Bridges of Truth

POLICY REPORT

‘Our Pain Turned into Policy’

Advancing Peace and Justice Through Community Dialogue in Syria

July 2025

Cover Image: Local residents take part in an ICTJ-led community dialogue in Damascus on April 30, 2025. The dialogue provided a safe space for participants to share their experiences during the war and dictatorship and discuss their needs and hopes for justice and reconciliation. (Abedalbaset Alhasan/ICTJ)

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About

Bridges of Truth

Bridges of Truth comprises a coalition of civil society organizations dedicated to advocating for comprehensive justice for the numerous victims of conflict and oppression in Syria. Our mission is to provide support to these victims, amplify their voices, and share their untold stories with the global community. We firmly believe that genuine peace in Syria can only be achieved through the complete restoration of the rights of the detained and disappeared, and their families. The participating organizations in this endeavor include Badael, the Center for Civil Society and Democracy, Dawlaty, International Center for Transitional Justice, Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights, the Syrian Institute of Justice and Accountability, The Day After, and the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression.

International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) works across society and borders to challenge the causes and address the consequences of massive human rights violations. We affirm victims’ dignity, fight impunity, and promote responsive institutions in societies emerging from repressive rule or armed conflict as well as in established democracies where historical injustices or systemic abuse remain unresolved. ICTJ envisions a world where societies break the cycle of massive human rights violations and lay the foundations for peace, justice, and inclusion. For more information, visit **www.ictj.org**.

Badael (“Alternatives” in Arabic) is a rights-based organization founded in 2013 with a mission to foster transformative justice as the basis of a genuine and sustainable peace in Syria. Championing locally owned alternatives, Badael endeavors to buttress the scope and impact of inclusive grassroots civic action and foment the development of holistic truth and understanding within and around the Syrian context. Badael’s approach combines direct assistance and capacity building efforts with bottom-up narrative-shaping initiatives, including research, oral history, and advocacy, so that all Syrians are equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to construct a pluralistic and rights-based society of tomorrow. For more information, visit **www.badael.org**.

Center for Civil Society and Democracy (CCSD) is an independent Syrian nongovernmental, nonprofit organization whose mission is to support and strengthen civil society and democracy and promote the values of freedom, justice, and coexistence. CCSD was founded in December 2011 with the aim of supporting sustainable and long-term movements for peace, justice, and democracy in Syria. Since then, CCSD has grown to include nearly 90 staff members working in Syria, Türkiye, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraqi Kurdistan. Through intensive trainings and mentoring focused on transitional justice, transparency, project design and management, and leadership, among other things, CCSD has developed the capacity of over 300 civil society organizations and local councils. As a result of these efforts, CCSD established and continues to act as the executive secretariat for three major networks: I Am She, Aman Network, and Syrian Civic Platform. The networks, respectively, focus on women’s empowerment, community safety and conflict mitigation, and civil society’s input on the peace process. For more information, visit **www.ccsdsyria.org**.

Dawlaty is a nonprofit foundation that believes in nonviolence and peaceful resistance and works toward achieving a democratic and peaceful transition to a state that upholds human rights, equality, tolerance, and diversity. Dawlaty supports civil society in becoming active participants in Syria's transition to a just and democratic state. Dawlaty works to build the knowledge of civic values and life skills of young people so they can engage in their communities and nation. In addition, it works to build an archive of stories and artwork to memorialize the Syrian uprising and highlight the experiences and voices of marginalized groups within the Syrian conflict. Dawlaty works on the ground and online to document, advocate, and build the capacity of civil society groups and young people. Dawlaty works in partnership with Syrian organizations to amplify Syrian voices. For more information, visit **www.dawlaty.org**.

Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (LDHR) Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (LDHR) is a Syrian civil society organization dedicated to supporting civilians in crisis and combating human rights violations. Founded by a group of legal and medical professionals in 2015, LDHR documents atrocities against detainees and provides rehabilitation services to survivors of torture and sexual violence through secure pathway. LDHR engages in medical-legal documentation, case management, and referral services, while raising awareness of human rights principles and gender-based violence. Our mission is to empower survivors and families of the missing persons, ensuring access to justice and fostering their integration into society. For more information, visit **www.ldhrights.org/en**.

