

Recommendations of the First Syrian Conference on Transitional Justice in Syria (A Dialogue on Justice, Fairness, and Truth)

A coalition of Syrian civil society organizations, associations of survivors, families of the forcibly disappeared, and victims of various human rights violations convened the first Syrian Conference on Transitional Justice. The conference focused on justice, fairness, and truth in the aftermath of the fall of Assad's tyrannical regime, with the attendance of the caretaker government's Deputy Minister of Justice for Legal Affairs & Studies, Judge Khitam Haddad.

The discussions, held on January 24–25 in Damascus, resulted in unanimous agreement on the urgent need to initiate a legal accountability and transitional justice process. In the short term, such a process is essential to prevent the country from descending into civil conflict. In the long term, it aims to break with the era of human rights violations and establish a state based on law and fundamental rights.

To achieve a genuine and effective justice process, the following recommendations were put forward:

Urgent and Short-Term Recommendations

To the Caretaker Government:

1. Issue a constitutional declaration to fill the legislative vacuum, ensuring that any constitutional committee is inclusive and represents all components of Syria's society, without exception. This includes ethnic, religious, and minority groups, as well as victims, survivors, women, youth, refugees, and expatriates.
2. Ensure that the legal accountability and transitional justice process is independent, public, and comprehensive, holding accountable all those for whom evidence of guilt exists. The process must include mechanisms for victim redress, compensation, and guarantees against future violations. The government should also present a clear plan outlining its next steps, with a defined timeline for each phase of accountability and justice.

3. Guarantee full transparency in handling human rights cases, particularly those related to extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, forced displacement, chemical weapons attacks, and sexual violence – crimes primarily committed by the Assad regime, as well as other parties to the conflict. This transparency is essential to prevent unfair or selective practices and to build public trust by regularly providing accurate, impartial information.
4. Ensure public security and safety nationwide, implementing effective measures to curb violations and hold perpetrators accountable, particularly for crimes motivated by revenge, sectarianism, or religious discrimination.
5. Establish open and transparent communication channels with Syria's society, activating state media as a reliable source to counter misinformation, false news, and defamatory content.
6. Initiate a sustainable national reconciliation process grounded in justice, accountability, and respect for human rights, while supporting local peacebuilding initiatives.
7. Hold regular official meetings with key stakeholders, especially the families of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons – whether at the hands of the Assad's regime or other parties to the conflict – ensuring their right to reparations, acknowledgment, and memorialization.
8. Recover and safeguard lost documents and preserve evidence related to violations committed in Syria.
9. Protect mass graves, prisons, detention centers, and evidence from destruction, tampering, or manipulation, ensuring the right to identify victims and providing families with the information they need about their missing relatives.
10. Facilitate the repatriation of foreign fighters by their home countries, ensuring that those involved in war crimes are investigated and held accountable to prevent impunity. Syrian perpetrators should be tried under fair legal standards to prevent a recurrence of such atrocities.
11. Prohibit the appointment of individuals with human rights violation records to state positions, prioritizing Syrian professionals and experts to restore public trust in the government.
12. Guarantee women's inclusion in all institutions and structures established by the caretaker government and future administrations, recognizing them as equal citizens, particularly in institutions overseeing justice processes.
13. Establish a transparent relationship between civil society and state institutions, ensuring an environment where civil society can operate freely and contribute effectively, leveraging its accumulated expertise for national benefit.

To Civil Society Actors:

1. Continue documenting violations and actively participating in the transitional justice process.
2. Raise awareness of legal concepts such as transitional justice, victims' rights, human rights, citizenship, and the rule of law, along with their associated obligations.
3. Provide sustained support to victims, survivors, and witnesses, ensuring their empowerment and participation in justice processes.
4. Develop and implement strategies to protect female survivors and children of unknown parentage from social stigma.
5. Advocate for the enforcement of government transparency measures in human rights cases.
6. Expand dialogue sessions beyond Damascus to include all Syrian provinces.

Medium- and Long-Term Recommendations

To the Caretaker Government:

1. Adhere to its legal mandate and rely on qualified professionals.
2. Avoid unilaterally passing transitional justice laws; instead, develop a broad framework with the participation of all stakeholders.
3. Create conditions for the safe and voluntary return of all displaced persons and camp residents, ensuring their role in shaping Syria's future.
4. Strengthen judicial independence.
5. Recognize the Kurdish cause as a national issue and uphold equal citizenship for all Syrians.
6. Launch an inclusive national dialogue based on transparency and partnership.
7. Ensure that Syria's future constitution prevents the recurrence of violations, prohibiting the use of state institutions for repression, intimidation, or the fabrication of a legal and institutional framework that undermines rights and freedoms.

To Civil Society Actors:

1. Contribute to developing comprehensive frameworks for transitional justice, assessing ongoing efforts, and adapting them to evolving needs.
2. Advocate for transparency in national dialogue initiatives and ensure the inclusion of experts and victims' associations.
3. Promote awareness of transitional justice as a long-term process.
4. Improve coordination between institutions working on transitional justice, enforced disappearance, and related sectors, such as medical organizations.
5. Expand dialogue to include a broader segment of victims and directly affected individuals.
6. Mainstream a victim- and survivor-centered approach across all civil society activities and programs.

In conclusion:

The Assad regime's half-century of authoritarian rule has come to an end, presenting us with a rare opportunity to build a free Syria founded on justice and dignity – the vision we have long dreamed of. We believe that serious efforts toward justice are the only guarantee for ending the era of violations and making a definitive break from it, paving the way for a future that ensures justice for all people in Syria and establishes a state and institutions that uphold the dignity of its citizens.

Issued by the Organizing and Participating Entities in the Conference

- General Union of Internees and Detainees
- Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM)
- Badael
- Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP)
- The Female Survivors Union
- Tastakel
- Lëlûn Association for Victims
- Jawa Voluntary Team
- Release Me
- The Syria Campaign
- The White Helmets
- Dawlaty
- Synergy Association for Victims
- DAR Association for victims of forced displacement
- Caesar Families Association
- Adra Detainees Association
- Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison (ADMSP)
- Sama
- Syrians for Truth and Justice
- Oxygen Shabab
- Syrian Network for Human Rights
- Syrian Female Journalists Network
- Shams Forum
- Detainees' Voice - Save the Rest | Documentation Group in Darayya City
- Families for Truth and Justice
- Families For Freedom
- Justice For Life
- Justice and Sustainable Development
- Step for Volunteer Work Team
- Warsheh Team
- Do Not Suffocate the Truth
- Bidayetna Initiative
- Syrian British Consortium
- Homs Civil Peace Group (Seen)
- Task Force of Survivors of Chemical Attacks in Syria
- Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights
- Madaniya
- Syrian Center for Media and Freedom Expression (SCM)
- Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Researches
- Syrian Justice and Accountability Center
- Chemical Violations Documentation Center and Research
- Justice Paths (Masarat)
- Arbitrary Detention and Enforced Disappearance Victims Support Project
- Adalaty Centre
- Women Now for Development
- Nophotozone
- Health Information System Unit
- The Day After (TDA)