



The General Principles for Applying Justice, Truth, and Remedy in Syria

From the Perspective of Civil Society and Survivor Groups

First Edition of the General Principles - August 2025

● Introduction

Today, a genuine opportunity exists for Syrians to reclaim their country and outline the features of a new future and a new social contract founded upon justice, truth, accountability, and the rule of law. Seizing this opportunity necessitates a serious addressing of the legacy of authoritarianism, grave human rights violations, international crimes, and deep societal rifts caused by over a decade of conflict following decades of systematic authoritarianism and oppression.

Amid the official steps being undertaken by the transitional government on the path of justice, truth, and remedy—such as the establishment of the National Transitional Justice Commission and the National Commission for the Missing and the commencement of their operations, in addition to the issuance of Presidential Decree No. (149) appointing the members of the National Transitional Justice Commission—there arises an urgent need to establish a clear and transparent national framework for these pathways. This framework must be based on constant communication from the government and ensuring access to the necessary information. It should guarantee a comprehensive vision grounded in human rights principles and inclusive of all affected groups, while also ensuring this pathway is harmonized with other relevant steps, such as those being taken by the Ministry of Justice to hold figures of the former regime accountable.

International experiences have shown that the success of transitional justice pathways requires a comprehensive national consensus that reflects the interests of all victims without discrimination and ensures their active participation in shaping their future. In the Syrian context, where political, institutional, security, economic, and social challenges are deeply intertwined, the necessity of such a framework becomes even more pressing, serving as the guarantor for any serious and effective justice process.

Over the past years, civil society organizations and victims' families' associations have played a pivotal role through their expertise in documentation, legal support, advocacy, combating impunity, preserving collective memory, and countering attempts to close the files of violations without accountability. At this stage, despite the challenges, these entities must continue to play a vital role as the expertise, technical support, and access they bring to the table can contribute to enhancing the work of national institutions and ensuring their independence, as well as the inclusivity and fairness of the process.

Hence, it is important that civil society organizations and victims' families' associations declare a shared commitment to general principles that unify their vision and guide their collective action to achieve remedies for all victims and safeguard the dignity and rights of all Syrians without discrimination. No transitional justice pathway in Syria will succeed unless it is founded upon clear principles agreed upon by all relevant stakeholders, thereby transforming justice into a genuine instrument for building a state of equality and the rule of law.

Therefore, the undersigned civil society organizations and victims' families' associations, who contributed to the preparation of this document, concur on the General Principles listed below. These principles represent the minimum consensus required to establish a comprehensive pathway for justice, truth, and remedy in Syria—one that ensures redress for victims and their families, achieves justice, and guarantees the non-recurrence of crimes and violations in the future.

● **Commitment to an Inclusive and Non-Discriminatory Justice Pathway**

We commit to working towards ensuring that the justice pathway is founded on the principle of equality before the law; one that recognizes all victims as individuals with equal rights, irrespective of the perpetrators or actors responsible for the violations. All victims possess the full right to realize justice, know the truth, and obtain effective redress. We will work to counter any selectivity in the enforcement of justice or the granting of exceptions to specific groups, which would undermine the credibility of the process and perpetuate new grievances rather than address them. Justice, truth, and remedy are inherent rights for all victims, without any discrimination or exception. Respect for these rights forms the cornerstone of any serious and effective transitional justice process.

We commit to working to ensure the fair and inclusive representation of all victims, including groups that have suffered compounded marginalization, such as ethnic and religious minorities, and victims from areas outside state control and various conflict zones. The meaningful recognition of these groups and the guarantee of their genuine participation and equitable representation in justice processes are prerequisite conditions for achieving comprehensive justice and avoiding the reproduction of exclusion, discrimination, and violations in the future.

● **The Centrality of the Victims' Role and Their Right to Participation**

We commit to keeping victims and survivors at the heart of justice processes, recognizing them as rights-holders and key actors who possess indispensable experiences, knowledge, and community wisdom. We affirm that their role is not limited to the narration of their suffering, but extends to shaping policies, defining priorities, and recommending solutions based on their needs, priorities, and aspirations. Positioning victims at the core of justice pathways not only makes these pathways more responsive to people's realities and needs but also enhances their legitimacy, fosters broader societal trust, and contributes to building a society founded on recognition, accountability, and non-recurrence.

We pledge to strive and advocate for ensuring the meaningful, systematic, and continuous participation of victims and survivors, from the design of justice pathways and continuing throughout implementation and evaluation. We further commit to providing the necessary conditions for their empowerment by providing them with information, psychological and legal support, and by respecting their choices, boundaries, and informed consent. Engaging victims does not merely entail inviting them to participate in justice mechanisms; it means empowering them to contribute to the design of these mechanisms, partake in decision-making, and opt for pathways that reflect their own vision of justice. Participation is not a symbolic or formal matter but a legal and fundamental right and a prerequisite for achieving genuine justice.