Syrian Institute for Justice (SIJ) is a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization. It was established in 2011 in Aleppo by a group of lawyers specializing in human rights law and criminal documentation. SIJ documents all human rights violations in Syria, regardless of who the perpetrator is. In an effort to establish principles of transitional justice, SIJ sets up legal case files, according to the rules of international criminal courts, to be presented to the specialized courts, and to prevent perpetrators from escaping punishment. For more information, visit **twitter.com/Syrian Institute**.

The Day After (TDA) is a Syrian nonprofit organization dedicated to countering authoritarianism and supporting a democratic transition in Syria, grounded in human rights values as outlined in international conventions and covenants. TDA was established in response to the Syrian conflict, bringing together a group of Syrian intellectuals from diverse backgrounds. In August 2012, this group published a comprehensive report titled The Day After- Supporting Democratic Transition in Syria, which addressed the challenges anticipated for a successful political transition. As the conflict in Syria became protracted and complex, TDA was formalized as an organization to implement various programs in support of Syria's political transition, ensuring that it is democratic and just. Today, TDA has grown into a leading actor in advocating for human rights, accountability, and the involvement of civil society in political processes. For more information, visit **www.tda-sy.org**.

Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) is an independent, nongovernmental, nonprofit civil society organization, founded in 2004. It works to achieve justice, defend human rights, promote media freedom, support civil society, and encourage active citizenship. The organization has gained experience in combating impunity and promoting the rule of law. Its work focuses on documenting human rights violations and providing legal files to hold perpetrators accountable, while strengthening the role of victims and their families, and supporting journalists, human rights defenders, and independent media as a means of building democracy. For more information, visit **www.scm.bz/en/**.

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Introduction

Seven months after the Assad regime's fall, Syria stands at a transformative crossroads. The installation of a transitional government has opened the gates to what many hope will be a new era of civil governance, inclusion, and justice. However, this moment of potential is steeped in the intertwined legacies of 14 years of brutal conflict and over 50 years of dictatorship. Syria's infrastructure and economy have been decimated. At least 350,000 people are estimated to have died since 2011.[1] More than 110,000 remain missing and millions have suffered displacement, dispossession, and serious human rights and humanitarian law violations.[2] A significant portion of the population remains food insecure.[3] And now, as displaced persons return to their homes, the country remains marred by grief, mistrust, and the scars of unaddressed injustice, with online hate speech and sectarian rhetoric threatening to inflame new cycles of violence.

In response to these multiple crises, the new Syrian government has sought international support to rebuild its economy, negotiated the lifting of some of the economic sanctions imposed since the 1970s, and cleared over $15.5 million in outstanding debt with the assistance of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. On March 10, 2025, it signed an integration agreement with the Syrian Democratic Forces to bring its military and civilian structures into the Syrian state.[4] It also took steps to freeze the assets and bank accounts of individuals and companies linked to the former regime and to establish a committee to investigate corruption.

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[1] OHCHR, UN Human Rights Office estimates more than 308,000 civilians were killed over 10 years in conflict, Press Release, June 28, 2022.

[2] SNHR, "The 11th Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; the Number of Victims Is Rising: Nearly 111,000 Syrian Citizens Forcibly Disappeared Since March 2011, Mostly by the Syrian Regime, Constituting a Crime Against Humanity," August 30, 2022; UNHCR, "Emergency Appel: Syria Emergency," www.unhcr.org/us/emergencies/syria-emergency; Omar Alaa Eldin, "Syrian National Commission for Missing Persons Faces Time, Funding and Building Trust Challenges," *Enab Baladi*, June 4, 2025.

[3] World Food Programme, "Emergency: Syria," www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria-emergency

[4] The Syrian Democratic Forces operated the de facto Kurdish-dominated autonomous administration region in northeast Syria. Adam Lucente, "Syria's President Announces Deal to Integrate Kurdish-led SDF into State Structure," March 10, 2025, *Al Monitor*.

