protesters:**

Many participants spoke about the abuses inflicted on protesters. Everyone knew that simply participating in demonstrations could be considered suicide, because Assad's forces used live bullets to suppress protestors, in addition to threats, intimidation, kidnappings, and deliberate killings carried out by external armed agents supporting the regime.

One participant was still trying to forget the scene she witnessed from her apartment window at the start of the revolution: "a group of young people gathered that day, and as soon as their number doubled, Assad's forces arrived and surrounded the demonstration with security cars, closing all escape routes." She added, "the protestors were attacked by security forces, who beat them with their rifles' butts and batons on their heads and all over their bodies. They were then placed in security vehicles, and their fate is unknown to this day."

4- <https://sn4hr.org/arabic/202114044/20/08//>

- **Institutional corruption:**

Since the Assad regime took control of the Syrian state, its institutions gradually became corrupt hotbeds whose purpose is to serve the ruling class and protect its interests. Syria is no longer a state in the modern sense, which is centered on institutions that represent its citizens, respect and guarantee their rights, and seek to serve public interests. Several participants described Syria as "a state of gangs controlled by militias and countries like Russia and Iran, whose main goal is to achieve their own interests, something they do with Assad's approval in exchange for protection and power." One of the women said, "our lives are dominated by fear. We do not feel safe even inside our homes, because armed militias are present visibly and abundantly, there are weapons everywhere, and these militias are above the law."

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- **Deliberate killing and arbitrary arrest:**

Many of the participants recounted incidents of deliberate killing in cold blood and arbitrary arrest for no apparent reason, based solely on suspicion, or based on affiliation with a particular region. Most participants have missing or detained relatives or friends whose whereabouts they have not known in years. One of the participants said, "my cousin has been missing for the past seven years. This is unfair. We want to know where he is. Has he passed away, so we can mourn him? It is possible that he's still alive." Another added, "ISIS kidnapped my son six years ago, and I still don't know where he is."

Children, like adults, were not exempt from getting arrested. "My son was detained for three months on 'suspicion of murdering two people and manufacturing explosives'," one participant related the story of her son who was arrested at the age of 13, "we had to pay a lot of money and go through a lot of intermediaries to get him out of the security branch. Once he was out, he was banned from leaving Syria or moving around the country." Another woman recounted how her child suffered after her husband's arrest, "he repeatedly asking me 'why is my father detained? Is he a criminal? What did he do that got him arrested?', her response was that "he was unjustly arrested; he did not commit an offense against anyone."

Every time she tried to convince him that his father was innocent, he would respond, "I don't want to go to prison, because I didn't do anything either."

One of the women shared the story of her brother, who was killed in 2011 "while he was trying to rush his sick nephew to the hospital in the middle of the night. When he arrived at a Fourth Division⁽⁵⁾ checkpoint, they gave him a warning to stop, but he most likely did not hear them, and kept on going, so they opened fire at him, and he died instantly." The woman added, "in complete cruelty and disregard, they sent a delegation from the Fourth Division to offer their condolences, telling the mourners that they had asked him to stop, but he didn't comply, so they had to shoot." Another woman told the story of her husband who died under torture two months after his arrest in al-Khatib Security Branch⁽⁶⁾. "My husband was neither a revolutionary activist nor someone who carried arms. He was merely an employee who was arrested by mistake," she said. One participant said that her "husband is an opponent of the Assad regime. He was arrested 5 times. The Arab Organization for Human Rights mediated for his release. However, they arrested him again. He went through several security branches during his detention, and he was released with a travel ban for life. Now his name is circulated among all checkpoints, and of course, we were both fired from our jobs."

- **Enforced disappearance:**

Since 2011, the number of people who are missing or forcibly disappeared in Syria has surpassed 100,000⁽⁷⁾. In the beginning of the conflict, many arbitrary detention cases carried out by the regime's security services took the form of kidnappings, leaving the families of the missing in the dark about their whereabouts and fate. International calls and pressures to reveal the fate of the missing, including prominent opposition figures like Abdul Aziz al-Khair who disappeared in 2012, have been futile with the regime, which has revealed nothing.

The Assad regime was not the only side committing enforced disappearances, as a significant number of enforced disappearances were documented in various Syrian areas outside the regime control, whether areas under the control of ISIS or the Autonomous Administration. Many activists were also kidnapped in Idlib and its countryside.

5- One of the Assad regime's army's divisions tasked with the most difficult missions.

6- State Security branch 251, also known as "al-Khatib", and is located in al-Khatib area in Damascus.