We commit to acknowledging the pivotal role of women survivors of arbitrary detention, gender-based violence, and any other violations, as individuals with unique experience and knowledge who are capable of driving change. We will work to support initiatives led by women survivors to contribute to the development of fairer and more inclusive approaches to justice; approaches that consider local and gender-specific contexts, restore the recognition of marginalized women, and open avenues for their participation in positions of influence and decision-making.

● Affirming Women's Leadership in Transitional Justice Pathways

We commit to advancing a comprehensive transitional justice process rooted in a deep feminist understanding that recognizes the systematic violations to which women, girls, and other marginalized groups in Syria have been subjected. These violations were not limited to sexual violence alone but encompassed others such as arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, displacement, and systematic marginalization in the public sphere, particularly in political life. Establishing transitional justice from a feminist perspective constitutes an essential entry point for building a just and sustainable peace that restores women to their rightful place as essential partners in rebuilding society and the state.

We work to ensure the recognition of violations committed against women and girls, the integration of their suffering into the truth narrative, and the design of responses that are sensitive to nuances of their experiences. This is achieved by empowering women survivors to participate meaningfully in the design and implementation of justice mechanisms, from truth commissions to reparation programs and institutional reform, in a manner that guarantees their voices are heard and their leadership is realized. We affirm our commitment to challenging dominant patriarchal structures that often reproduce marginalization, and to integrating principles of gender-sensitive equality into all relevant national policies, particularly those concerned with reparations and guaranteeing non-recurrence. This includes amending discriminatory laws against women and confronting institutional violence and violence perpetrated by state institutions, to ensure that systems of injustice are not perpetuated under the cover of law or authority.

Furthermore, we commit to developing effective mechanisms to combat the stigma and discrimination faced by women survivors, support their dignified reintegration into society, and employ an intersectional approach that observes the intersectionalities between various forms of discrimination (based on gender, ethnicity, class, religion, or geographic affiliation, etc.) and violations. This ensures a transitional justice that excludes no one and does not reproduce exclusion in new forms.

As we believe that feminist transitional justice is not limited to the recognition of violations alone, but requires addressing their profound impacts on all aspects of women and girls' lives, we affirm our commitment to broadening the concept of justice to include the economic and social magnitudes. This will be achieved by ensuring economic reparations, restoring women's rights to housing, land, and property, and securing their access to resources and opportunities for dignified livelihood. We also attach paramount importance to the documentation and archiving of memory and to protecting the testimonies of women survivors from exploitation or politicization, considering this a necessary measure to safeguard the truth and pass on the experiences of women to future generations.

We call for the recognition of women as producers of knowledge and makers of policies and decisions, and for supporting the production of feminist knowledge grounded in their experiences and expertise, thereby enhancing their active presence in shaping justice pathways. We further emphasize the necessity of integrating sustainable physical and mental health services as part of reparation processes in order to address the deep trauma inflicted by the conflict.

We are keen to adopt an intersectional approach that focuses on the most marginalized women, such as those with disabilities, older people, and women in rural areas, to ensure the inclusivity of justice pathways and that no group is excluded. We also believe in the importance of linking transitional justice to legal and judicial accountability processes to ensure impunity is not an option, particularly for crimes related to sexual violence and torture, while providing the necessary protection for survivors and women human rights defenders participating in these processes from any targeting or retaliatory violence.

● Challenging Impunity

We commit to the rejection of impunity, which we hold to be an essential condition for achieving transitional justice in Syria. We affirm that no justice is possible without the serious accountability of all perpetrators of international crimes and grave human rights violations, regardless of their affiliations or positions. Comprehensive accountability is a fundamental prerequisite for restoring trust in justice, ensuring non-recurrence of violations, and entrenching the rule of law.

We commit to defending the principle of comprehensive accountability as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving a just and sustainable peace, and we reject any settlement that bypasses or bargains away the rights of victims. We affirm that any measures related to amnesty, reconciliation, or similar procedures must be assessed against transparent and fair standards through a participatory process with affected communities. This ensures respect for the right of victims to know the truth, achieve justice, and obtain reparations, and must be in accordance with international law. Furthermore, we will work to counter any attempt to reintroduce or enable any individual implicated in human rights violations or crimes to assume leadership positions without being held accountable, as this constitutes a violation and disregard for victims' rights, a threat to the justice process, and a perpetuation of a culture of impunity.

For us, the commitment to accountability and the rejection of impunity is not merely a legal demand; it is the foundation for building sustainable peace and a society based on justice and equality. We reiterate that accountability requires independent, fair, and transparent legal proceedings that meet international standards for a fair trial, guarantee victims and survivors their rights to redress and recognition, and contribute to creating a public space that allows victims and survivors to narrate their diverse experiences. This helps Syrian society confront the past and prevent the recurrence of violations. We view accountability not as a tool for retaliation, but as the only path to building a sustainable peace and a just society, one based on the recognition of violations and the meaningful participation of victims in achieving justice.

