

## **Letter from 93 Organizations Operating in North and Northeast Syria to Brussels Conference**

Mr. Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,

Mr. Geir O. Pedersen, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria,

Dear representatives in the Joint Commission of the European Union and United Nations organizing the Fourth Brussels Conference, representatives of donor countries and organizations,

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Since the last year, the Syrian crisis has been further worsened, and the international inability towards resolving the Syrian issue has become more present. This resulted in creating difficult humanitarian conditions, such as destruction, displacement and impediment of the political process in Syria among all the conflicting parties in the country.

We, the ones who are working in the Syrian civil society organizations and institutions operating in Syria, and the signatory on this letter, believe in the necessity of a political solution in accordance with the path of the Geneva Conference and international resolution (2254), as the only way to resolve the Syrian issue. We reject violence in all its forms, and we condemn the use of all internationally prohibited weapons by all parties.

We would like to recall the necessity of stopping all military operations by all the local, international and regional conflict parties, forced displacement, expulsion of indigenous people from their regions, as well as stopping demographic change operations, eliminating its effects, compensating the victims, and condemning all human rights violations in the Syrian territories. In addition to work to ensure the return of indigenous peoples to their regions and provide rapid support to the population, internally displaced people and refugees in neighboring countries, especially those residing in camps. And to work to end all occupations on the Syrian territories, particularly the Turkish occupation which mainly supports extremist Syrian militias, which in turn, have been committing massive violations against the Syrian people in Afrin, Ras al-Ain, and Tal Abyad, and press for all foreign militias to be removed from Syria, while we emphasize the need to maintain the Syrian territories' unity.

We would also like to stress the need for all parties to the conflict in Syria to adherence of International Humanitarian Law rules, and shank the civilians from the dangers of indiscriminate bombing and military operations and stopping them, as well as working on providing the urgent

needs of the internally displaced people who reside in the camps, within the country and in neighboring countries.

### **Health Sector:**

NES region recently had been attacked by the Turkish military which resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and has destroyed the infrastructure in all sectors, including health and education sectors, at a time when the region has not yet recovered from the devastation left by the war against ISIS and other jihadi organizations.

Therefore, we like to stress the need for coordination between international donors and organizations working in health sector in Northern and Northeastern Syria, to provide rapid support to health sector in a geographical area that constitutes 30% of the Syrian geography, and develop the infrastructure of the health sector to respond to crises, where Covid-19 experience had demonstrated the poor capabilities available in the region to deal with epidemics.

Civil organizations believe that it is essential to promote health sector through development projects and centers for treating cancer and chronic diseases, and to support the provision of medicines and medical devices. Similarly, support the health sectors to provide the necessary care to individuals affected by the war and its remnants in the region, and put pressure on the actors in the Syrian affairs to open humanitarian crossings between north and northeast of Syria with the neighboring countries.

### **Women Sector:**

Women issue, in the Syrian conflict, is one of the most important issues that needs to be internally supported because of the massive violations, such as kidnapping, rape, verbal and physical abuse, that have occurred by some parties to the conflict, particularly the extremist armed groups.

Within this context, it is important to provide the urgent support to reduce violations against women in the areas occupied by Turkey, such as Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad in Al- Hassakah and Raqqa governorates, Afrin in Aleppo and other Syrian towns. Furthermore, it is important to address and stress on women's development projects and psychological support projects, as well as activating their role in political and civil life, and enhancing their participation in decision-making in Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, Al-Hassakah and Northern Syria.

It is also significant to focus on the women affected by military operations, re-supporting them, rehabilitating them, and compensating them for the violations that had been committed against them.

### **Education Sector:**

The educational process in Syria has gone through very difficult circumstances and the educational curriculums were diversified in the governorates of Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, Al-Hassakah and Aleppo, with the multiplicity of the military forces controlling the region, and hundreds of thousands of children were deprived of education rights completely for many years. The educational infrastructure was destroyed as a result of bombing the schools, and educational facilities in the area were used as military headquarters and refugee shelters, and the emergence of the Coronavirus has further complicated the educational process.

It is important for the international community to pressure the United Nations organizations to recognize the educational achievement and educational certificates, sponsor them, support and develop an educational curriculum and provide the necessary logistical support for the continuation of the educational process as the Coronavirus pandemic continues to spread, as well as providing university scholarships for Syrian students, and ensuring adequate support for education in refugee and IDPs camps in North and Northeastern Syria.

Similarly, it is important to pressure to support the education process in the Kurdish and Syriac languages, along with the Arabic language as basic languages, as well as other local languages of the North and Northeast regions of Syria and to rehabilitate children who joined the military to engage them in civilian life and ensure their education rights.