7- SNHR <https://sn4hr.org/arabic/202114099/30/08//>

One of the participants mentioned the most well-known case of enforced disappearance, which took place in 2013 in an area controlled by Syrian opposition groups: the disappearance of human rights activists in the town of Duma, northeast of Damascus (Razan Zaitouneh, Nazim Hammadi, Samira Khalil, and Wael Hamada). Although Jaish al-Islam, one of the armed opposition factions that was controlling the area, had moved out of there, the fate of these activists remains unknown. "They escaped the regime areas to Duma because they were wanted by the regime's security apparatus," a woman close to the four activists said, "but what happened to them in the opposition-held areas was worse, as they completely disappeared and there is no information of their fate to date."

Violations of societal and cultural rights:

- **Losing the will to live:**

One of the participants recalled some direct messages sent by the Mufti of Syria, an ally of Assad and the most senior Sunni Muslim representative in Syria, when he said, "the refugees should know they will not find anyone to pray for them." She added, "he delivered his message forcefully and confidently. This means they have decided our fate: the refugees will remain refugees, the homeless will remain homeless, and the IDPs will remain IDPs."

The violations continue and the damages grow day after day. According to one of the participants, "every day, we hear about a tragedy; we can no longer listen to the news because there is no good news; news of death is chasing us all the time, our own and that of our young men. Our country has been violated, and our young men have died." She then spoke about her daughter, who is going through a difficult psychological crisis, "she sought help from a number of psychiatrists. She always had the feeling that death was chasing her and that she would die soon." A woman talked about her son, a high school student, who constantly repeats phrases indicating hopelessness and the only way out is to leave the country. One participant, a pharmacist, stated, "young people in their twenties or less are in a state of completely loss. Unfortunately, this is the war generation. They come to the pharmacy to obtain antidepressants, sedatives, and sleeping pills."

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- **Grave exhumation:**

Even the dead were not spared the Syrian regime's abuses. "What does it mean that the regime's army digs up the graves of our dead and our martyrs? What does this mean?" one of the women asked, "despite all the pain and sorrow we have experienced, the most heinous images were those of the regime army exhuming graves. They filmed themselves laughing and bragging about their actions."

- **Raiding IDPs' homes and violating their privacy:**

Some of the participants said they had to leave their homes quickly after the regime's army entered the areas in which they lived, and they did not have time to pack their belongings. When they were able to access the internet the next day, they were surprised to see pictures on social media of soldiers carrying women's underwear; in each of those images they had tagged the husband of the women whose underwear they were holding. Other women said that raiding their homes took place in areas outside the regime's control. Many confirmed the process of raiding homes and displacing their owners was also carried out by all de facto forces.

- **Forced displacement:**

The participants recounted stories of many people who had been forcibly evicted from their homes. One participant quoted her neighbor, who had been forcibly displaced from her city, as saying, "she was pregnant. She gave birth because of the exhaustion and fear she experienced on the road. The baby died three days after being born." Another woman said, "I was forcibly displaced from my home four years ago. To date, I don't know anything about my home; I left everything I owned and we took off."

After things became complicated, and during the successive events since 2011, parents' only concern has been to save their children and get them out of Syria at any cost, particularly young men wanted for military service. "We sent our children away when they were young; we know nothing about them, and today they talk to us like strangers," one participant said. "We tell ourselves that we must send our children away; that is better than seeing us humiliated daily in order to obtain our most basic right, which is a loaf of bread," another participant added.

- **Movement restrictions within Syria:**

Since 2011 it has become difficult to travel freely among Syrian cities, due to the country's division into three areas of control and the resulting displacement. This has exacerbated the already-existing problems for Syrians, adding more complications at all levels. One of the women shared a story about a neighbor who had been brutally abused by her husband. The woman was unable to seek divorce because she could not return to her parents as she could not go to their city. She also needed to go there to help her elderly parents and disabled sister, as they had no one else with them. Another woman described the suffering for those who lived in ISIS-controlled areas: "everyone knew that women had suffered twofold under ISIS control. Many of them did not leave their homes at all. Women were particularly humiliated and denied education," she explained, adding with a choke, "it took me seven years to graduate college. My sister, however, was a Civil Engineering student at the time; although she had finished four years, she was able to graduate, which caused her to become very depressed, and she was admitted to hospital, where she died a day later."

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everyone knew that women had suffered twofold under ISIS control. Many of them did not leave their homes at all. Women were particularly humiliated and denied education.

The reasons for restricting movement within Syria vary, but the most prominent was the prosecution of activists, by the different de facto forces, in the regime-controlled areas or in areas outside the regime control. No one who opposed the authority controlling the area dared to enter it. Furthermore, the establishment of crossings in northern Syria between regime-controlled and opposition-controlled areas exacerbated the situation. One recent example is Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) prohibiting Syrians from entering the areas they control, except those with deeds for real estate in the area or who are registered in the civil records there.