● A Justice Pathway Fully Led and Owned by Syrians

We commit to working towards ensuring that the pathways to justice, truth, and remedy in Syria are driven by genuine Syrian leadership and national efforts that stem from the priorities and needs of the Syrian people, not from premade templates or imposed models. We affirm that Syrian leadership and ownership do not mean the state or official bodies monopolizing these processes. Instead, it means that the pathways for justice, truth, and remedy must be the product of meaningful and broad participation by victims, survivors, victims'/families' associations, civil society organizations, and local communities. They are the primary stakeholders and rightful owners of these processes, possessing the full right to design the future of justice not as observers, but as active agents who hold the vision, expertise, and societal legitimacy.

Our commitment to Syrian ownership of the justice pathways does not preclude benefiting from the experiences of others who have undergone transitional justice processes. However, we will work to adapt and reinterpret these experiences in a manner congruent with the Syrian context.

● **Effective Coordination and a Collective Vision for Comprehensive and Transparent Transitional Justice**

We commit to working within a collaborative framework based on clear objectives and grounded in International Human Rights Law as the legal and ethical foundation guiding our efforts. This commitment is built on respect for the autonomy of our respective entities, the distribution of roles based on expertise and community ties, adherence to the "do no harm" principle, and the rejection of any political or symbolic instrumentalization of victims, ensuring transparency, accountability, and the right to meaningful participation. Justice, truth, and remedy in Syria cannot be achieved without a comprehensive collective vision and effective coordination among civil society organizations and victims' associations. Such coordination guarantees balanced and effective participation in the design and implementation of justice pathways, ensuring that the rights of victims and survivors remain at their core.

We commit to supporting local initiatives that emerge from within affected communities and are led by survivors, victims' families, and community leaders, recognizing them as fundamental pillars of the transitional justice process. These initiatives embody real experiences and tangible needs, contributing to the rebuilding of trust within society. We will work to ensure the integration of these initiatives into any comprehensive national framework for justice as effective partners in designing and implementing pathways to truth, remedy, and accountability.

Moreover, we aspire to a process of transparent and clear two-way communication between civil society organizations and victim groups on the one hand, and the established national bodies on the other. This is to ensure the viability of efforts and the high-level coordination required for these important issues, and to safeguard the independence of national institutions.

● **Commitment to the Right to Know the Truth**

We commit to working towards entrenching the right to know the truth as a fundamental principle of international law and a cornerstone of transitional justice processes. This right is not merely an entry point to accountability or a prelude to trials; it is an independent right in itself. It is a personal right for victims and their families to know what happened and the fate of their loved ones, and a collective right for Syrian society to know the facts behind the violations that occurred, who was responsible, and why they happened. This is essential for understanding the past and building a future based on acknowledgment. It paves the way for constructing a collective memory that helps prevent the recurrence of violations.

We commit to supporting all efforts aimed at promoting this right, whether through documenting violations, community-led initiatives to preserve memory, or participation in institutional processes related to disclosing the fate of the missing and forcibly disappeared. We are dedicated to ensuring victims and their families have unobstructed access to information, which restores the recognition of their experiences and affirms their non-negotiable right to truth and redress.

We further commit to fostering a public space to document marginalized, untold (or overlooked) narratives, and supporting the creation of archives that enable individuals and communities to understand what transpired, guaranteeing the right to knowledge for future generations. We reiterate that the right to know the truth is not achieved by constructing a single, dominant narrative, but through the recognition of plurality and the documentation of the diverse experiences of affected communities as a fundamental pillar for preventing recurrence and achieving remedy.

● **Commitment to a Just Reconstruction Process that Does Not Perpetuate Violations**

We commit to working towards ensuring that the reconstruction process in Syria is an integral part of the transitional justice pathway, founded on the principles of remedy, accountability, participation, and non-recurrence. We will work to prevent any approach to reconstruction that views it as a purely technical or economic process. Instead, we will engage with reconstruction as a political, social, and developmental act that contributes to reshaping the public sphere, memory, and national identity. It must be used as a vehicle for justice, not as a tool to reproduce marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion.

The linkage between reconstruction, community development, and the building of a democratic political life based on equal citizenship and the peaceful transfer of power is an indispensable prerequisite. Therefore, we commit to pursuing all efforts to ensure that reconstruction policies are consistent with the principles of transitional justice and are inclusive of all Syrians without discrimination. We reiterate our commitment to advocate for and work towards:

- Entrenching spatial justice through reconstruction projects that respond to the needs of affected communities and respect the rights of original inhabitants, rather than imposing centralized plans that perpetuate displacement or reproduce marginalization, exclusion, and violations.
- Ensuring the meaningful participation of victims, survivors, and local communities in all stages of planning and implementation, particularly concerning return, housing, essential services, and infrastructure.
- Approaching reconstruction as an opportunity to achieve economic, social, and political justice by dismantling the legal and administrative structures that historically fueled exclusion, impoverishment, and discrimination.