In parallel, transitional justice measures for Syria's many victims of atrocity crimes are being developed. While the government has taken initial steps—beginning with its commitment to "achieving transitional justice and redressing victims" expressed during the National Dialogue Conference on February 25, 2025, and reaffirmed in the Constitutional Declaration signed by President Ahmed al-Sharaa on March 13, 2025—by establishing two key institutions, the National Commission on Transitional Justice and the National Commission for the Missing in Syria on May 17, 2025, there remain concerns among various stakeholders about the inclusivity and credibility of the process, as well as the potential risk of transitional justice being applied in a selective manner.

Article 49 of the Constitutional Declaration focuses on violations attributed to the former Assad regime, without reference to abuses committed by other actors. Similarly, Decree No. 20, which established the National Commission on Transitional Justice, limits the Commission's mandate to addressing "grave violations caused by the former regime." This has raised concerns about whether the transitional justice process can ensure a comprehensive and balanced approach. In addition, the establishment of both commissions occurred without formal consultation with victims, survivors, or civil society representatives, prompting calls for a more participatory and inclusive process moving forward.

In the face of these concerns and to inform these future transitional justice processes and ensure that Syrians' views and lived experiences are heard at this pivotal time, the Bridges of Truth (BoT) project held seven intensive community dialogues in April 2025 with the participation of 133 men, women, and youth.[5] The testimonies included stories of past and ongoing violence, the loss of loved ones, displacement, extortion, political retribution, and the details of horrific extrajudicial killings perpetrated by the regime and other actors. The stories were horrific to hear, let alone tell. As one participant said, "Today, we reopen our wounds."

The sessions revealed a profound need among Syrians to be heard after years of oppression and forced silence. They also exposed the enormous gulf in understanding within and between communities about what each suffered during the war and the profound challenges facing a society experiencing deep and varied forms of resentment across political, sectarian, religious, and ethnic lines. The same is true of the divide between returnees and those who stayed behind and between supporters of the regime and the opposition.

Despite these differences, participants were united by a collective call for urgent action in support of justice, with shared ideas for what should be done, and how: justice must be comprehensive, transparent, inclusive, and built from the ground up. It must be taken forward by "neutral and independent" institutions operating based on the rule of law and committed to restoring dignity and social cohesion. The call encompasses the many injustices perpetrated since March 2011, as well as human rights violations before that date. It also includes justice for the ongoing violations being perpetrated by state and non-state actors, including foreign actors like Israel.

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[5] The Bridges of Truth project is a collaboration of seven leading Syrian civil society organizations and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). Launched in 2017, the project raises awareness about the plight of detainees, the forcibly disappeared, and their families and advocates for justice for the innumerable victims of the Syrian conflict and the former regime's repression.

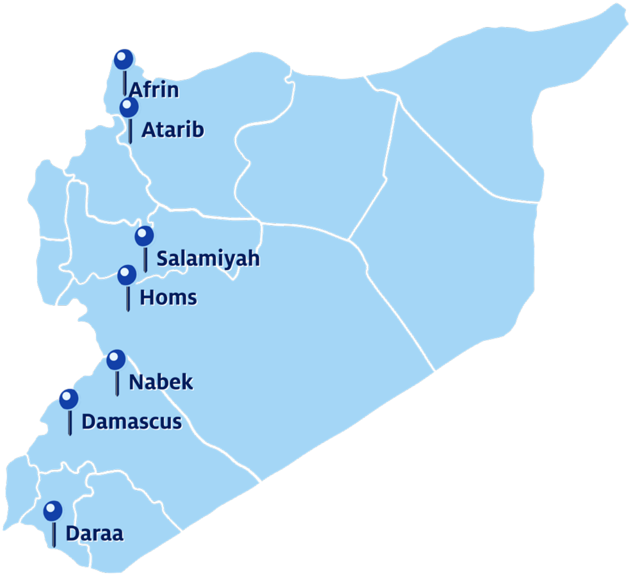
This report is being issued now to facilitate discussions during upcoming meetings on transitional justice, internationally and in Syria. It distills participants’ main observations into key messages without attributing statements or views to specific individuals. It offers analysis of what those observations reveal about how transitional justice can proceed in Syria, the inevitable challenges that will arise, and some actionable steps that can be taken in the short- and medium-term for fostering security, advancing inclusive transitional justice processes, and improving cooperation and coordination among transitional justice stakeholders.