- **Violations of children's rights and the right to education:**

Children and young people were subjected to numerous violations and were victims of family disintegration because of the conflict or the arrest of a parent. Additionally, many children became orphans, where there are cases of children who lost both of parents. According to a 2013 UNICEF report, there approximately one million children among refugees without their parents. However, since the start of the popular uprisings

against the regime in March 2011 to date, the right to education has been subjected to systematic and ongoing violations. According to the aforementioned UNICEF report, 2.2 million children were out of school inside Syria, with roughly half a million of others among refugees. At the time, the majority of the children were in their second or third year out of school (we do not have new and reliable statistics for school dropout rates). All of this was due to several factors.

According to some of the participants, parents were afraid to send their children to school because of the siege, the security situation, and the deliberate targeting of schools. The children's psychological state was also very difficult. One of the participants, a university student who lost her brother in 2013, described a difficult psychological crisis that she and her family went through. In addition to losing her brother, she and her family were forcibly displaced from their city, lost all their possessions and livelihood, and as a result, she and her younger brother failed school. Another participant mentioned that her sister was studying Kurdish⁽⁸⁾ in school and did not speak Arabic well; after they were forcibly displaced, her sister's "was out of school for a long time". Another woman talked about her friend's 16-year-old daughter who faced the same issue and was forced to leave school to work in a sewing workshop due to forced displacement; she could not adapt to the new curriculum or school, as her Arabic language skills were limited.

Violations of economic rights:

• Forced eviction from one's home:

Many Syrians have been forcibly displaced and had to abandon their homes. "All of our past hard work was in vain," one woman said. Another wondered "How will we get the squatters out of our homes? The regime has systematically impoverished people at all levels, but all de facto forces have committed this as well. They simply want to limit us to be thinking about getting our bread." In addition, one of the participants said, "Why was my house burned twice? I don't have any children, who would be accused of participating in any protest. We had to leave the house, and when we returned, it had been completely burned. It was set on fire again while we were in it." One woman told the story of her uncle, whose home had been seized, "my uncle had to go to

8- The People's Protection Units (YPG) made Kurdish the official language in Afrin when it was under their control. When Turkish-backed factions took control of the area, Arabic language curricula were imposed. This was a challenge for children who had previously only received Kurdish education. Furthermore, secondary and intermediate education certificates issued by that administration are not recognized by universities in regime areas, nor by universities in neighboring countries.

Jordan for a while and when he returned, he was surprised to find the lock on the door had been changed, another family was living in his house, and his belongings had been sold by the squatters. He went to court with his deed, but discovered that the squatters had falsified a deed, and the judge ruled in their favor." Another participant said, "we were robbed by both sides."

- **Cutting down trees and stealing crops:**

One of the women told the story of her uncle's family, who had 100 olive trees. "Not long ago, 100 armed men stormed the farm, located in an area controlled by opposition factions. They stole the entire olive harvest, leaving him with nothing. My uncle and his kids stood watching from afar, because if they did anything, they would be dead today," she explained.

Another woman, who was displaced with her family from the town of Saraqib, of which the regime restored control in 2018, recalled a similar incident, but this time it was by regime soldiers who cut down olive trees. "Do you know why they cut down trees? Because they understand that land is like our child, we care for it as we do with our children, and we rejoice when it gives back to us," she said. Another woman said in agony, "majority of people own olive vineyards that cost them millions. Trees need a lot of time and care; they're like our souls."

No transitional justice without political transition:

There were many stories, but the women's suffering and demands were consistent and clear: to see all those who violated their rights held accountable. When we discussed accountability, most women from the various Syrian regions asked, "who will hold whom accountable? Will the Assad regime hold itself accountable? Will the violators and torturers hold themselves accountable?"

According to all participants, Syria needs general change, from top of the pyramid to its base. Real accountability requires achieving political transition; otherwise, the country

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Do you know why they cut down trees? Because they understand that land is like our child, we care for it as we do with our children, and we rejoice when it gives back to us.

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who will hold whom accountable? Will the Assad regime hold itself accountable? Will the violators and torturers hold themselves accountable?

will suffer the "same fate as Lebanon." According to one of the women, after the Lebanese civil war ended, "amnesty was issued for all the crimes that had occurred, and today Lebanon is no better than it was during the civil war." Another woman asked, "can we have accountability without sovereignty?" While another believed "that the day will come, whether after twenty or thirty years." Accountability for the participants is "a little bit of justice and a little bit of dignity." It must be achieved one day so that "we can feel as if we have triumphed in the end."

"We are tired, and we have the right to rest; accountability will bring us comfort," said one woman. Most of the participants agreed with a participant who said, "we don't want revenge," and agree with another who said, "we will continue to feel we have been wronged if accountability is not achieved. An entire society feels it has been wronged." Another group of women believed accountability fosters "security, stability, and fulfillment." Some believed it is a form of "rehabilitation" and is a way to solidify justice in society because "everyone should know their boundaries and not go beyond them," as they said, because "if the oppressor persists in his oppression, he will think that he is right; this is because we kept quiet."