● **Transitional Justice as a Long-Term Pathway, Not a Fleeting Moment**

We commit to approaching transitional justice as a long-term pathway, not as a temporary response or a bargaining chip. We affirm that transitional justice must be built by the will of the Syrian people and for them, free from any politicization or official co-optation. We will also work to ensure that transitional justice contributes to rebuilding trust between the state and society, dismantling systems of oppression and discrimination, and achieving a genuine transformation towards a state founded on the rule of law, human rights, and equal citizenship.

We commit to upholding justice as an inherent right, not a negotiable demand, and as an ongoing pathway that does not conclude until full redress for victims is achieved and the trust of Syrians in justice and institutions is restored. We will work to ensure that justice pathways are open to the visions and approaches emerging from the grassroots, particularly those led by women survivors and marginalized communities, recognizing them as essential agents in building a more just and inclusive future. We affirm that genuine transformation does not come solely from top-down decisions, but from the diligent work of rebuilding trust within affected communities and creating truly representative spaces for victims as rights-holders. Furthermore, we commit to confronting any bargaining over victims' rights under the pretext of political compromises or temporary pragmatism.

● **International Partnership in Support of Syrian-Led Pathways to Justice, Truth, and Remedy**

We commit to working towards fostering a balanced and effective partnership with the international community, one grounded in respect for national sovereignty and which places the rights of victims at the heart of any cooperation. We will work to leverage international expertise and UN-mandated mechanisms specific to Syria, notably the International Independent Commission of Inquiry (COI), the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP), to support pathways towards justice, truth, and remedy.

We further emphasize that such cooperation must be directed towards a gradual transition of mandate, expertise, and knowledge from international mechanisms to national institutions, once the necessary conditions are met. This is essential to empower Syrians to lead their own justice pathway and to ensure a genuine Syrian ownership of the transitional justice process.

● **How to Build Upon This Paper**

This document has been labelled the "First Edition" in the hope that it will serve as a starting point for the development of more detailed principles as work on the transitional justice file evolves.

Civil society organizations, victim and survivor groups, and their families can hold consultative sessions on this Principles Paper to build a more comprehensive and profound vision, and a shared understanding of these principles across the breadth of Syrian geography and the diversity of violations committed against Syrian society.

It is our hope that this document will form a foundational cornerstone for building more detailed strategic advocacy plans in the future. It can serve as a reference point for comparing the evolving work of the National Transitional Justice Commission and the National Commission for the Missing, on one hand, with the aspirations of Syrian society regarding the transitional justice file, on the other.

The Undersigned Entities

1. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
2. The Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP)
3. Women Now for Development
4. Syrian Network for Human Rights
5. The Day After
6. Ettijahat - Independent Culture
7. Enmaa
8. Union of Revolutionary Bureaus
9. SOAS Syria Society
10. Badael
11. Bader for Community Development
12. Lelun Victims' Association
13. Salam Charity for Development and Democracy
14. Deirna Nexus
15. Cevher
16. Human Rights Guardians
17. The Syria Campaign
18. Don't Suffocate the Truth
19. Huquqyat
20. Child Guardians
21. Truth Tent in Darayya
22. Truth Tent in Eastern Ghouta - Southern Sector
23. Truth Tent in Jaramana
24. Truth Tent in Salamiyah and Countryside
25. Dawlaty
26. Dar Adala
27. Synergy - Hevdesti
28. DAR Association for Victims of Forced Displacement
29. Badrat Khaier
30. Caesar Families Association
31. Massar Families
32. Association of Detainees & The Missing in Sednaya Prison
33. Seen for Civil Peace
34. Syrians for Truth and Justice
35. Families for Truth and Justice
36. Families for Freedom
37. Detainee's Voice
38. Green East
39. Taafi
40. Justice for Life
41. Adalaty
42. Global Organization for Civil Society Advancement
43. Mehabad Organization for Human Rights
44. Syrian Youth Empowerment
45. Amal Healing & Advocacy Center
46. Shams Cultural Forum
47. Midmak
48. Oxygen Shabab
49. Transformative Pathways
50. Musawa
51. Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights
52. Jawa Voluntarily Team
53. Global Harmony
54. Hope Foundation
55. Prisons Museum
56. Humanitarian Care Charity (H.C.C)
57. Women Support and Empowerment Center
58. Truth and Justice Charter
59. The Youth Empower Platform
60. Najoon
61. Local Awareness and Community Unity