During the dialogues, participants sought reassurance that their thoughts and recommendations would be “taken seriously” and would “reach the relevant parties.” After decades of dictatorship and war, those in attendance emphasized that although the government appears committed to “a process,” they must do more to show that this process will not be merely symbolic, but provide meaningful, inclusive, and participatory justice. This report represents our commitment to pass along their views to all who will listen, including national and international stakeholders working on transitional justice, governance, development, peace, and other interventions. As one participant emphasized, “There’s much work to do. The time to act is now.”

Methodology

From April 14–30, 2025, BoT facilitated seven full-day community dialogue sessions in Damascus, Daraa, Al Nabek, Homs, Salamiyah, Afrin, and Al Atarib (shown on the map in Figure 1). These sessions were collaboratively organized by Syrian civil society groups and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), with technical assistance from the Center for Victims of Torture to ensure that mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) were considered at all stages of preparation and implementation. Each session brought together a diverse group of approximately 20 participants, including former detainees, families of the missing, displaced individuals, civil society leaders, youth, medical doctors, and religious minorities.

Figure 1: Map of Community Dialogue Sessions



The seven locations were selected based on four main criteria: reaching underrepresented regions, ensuring demographic and experiential diversity, accessibility through local partners, and relative safety.

The selected sites captured a wide spectrum of identities and experiences, including Sunni, Alawite, Christian, Kurdish, Syrian Palestinian, and Ismaili communities. Each area experienced distinct forms of harm, from state repression and aerial bombardment to displacement, sectarian violence, and marginalization. A planned session in Suwayda, which would have offered critical perspectives from the Druze community, was cancelled due to security tensions that day.[6] Ongoing violence and instability in Syria's coastal region and northeastern and eastern areas prevented the inclusion of voices from regions such as Tartous, Latakia, and areas east of the Euphrates. Future dialogue efforts will target these areas to ensure broader national representation.

Despite these limitations, the sessions were inclusive in both content and facilitation and were trauma-informed from inception.[7] Mental health professionals were embedded into the facilitation teams to ensure psychological safety and emotional support. Discussions were carefully structured, starting with general themes before delving into more sensitive topics such as truth telling and accountability. Pre- and post-session surveys were conducted to measure participants' knowledge and emotional wellbeing, revealing marked increases in both awareness and psychological openness.

The dialogues focused on themes central to understanding what transitional justice means to Syrians in different communities and what they see as necessary for achieving justice and sustainable peace. The questions for discussion sought to elicit participants' views of basic concepts like human rights, justice, accountability, truth seeking, reconciliation, and reparations. Questions also encouraged their reflections about the violations they and their communities suffered, the harms caused, their feelings of safety, community relations, and social tensions, and their priorities for rebuilding their and their families' and communities' lives and relationships. The questions were adapted to each locality and were framed in community-centered, accessible language, avoiding legalistic and politically charged terms.

Importantly, the presence of trauma specialists contributed both to the safety of participants and the success of the sessions by encouraging open and non-violent communication, genuine expressions of thoughts and feelings, and reflective responses. In Al Nabek, facilitators noted that several participants spoke about their experiences in public for the first time. In Daraa, one mother described how the environment allowed her to mourn her missing son without fear of being judged or dismissed.

This approach enabled the emergence of a rich tapestry of narratives, concerns, and policy suggestions. Participants were not just reporters of facts—they were authors of a vision for justice that extends beyond criminal accountability into areas like memory, healing, economic recovery, and rebuilding the social contract. Although the full breadth of participants’ experiences and views could not be captured in this report, their deep desire to bring Syria together is manifest throughout. As one participant emphasized, transitional justice should entail everyone coming together to help: “The responsibility isn’t the government’s alone; it depends on all of us as individuals, lawyers, and victims.”

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[6] Etana, "Brief: Armed Clashes Erupt in Jaramana & Sahnaya," (May 1, 2025).