Steps of accountability:

Most of the women who participated in the discussions agreed the situation in Syria is complicated, but it must be resolved as soon as possible. Accountability was the first topic they brought up when discussing change and the future in Syria, since accountability, for them, is the beginning of a solution that "will calm souls." As an example, one participant told the story of her husband, an elderly man who was arrested and tortured for no apparent reason for a year. "He will never forget the face of the person who tortured him," the woman said. On the other hand, the participants agreed unanimously that accountability, particularly at the local community level, would protect people "from revenge and reduce hatred."

Accordingly, the women from the various Syrian regions had a clear idea of the steps of accountability. However, before delving into these steps, the beginning of this process must be clearly identified. According to a group of women, the accountability process should begin with holding "al-Assad, the head of the regime," accountable, followed by "senior members of his regime." As for the next phase, as a group of women suggested, should be forming a truth commission, along with another commission to document the work of the first. The truth commission will identify those who have been harmed or against whom violations were committed. The commission is required to

"conduct many interviews with the families of the missing, detainees, and martyrs." Simultaneously, the role of the documenting committee will be to document all the procedures followed during the fact-finding process with the victims' families (videos, photographs...) and prepare complete dossiers.

After identifying the violators, the truth commission must contact those accused of violations and convince them to admit the damages and violations they have committed. This is the most difficult phase, and the commission will face a slew of challenges and threats. Some of the accused will undoubtedly try to evade responsibility, but if the truth commission does its job perfectly and collects all documents and evidence incriminating them, it will be difficult to avoid punishment, even if the violators refuse to confess to their crimes. Following that, preparations for the lawsuits begin, followed by reparation programs for both material and moral damages.

Prosecutions:

Prosecutions have several levels, some of which can begin before political transition, such as personal lawsuits filed by plaintiffs, individuals or groups, living abroad, against defendants also living outside Syria, in countries where domestic laws providing such a right.

Due to the complexities of the Syrian situation, it is not possible to resort to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the International Court of Justice, because this requires the state to make such a request or be a signatory to the ICC statute; and this does not apply to Syria.

Another option, which is to resort to the Security Council, is obstructed by Russia's and China's support for the regime, as well as their use of the veto over any draft resolution against it. As a result, prosecution of the current regime in international courts can only take place after being no longer in power.

A group of the women believed that lawsuits should be filed against the violators prior to political transition, because the violations increased over time in the absence of accountability. It is critical to put an end to these violations, particularly in less complex cases like inheritance, real estate, theft, and others. As for cases related to torture, murder, and arrests, these crimes go beyond the legal definition of the crime, because the most heinous violations occur in detention centers. As a result, such cases require special courts, which may be international or mixed.

Another group of participants believed Syria is currently in a "real dilemma, and acquiescence will cost us more if we do not act today." Other women believed there would be no political transition if everyone remained silent and did not take action and expose the violations and the damages they have endured. "Should we wait till after the political transition in order to expose the violations and crimes committed against our families, relatives, and friends?" some women wondered. In this regard, one woman stated she was sexually harassed by a cleric and decided to sue him, but her family strongly disagreed with her out of fear of the social "stigma." However, she insisted and filed a lawsuit, and the cleric was punished.

One of the women told the story of her husband, who was arrested for no reason and was subjected to severe torture during his detention. When she went to the judge, he told her, "your husband had confessed to the crimes he committed," she responded by saying, "but my husband is innocent, and if he confessed, it was certainly because he was being tortured." This group of women agreed the Assad regime has control over all state institutions, not just the judiciary.

These examples and stories the women told may only be a small part of what is going on. Some of them wondered if "all Syrian judges are evil, with no exceptions?" However, some of them believed that there are surely few judges who are not happy with what has happened and is happening in Syria, and that some work quietly and secretly for the benefit of the oppressed. If honest people stand in solidarity with one another, the regime will be under pressure. "It is true that our cases will be in courts for a long time, and we will face violence," the women said, "but if we remain silent and submit to injustice, we will suffer even more."

They believed that if Syrians remain silent and rely on the passage of time to address such issues, that will only serve the regime, which is now "restoring its false legitimacy" before the world. One evidence of this is the regime restoring relations with countries such as Jordan, the UAE, and others. The women unanimously agreed on the importance of achieving political transition, reforming the judiciary, building dossiers, and filing lawsuits against the regime, as these steps will provide an important source of documentation, continuing these cases, and issuing fair verdicts.