We also believe that it is necessary to pressure the conflict parties to neutralize educational centers from the ongoing military conflict in the country and to support development projects to the rehabilitation of the educational infrastructure.

### **Protection Sector:**

The region has suffered from adverse security conditions since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, where there have been extensive disagreements between the different parties of the conflict, the war against jihadi organizations in particular. During the past two years, the Turkish attack on Afrin, Ras Al-Ain, and Tell Abyad has brought back that suffering. It also, has exerted pressure for the prevention of humanitarian and relief aid access to the region after the local population had lived a kind of security stability.

Therefore, the protection file features as a top priority, which must be worked on, in order to guarantee ongoing stability, remove all remnants of the conflict, and the remnants of the war against the Islamic State *ISIS*, in addition to working on ensuring they never return.

Similarly, it is crucial for the international bodies to train the teams specialized in demining mines left by the war in the region. Also, to provide sufficient support to organizations and individuals view to work on the files of detainees and abductees of the different parties of the conflict.

Likewise, to support protection sector in the region and support the delivery of individuals official identity documents, establish DNA laboratories for the corpses of war victims, and work on the completion of the process of returning citizenship to those who were stripped of it according to the iniquitous extraordinary census of the year 1962. Those who were unable to finish the proceedings for providing their identification documents due to security prosecutions and the state of military conflict. As well as, compensation for those affected by the damage caused by being stripped of their identification documents, having their properties seized, depriving them from job opportunities, employment, and studying. In addition to stressing the necessity of reassuring the right of the undeclared nationality people to regain their nationality and settle their legal status and its results and modification of the legal adaptation of the totality of those stripped of citizenship according to the aforementioned census based on (restoration of the nationality) and not granting it.

### **The Societal Cohesion Sector:**

The societal cohesion and justice issue are considered as one of the most fundamental ones that must be worked on in the entire Syrian geography, and in particular the North and Northeast Syria regions. Taking into consideration the considerable societal intersection between nationalities, ethnicities, sects, and religions in the region. Therefore, it is essential to concentrate on relations and interactions within the society, and it is also necessary to work on establishing a civil political system based on the principles of equality, justice, and parity.

Taking this into consideration, we find an urgent need for the international community to work to help organize an international court to prosecute perpetrators of war crimes by different armed parties. In particular the Islamic factions supported by Turkey and the Islamic State "ISIS". As well as, the establishment of special committees supported by the international community to pursue the files of missing, detainees, and kidnapped persons. Consequently, holding those responsible for their disappearance accountable.

Supporting truth and inquiry committees and the competent authorities in the field of civil, societal, and religious peace. Also, identifying the underlying causes of the conflict and marginalization in addition to removing the causes of division by supporting civil projects concerned with this issue and provide a full understanding of the aspects of justice and equality. Thus, achieving a comprehensive, just, sustainable, and appropriate solution that guarantees the rights of all Syrians, with their national, religious, and sectarian diversity, as well as documenting them in the new Syrian constitution.

It is also important for the international community to focus on supporting contributions that seek to bring women to justice in work, employment, education, legal and societal issues. Likewise, to eliminate all depictions of violence against women, and those projects related to the protection

of minorities; in particular Yazidis and Christians, and the protection of property of the displaced, expatriates and refugees.

### **On the Issue of Refugees and Internally Displaced People:**

One of the most fundamental issues generated by the war in Syria is the one of Syrian IDPs and refugees, who live inside and outside Syria. Also, north and north-east regions of Syria are no exception to this issue. As the engagements between the different parties forced hundreds of thousands of civilians to migrate towards safer areas and settle in camps that lack the lowest qualifications of a dignified life.

Therefore, we believe that the most important files that must be supported by the international community and relevant parties are those of the displaced and refugees in north and northeast Syria. This should be applied, in an urgent manner under international supervision and control, through the support of humanitarian and relief projects, courses for improving the capacities of the displaced and refugees, psychological rehabilitation courses and service and health development projects in the camps. Especially, in light of the spread of the Corona virus pandemic.

We also look forward to the governments of the countries participating in Brussels conference to urgently introduce the international community to solve the issue related to ISIS families and children in Al-Houl camp in Hassakah governorate, in northeast Syria, and return them to their countries.

This letter represents the hopes of the Syrian citizens in North and Northeast Syria, who have gone through long years of war, and are still cautiously watching the military and political developments in the country. As well as, being subjected to violent military attacks that force them to be displaced from their homes. Also, this letter is merely an attempt to express the needs of the people and their necessary priorities, and to bypass the remnants of war that affected their social life and service circumstances. The inhabitants of this region have not yet lost the hope of victory over the war, rather they are determined to overcome it. Therefore, in order to achieve all of this today, they need real international support that paves the way to achieving a stable and secure life in a new civil political system.

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