[7] Facilitators also represented varied sectarian and regional backgrounds, helping to build trust and foster open, diverse participation.

Identified Areas for Policy Intervention

Urgent Action to Address the Lack of Accountability and Security Challenges

The lack of accountability for gross violations of human rights in Syria was among the most pressing issues cited by participants during the dialogues. In communities across Syria, the justice deficit is a main flashpoint for violence, as perpetrators “walk freely” with no defined path or process for bringing them to justice.

Since the fall of the regime, the security situation in Syria has remained unstable, with persistent outbreaks of violence leaving Syrians feeling insecure. Most notable were the attacks in Syria’s coastal region in early March 2025, during which over 1,000 civilians were killed, including 103 women and 52 children.[8] Likewise, in April, intermittent clashes targeting the Druze community killed nearly 200 individuals, including 30 persons who died during intermittent clashes in areas near where the dialogues were being held. In May, at least 157 civilians, including 20 children, died at the hands of various actors, including the current transitional government, former Assad regime elements, and Kurdish and Israeli forces.[9] In June, there were attacks against the Murshidi religious minority, which brought thousands onto the streets to demand protection and the identification of the perpetrators.[10]

These and similar events were at the fore of participants’ minds during the sessions, with many offering explanations for the intercommunal violence in their communities. Participants in Al Nabek, for instance, tied the risk of escalating violence to the lack of accountability mechanisms and the reality of revenge killings, with one person mentioning growing impatience with the lack of accountability processes and the need for “justice right now.” One person in Damascus stressed the absurdity of “criminals walking free outside prison” and complained of “criminals being released without proper accountability.” One woman reported, “I never feel safe.”

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[8] Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, “Massacres Again: A Statement on the Tragic Events of 6-10 March 2025,” (2025).

[9] Syrian Network for Human Rights, “Monthly Report for Victims of Extrajudicial Killing in Syria: The Death of 157 Civilian Including 20 Children and 11 Women, and One Death Due to Torture Recorded in May 2025,” (June 2025).

[10] “Protests Erupt in Syria After Murder of Teenagers from Religious Minority,” *Medya News*, June 15, 2025.

As some explained, the security situation is made worse by the widespread availability of weapons, which feeds vigilante justice. Targeted killings of associates of the former Assad regime are widespread, spanning areas of the country such as Aleppo, Daraa, Damascus, Deir Ezzor, Homs, Hama, Latakia, and other governorates.[11]

Efforts by the government to respond were characterized by those in attendance as "slow and inconsistent" with "some criminals from the regime being released" and "no official spokesperson from the government or ministries to explain why they are free." In fact, some emphasized that enforced disappearances are ongoing, even under the new government.

The insecurity is compounded by the lack of a coherent and transparent strategy for addressing the related justice issues or victims' concerns. To date, the government has pursued a process of "reconciliation," or settlement (taswiya), by inviting former soldiers, officers, and members of pro-regime militias to surrender their weapons and register their personal information in return for temporary identification cards.[12] However, there has been little transparency in these decisions and inconsistency in the handling of cases. For instance, arrests of high-ranking members of the former regime have received public announcements while "former informants and lower-level personnel continue to walk the streets."[13]

Making matters worse, there have been several high-profile releases, including of several detainees linked to the former regime. Among them is Fadi Sakr, who is implicated in the massacre of civilians in Tadamon in 2013. These releases caused outrage, which the government sought to quell. On June 9, Hassan Soufan, a member of the Civil Peace Committee, explained the releases during a press conference in Damascus, citing detainees' voluntary surrender, the existence of a "thorough investigation," and a lack of war crimes charges. He also emphasized that the decision was motivated by security concerns and that the releases would "prevent bloodshed." He stressed that current conditions of instability require giving priority to the "civil peace process" and that future transitional justice processes would "work toward real justice that honors victims and holds perpetrators accountable."[14]

That explanation highlights one of the major dilemmas facing the transitional government as the country emerges from the combined trauma of war and dictatorship: how to meet the immediate and seemingly contradictory imperatives it faces to provide justice and accountability, while also maintaining peace, building a society based on rule of law, and catalyzing economic development.