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Many women, on the other hand, objected to this idea out of fear, saying that filing lawsuits under the existing security authority would expose people to danger and possibly new violations. As a result, the fear of retaliation prevents them from even considering resorting to the judiciary, demanding rights, or even discussing the violations that had occurred, because "real political change" is needed. "Who will protect us if we expose the violations and injustices we have endured?" the women asked. This group of women believed that it would be better to wait until the political transition takes place, because the first step should be identifying the main perpetrator: "The one who still clings to power today."

One of the women asked, "can I sue Assad in the courts he controls? Certainly not, because I will be immediately arrested." Another said, "merely talking about violations or injustice, undoubtedly gets the person to more of this injustice." Another woman adds, "we have lost faith in the judicial system since this regime came to power. The judiciary has become corrupt, and we must pay a lot of bribes. As a result of such chaos and lack of independence of Syria's judicial system, many people settle their disputes on their own, and there are many cases of vengeance." Another group of women pointed out that political transition should not be limited to the head of the regime, as there are many other sides that must also be prosecuted. Hence, a group of them proposed forming a special judicial committee comprising local and international members to prosecute criminals.

The participants emphasized that the role of the truth commission is critical, and those in charge of this task must be chosen with care and ensure they are competent because this commission will assist the judiciary in uncovering facts and issuing fair judgments. "We have to reach that stage in the end," one participant said, "after all the chaos, damages, and violations that have taken place in Syria since Assad the father took over the power." Another participant stated that after achieving political transition, the first and most important concern is "trying everyone fairly." Another woman added, "we want justice in Syria, and every criminal should get the punishment he deserves. For example, theft is not the same as killing, and a jailer who helped detainees is not the same as a jailer who was torturing them, so caution must be exercised when the time comes."

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A group of the women believed it would be better if the trials are local, where Syrian judges known for being honest are appointed, because they are familiar with the

peculiarities of Syrian society. In this regard, several women echoed the phrase "no one understands pain better than those who have endured it." Some of them considered that "a citizen of our country is the only one who is able to respect our customs and traditions, and feel the pain and injustice we have endured."

Concerning trials outside Syria, a group of the women believed that while European courts might be fair, they might not be able to deal with the violations suffered by the Syrian people. An example is the Koblenz trial, which some women saw as a good move. Some wonder though "if its objective is really the interest of the Syrian people". This group believed the Europeans are "only concerned with the interests of their societies," and improving the conditions in the Middle East is not among their priorities. From their perspective, European countries are just, but their justice is "only within their own," and they may contribute to achieving justice in other countries if it is aligned with their interests.

One of the women cited as an example the case of Rifaat al-Assad, brother of former President Hafez al-Assad and uncle of Bashar al-Assad. Rifaat was recently tried in France on a variety of charges, including "graft." Nonetheless, he fled France and returned to Syria after the regime granted him permission. "He bombed Hama and committed massacres there in the 1980s, and before fleeing Syria, he stole the entire state treasury. Everyone knows this, even the Europeans," a woman said, "however, they allowed him in despite knowing he was a dangerous criminal. He lived in luxury and invested in numerous major projects in Europe with the Syrian people's money." Another woman referred to Caesar's Law as an example, "what happened after all these documents and photos were collected? They imposed sanctions; we were impressed at first because it was a positive step, and we expected more change. Unfortunately, it became clear after a while that the sanctions harmed the Syrian people far more than the regime."

Based on these examples, this group of participants does not trust trials in Europe or elsewhere outside Syria. Rather, they saw these trials must be local and public, and should be broadcast live on television. Although some of them agreed commissions and trials should be held locally in general, others believed that the means of justice are not yet available in Syria and will take a long time to build; thus, European and international trials are the best option, first because they are fair and by an impartial side, and second because they have the expertise, experiences, and specialists.

3. Reparations for material and moral damages

Reparation programs seek to meet the basic needs of survivors of grave human rights violations while contributing to rebuild citizens' trust in their institutions, which has a positive impact on the process of reintegrating survivors and those affected into society.

According to the 2006 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) booklet titled, *Rule-of-Law Tools for Post-Conflict States - Reparations programs*: "Under international law, gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law give rise to a right to reparation for victims, implying a duty on the State to make reparations."⁽⁹⁾ Among the fundamental reparations measures, according to the OHCHR, are: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition.⁽¹⁰⁾

According to some participants, nothing can help the survivors to go back to how they were before the violations. Reparation programs will not turn back time or give back the years spent and under torture in detention centers, and "no amount of money or any other form of compensation can possibly bring back a father, mother, daughter, or son, or ease or erase the pain they have endured."