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[11] Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, "Revenge Killings Targeting Assad Regime Affiliates (December 2024–May 2025)," (May 22, 2025).

[12] Anna Myriam Roccatello, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, "Coming to Terms with the Past in Syria: The First, Fragile Steps of 'Transitional Justice,'" (February 7, 2025).

[13] Kayla Koonz and Gregory Waters, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Without Accountability, Syria's Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen," (June 10, 2025).

[14] "Hassan Soufan Announces Efforts to Achieve Stability and Peace in Syria," *Levant News*, June 10, 2025.

In response to these challenges, participants across multiple regions sought immediate action on transitional justice as a way of addressing the tensions that are contributing to violence, seeing it not just as a theoretical framework but as a practical path to justice, accountability, and redress. As one participant in Al Nabek put it, "We need transitional justice as soon as possible to open the line for submitting reports on violations."

However, as some participants stressed, training is needed to raise awareness about transitional justice and mechanisms of accountability. Although in some locations participants showed an understanding of the nuances of transitional justice concepts and spoke of both restorative and more traditional retributive measures, there was also a strong call for "people to be educated, not to seek revenge."

In addition to transitional justice trainings, a key takeaway from the sessions is the need to define a transparent amnesty framework that accords with international law to replace the current, largely ad hoc, and non-transparent approach. That framework should be designed in consultation with victims and civil society and establish fair and clear criteria for distinguishing between the categories of persons and crimes covered, the types of conditions attached to the amnesty, and the amnesty's legal effects.

Support Neutral, Comprehensive, Participatory, and Inclusive Transitional Justice Processes

After more than a decade of war and 50 years of dictatorial rule, it is unsurprising that trust in Syria's national structures and governance institutions is lacking. Although there is confidence in local governance and community structures in some areas, additional work is needed to build out the representative and participatory processes necessary for reaching victims to understand their needs and priorities and design and implement responsive policies.

The dialogues and consultations recently underway on the mandates of the national transitional justice commissions offer a first opportunity to solicit victims' views, as do other ongoing processes, such as recently announced efforts around elections.[15] These efforts are critical for building civic engagement, empowering marginalized groups, and establishing trust between the government, victim groups, communities, and civil society, many of whom are deeply suspicious of the new government because of its lack of outreach and consultation.

That suspicion was on display during the sessions. For instance, there was strong anger among some in attendance at the process for establishing the fact-finding committee appointed to investigate the coastal violence in March, which they believe is not neutral. Making matters worse, that body has not yet released its report, and no one has been held accountable.

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[15] "Supreme Committee for People's Assembly Elections Sets Timeframe for Completing Its Tasks," *Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)*, June 18, 2025.

Similarly, although the two transitional justice commissions had not been established at the time of the dialogues, participants were already deeply concerned about what they perceive as a general lack of commitment to accountability by the government. The formation of the commissions was a key area of concern. The skepticism stemmed primarily from the harshly criticized decree establishing the National Commission on Transitional Justice, which as of now covers only "serious violations caused by the previous regime."[16]

Attention must also be paid to addressing the urgent and pervasive psychological toll of Syria's conflict. To have a chance of succeeding, MHPSS must be recognized from the start, not as a peripheral concern but as a central component of transitional justice. Participants in the dialogues consistently emphasized the long-lasting effects of trauma, from prolonged detention and torture to witnessing massacres and the collapse of their communities. The presence of trauma specialists during the sessions not only safeguarded participants' well-being but also demonstrated the transformative power of a safe, supportive environment in enabling truth telling, reconciliation, and healing. To ensure a genuinely victim-centered approach, MHPSS must be mainstreamed across all transitional justice processes, from truth commissions and reparations programs to local justice mechanisms and education reform. Equally important is the provision of MHPSS support for the implementers themselves, including commission staff, civil society actors, and local facilitators, who are often exposed to secondary trauma and operate under conditions of stress, grief, and burnout. Strengthening the psychological resilience and ethical capacity of these frontline actors is essential for sustaining their work, ensuring compassionate engagement with victims, and building institutions that embody the principles of justice, care, and dignity.