A group of participants stressed that without accountability, reparation programs would be meaningless. "We must have accountability first, then we can move on to other procedures and mechanisms," one woman said. In their opinion, the most important aspect of compensation was "getting back the state funds plundered by the corrupt to the Syrian people; these funds are rightfully theirs." One of the participants added, "the Assad regime has robbed the country for years." One woman suggested that, at first, compensation should be done collectively through the "seizure of both movable and immovable assets, and that all corrupt people be held accountable, and returning the stolen money to the state treasury." In addition, one of the participants proposed the reconstruction of people's homes so that the displaced can return to their towns and home, as well as developing the most affected areas and areas that have been marginalized in the past.

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We must have accountability first, then we can move on to other procedures and mechanisms.

9- <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47ea6ebf2.html> (p7)

10- Ibid.

Transitional justice measures, according to all participants, are not **"a magic wand that will erase the wounds of the past."** Putting in place transitional justice mechanisms is a difficult process and requires time and patience. There is also a large number of victims, survivors, and war-wounded. Thus, a compensation commission should be formed, because it is possible to **"only compensate people who have suffered serious violations."** Accordingly, the women believed each case should be thoroughly evaluated to determine the appropriate amount and type of compensation based on the damages and harm suffered by the person. For example, **"children and children of war victims should be given priority in compensation."**

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Most of the women believed that the state should cover all the orphans' needs, including monthly stipends, as well as for people with permanent disabilities as a result of torture in detention centers or were wounded in shelling or the war. Furthermore, many of the women stated that many people had lost their homes due to shelling, or lost everything they owned, including the deeds to their homes, and some incurred financial losses as a result of displacement. According to the women, the cases of these families must be evaluated to assess the damages they have suffered, and appropriate compensation should be provided to them. One of the participants believed that the damages are massive, and the state budget could not possibly compensate everyone. **"In the new Syria, the government must reach an agreement with private construction companies to construct buildings as compensation for families who have lost their homes,"** she said, **"and the residents may pay a symbolic rent for twenty years, after which the apartment becomes their own."** It is possible to offer financial compensation or easy-to-pay loans to people who have lost their business, especially small-scale business owners.

In terms of moral compensation, most participants stated they would not accept any compensation unless **"Syria is free."** Others stated that **"until Syria is a secular democracy"** and **"the perpetrators are held accountable; this is the moral compensation we would accept."** While many of the women emphasized the importance of changing educational curricula, particularly history textbooks because the Assad regime teaches children about **"the regime's genius and its false glories, the October War, and the Golan Heights, which the regime refuses to admit it had sold."** Furthermore, children

are being taught nowadays about the regime's victories in the battles of Duma."⁽¹¹⁾ The participants believed that future generations must know the truth about what happened in Syria, as well as "about the Syrian revolution for freedom and justice, and about the heroes and revolutionaries who lost their lives to achieve that." They added that "history books should lay the groundwork for the future that Syrians dream of, and not just to tell history."

Additionally, one of the participants suggested the first act of reparation should be to honor the memory of Hamza al-Khatib, the first child victim killed in Syria, by naming a school after him. Some of them proposed establishing a school for children with special needs or those who suffered war injuries. Martyrs' names may be given to schools, parks, hospitals, streets, and charitable organizations, in addition to commemorating a day in memory of war victims, dedicating a museum to the revolution, and a museum of detention centers to display the stories of detainees.

11- The town of Duma, located in Damascus' countryside, witnessed popular protests against the Assad regime and was out of its control, before being subjected to a siege that lasted for years and violent attacks, including attacks with chemical weapons, and later displacement of its residents in 2018.

4. Reconciliation and settlement

Reconciliation is considered one of the most important and difficult transitional justice mechanisms, and it is the ultimate goal of societies that have inherited a past filled with abuses, injustice, or lived under repressive dictatorial regimes. Reconciliation is closely linked to the surrounding context, as well as to each society's cultural, political, historical, and economic framework. Thus, defining the meaning of reconciliation and how to implement it is difficult, because this mechanism necessitates numerous national consultations and dialogues with all components of society to ensure its realization. In order for reconciliation to be real, apologies and acknowledgments of violations must be effective and genuine, recognizing the violations suffered by those who were harmed and holding the violators accountable.

Most of the women believed that "there is no reconciliation or settlement without political transition, holding the violators accountable, and admission of wrongdoing." One of the women stated, "we will not be able to reconcile or forgive. How can we expect mothers, fathers, and children to forgive those who killed their children or parents? That will be very difficult." Another participant added, "the use of these two concepts, reconciliation and settlement, is provocative and annoying although necessary to stop the killing and this chaos," and the right moment will come for us to "put salt in the wound", but "how will we accept it?"

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One of the participants spoke about what happened in Daraa, "a fragile reconciliation took place, or more correctly a settlement, and after a while a campaign of assassinations against officers in the Free Syrian Army took place." Another woman added in this regard, "after the settlement, the regime's army entered Daraa, arrested and insulted people, and looted their homes. We used to complain about the Free Syrian Army, then we remembered the regime is much worse."

According to one participant, the compulsory reconciliation that Daraa residents were forced to accept does not fall under transitional justice. "Such model of fragile reconciliations and settlements will not be an accepted model in the reconciliations that will take place during the transitional justice process," she said. However, the time for real reconciliation will certainly come when the first condition, political transition, is met and then transitional justice will take its course. Another participant added, "we will start over. We will forgive and reconcile only at the societal level. In the end, we all suffered harm and pain, and we all lost. However, the criminals whose hands are

covered in blood must be held accountable, and people must be compensated for the material damages they have suffered." In this regard, a group of participants noted that community reconciliations are necessary. However, the political crisis is more serious than societal problems. The major issue is that politics control society. "There are families who fled to other Syrian provinces, and they were forced to live in our homes and use our things. They were forced to do that," one participant said. This lady described her own experience, "my house is in Afrin, and the family who lived there is from Ghouta. We are in constant contact, and after learning about the mother's story and suffering, it became clear to me that my suffering pales in comparison to what happened to her. That's why I forgive her because she was forced to live in my home."

Since former President Hafez al-Assad took power, the Syrian regime has sought to sever the Syrian social fabric by rewarding corruption in state institutions and motivating and training police and security personnel to further oppress the people. It also worked to break society's cycle of solidarity by punishing and arresting anyone who defends the oppressed or dares to criticize the authority's violations of people's rights. Some of the participants believed people have been "manipulated" and "discord has spread among the people." All Syrians have been harmed, without exception. As such, one of the participants saw the need for "achieving societal reconciliation in order to rebuild a sound homeland for future generations."

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sound homeland for future generations.

5. Institutional reform

Institutions in dictatorial regimes become paralyzed and controlled by the ruling elite affiliated with the governing authority, therefore, institutional reform is one of the most important mechanisms in the transitional justice process. If the state institutions were independent, effective, and fair, all these grievances would have not accumulated, and Syrians would have not lost trust in them. As a result, the concept of reparations is inextricably linked to the reform of state institutions. The challenges of institutional reform include acknowledging past violations committed by the state, formulating and drafting national memory, restoring rights, and ensuring non-repetition. The United Nations regards this as an essential aspect of institutional reform, stating "Public institutions that have contributed to the perpetuation of conflicts or repressive regime must be transformed into institutions that support peace, protect human rights, and foster a culture of respect for the rule of law. Institutional reform enables transitional governments in the post-conflict phase to prevent future human rights violations, by reforming or establishing public institutions that are fair and effective." (United Nations 2010.)

According to the ICTJ, institutional reform "includes the oppressive state's institutions—such as the armed forces, police, and judiciary—for the purpose of dismantling – using the appropriate tools – the structural violations mechanism and avoiding recurrence of gross violations of human rights and impunity."⁽¹²⁾

Participants unanimously expressed their lack of trust in Syrian institutions, stating they "require radical restructuring." "How can we trust such institutions while they are controlled by one person? Are there even institutions in Syria!?" some of them wondered. Many of them demanded these institutions be dismantled and completely restructured when political transition begins, particularly security institutions. A group of the women emphasized the importance of dismantling and restructuring all institutions closely linked to the Assad regime, particularly those "with blood on their hands" and implicated in violent repression, such as the police, security forces, military, and judiciary.

However, a group of the participants believed that reforming institutions would be better than dismantling them. One of the women gave an example in which she asked, "do we cut down a large tree and plant a smaller one in its place? Or do we treat it, in order to get the fruit we want? We have powerful and old institutions, but those in charge are corrupt." In this regard, one of the participants added, "state

12- <https://www.ictj.org/our-work/transitional-justice-issues/institutional-reform>

employees have an intelligence mentality; if you walk into any public institution, even for a simple issue, they have to know everything about you, just like they would in a police or military security institution. However, there are exceptions. There were non-corrupt employees who secretly were unhappy with the injustice and helped people." Nevertheless, a group of the women emphasized there are numerous stories of "God-fearing" employees, judges, and jailers, and we should not treat these employees unfairly when the time comes for accountability. The women also emphasized the importance of appointing the person with the right qualifications, education, and experiences to the right position.

One woman gave an example: "once, a veterinarian was appointed as Minister of Education," which is not unusual given the prevalence of corruption at all levels in ministries. Based on this, the women propose the formation of an independent national anti-corruption commission, as well as a special committee to assess employee qualifications, in order to put into practice "appointing the right people to the right positions."

6. Transitional justice and gender

Transitional justice mechanisms are flexible and can be gradually adapted to better serve survivors.

According to the ICTJ's Transitional Justice and Gender Program,⁽¹³⁾ "Gender-based violence is a common element between conflict and authoritarianism. In these contexts, impunity for violations against women is widespread, and at the same time, women are often marginalized, or underrepresented in efforts to address such violations." In its Rule-of-Law Tools for Post-Conflict States-Reparations Programs booklet, OHCHR recommends that reparation programs be made gender-sensitive because "The topic is so important and reparation programs have neglected it so often, that it warrants a section of its own. Even before a reparation program is designed, gender-sensitive strategies must be set in place to gather gender-specific information that will be relevant for the program downstream and to secure the participation of women in debates about the design of the program."⁽¹⁴⁾

Several questions about transitional justice and gender issues were raised during the sessions. The participants discussed the importance of designing transitional justice measures and mechanisms that consider the appropriate representation of women in all transitional justice institutions and government bodies, including leadership positions.

A small group of participants believed this is unnecessary because the violations affected everyone, men, women, the elderly, and children alike, that entire areas were affected and were victims of marginalization for years. This group of participants believed more emphasis should be placed on violations and damages suffered by the person, regardless of gender, because men or children may have been more affected than women, or vice versa. Children, women, and men were all subjected to grave violations; men, not just women, were raped in detention centers. Furthermore, the women who held this viewpoint believed it is better not to divert attention away from transitional justice mechanisms and measures by focusing on gender issues, because additional focus on gender issues and women's rights is obvious. They went on to say that, as long as reparations are proportionate to the extent of the violation experienced by individuals, there is no need to include gender-sensitive measures in transitional justice because doing so would contribute to gender inequality.

13- <https://www.ictj.org/our-work/transitional-justice-issues/gender-justice>

14- <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47ea6ebf2.html> (p37)

On the other hand, most of the women disagreed with this group's assertion that there was no need to consider a gender perspective in transitional justice. Most of the participants believed women have paid the highest price. According to this point of view, one of the women asked: "why is it that when a man is released from prison, he immediately becomes a hero in his family and society? However, when a woman is released from prison, she becomes a disgrace to her family and suffers from societal injustice." Another participant shared a story about a girl who was detained for a year and when she was released, her father killed her because of the "Stigma." One of the participants told the story of another female detainee, whose mother and the rest of her family believed her death would have been better than being released because she would face injustice from her community, possibly worse than what she experienced in detention.

The women agreed that most women in Syria "paid the price twice." Furthermore, the women stated it is extremely difficult for female detainees to talk about the violations they experienced during their detention, whereas men are not subjected to the same societal pressures. Some Syrian communities link a woman's honor with the honor of the entire family, and "any violation of a woman's body is a violation of the dignity and reputation of the family," regardless of whether the detained woman is a leader and is active in public and political affairs, or her arrest was purely coincidental or due to mistaken identity or no reason at all. Therefore, several participants proposed forming a women's committee comprising women specialized in psychological support, so that women would feel safe to testify. They also emphasized the importance of forming other committees concerned with raising awareness and providing support for the families of female survivors and the community in general, as well as providing training programs to economically empower women so they are liberated from being economically dependent on the family males, and they have more options, including the right to disclose the violations they have been subjected to and demand their rights.

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Findings:

- The women participants believe most Syrians were subjected to harm in all its different forms by the various sides to the conflict during the war.
- The participants agreed that the transitional justice process could not begin before political transition and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254.
- Most participants believed accountability is the foundation of transitional justice in the Syrian case and this path would be meaningless unless those implicated in violations and crimes were held accountable.
- Many participants agreed that prosecutions should begin even before the political transition stage, using available external means, and that the Syrian regime's judiciary or courts under the control of the de facto forces should not be involved in this process, due to their lack of integrity.
- The participants believed one of the priorities of transitional justice should be to reveal the fate of the missing persons.
- Participants indicated women should be effectively involved in transitional justice efforts because they were one of the groups directly affected by the war in Syria.
- Most of the women rejected the idea of reconciliation and settlement agreements in Syria if they were forced and under unfair conditions, as the Syrian regime did with residents of various Syrian regions.

Recommendations:

- Increase international pressure on the Syrian regime and its allies to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which calls for the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria.
- Support individual plaintiffs in filing lawsuits abroad against those implicated in violations and crimes, in countries where the laws allow it.
- Increase measures against the Syrian regime and other de facto forces to put an end to violations against Syrians across the country.
- Increase pressure on the Syrian regime and de facto forces to reveal the fate of missing persons and detainees.
- Restore Syrians' trust in the international community and the "Group of Friends of the Syrian People" by dealing with the Syrian case in a transparent and serious manner.
- Ensure women's effective participation in the political transition and transitional justice processes.
- Facilitate the recovery of money stolen from the Syrian state in order to fund reconstruction and institutional reform and restructuring.



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