In addition, as discussed during the sessions, future justice mechanisms should meet fundamental standards to ensure the rights of victims, guarantee non-discrimination against any participants, and adhere to basic principles of fairness,[17] as follows:

Inclusivity and Nondiscrimination

As the dialogue sessions revealed, the perceived legitimacy of justice mechanisms hinges on their ability to treat violations by all parties equally—including the former regime, opposition factions, local and national authorities, and foreign actors, which one participant stressed should include "all the big players, including Russia, Assad, Iran, and Hezbollah."

As participants emphasized, principles of inclusivity and nondiscrimination need to be reflected in the definition of "victim" and in the material and temporal scope of Syria's transitional justice framework. As they made clear, justice should not serve political agendas. As one woman in Salamiyah explained, "Selective justice is worse than no justice. When we forgive one side and punish the other, we lose all credibility." Without evenhandedness, participants fear that transitional justice will reinforce grievances rather than resolve them.

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[16] Syrian Arab Republic – Presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic, Decree No. 20 of Year 2025: On the Formation of the National Commission for Transitional Justice, May 17, 2025.

[17] Eduardo González and Howard Varney (eds.), ICTJ, "Truth Seeking: Elements of Creating an Effective Truth Commission," (2013).

Participants also pushed back strongly against narrow, legalistic categorizations that prioritize direct, physical harm—such as torture or death—over other forms of suffering, including psychological trauma, economic deprivation, social exclusion, and long-term displacement. They also stressed that transitional justice policies must acknowledge the breadth of victims, including direct and indirect, individuals and collective groups, and historical and ongoing injustices. For instance, in Damascus, a former detainee insisted that family members should also be considered victims: "I wasn't tortured, but my daughter stopped speaking after watching me disappear for four years. Is she not a victim too?"

Discussions of victimhood also reflected the multifaceted nature of violence in Syria's conflict, where whole communities have been systematically marginalized, stripped of their livelihoods, and denied access to essential services based on their perceived political loyalties, ethnic identity, or religious background. In Al Nabek, a woman described how her family's property was confiscated after her husband was detained by regime forces: "They took our home, our business, and even stopped us from renewing our IDs. We were erased, but no one considers us victims because we didn't bleed."

Across sessions, participants also identified structural violence—such as discriminatory housing policies, denial of civil documentation, blocked access to education, and exclusion from humanitarian aid—as both a legacy of the war and a continuing source of harm. In Salamiyah, youth participants emphasized how growing up stateless or undocumented has deprived them of any meaningful future. One 19-year-old stated, "Without papers, I am invisible. No school, no job, no passport. I've been sentenced without a trial."

In the aggregate, participants suggested that the legal and social definition of "victim" in future truth, accountability, and reparations processes should include victims of enforced disappearance and their families, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, children of detainees and the disappeared, persons who sustained disabilities due to the conflict, victims of forced displacement and property seizure, survivors of economic marginalization and collective punishment, and individuals who suffered stigma or exclusion due to identity or association, among other categories.

Neutral and Independent Justice Mechanisms

As one participant stressed, the "commission should not be under the new government." Instead, it should be an independent entity and include people who "have the trust of society because of their social work or role promoting social cohesion." To ensure "the essence of justice," one participant said that the head must be "trustworthy," and the commissions should be based "on international standards." Another participant stated that to do otherwise "would be changing the actors but keeping the same movie." To ensure neutrality, one participant proposed "local and international monitoring" to ensure that accountability and punishment is based on evidence.

Because selection and recruitment processes for the heads of both commissions, advisory board members, and staff have so far been closed, to ensure ongoing political and operational independence, it is important that future selections be made based on transparent and consultative appointment processes with input from different sectors of society, especially victims and other marginalized groups. The selection process should also ensure that the appointments are broadly representative of society and guarantee equal gender representation.

Other steps to ensure neutrality could include granting the commissions control over their financial and budgetary decisions, consistent with strict standards of transparency, and the issuance of financial and other protocols such as policies regulating conflicts of interest, reimbursement of expenses, and gifts, as well as codes of conduct and ethics rules.

Participatory Processes

Dialogue participants stressed the importance of widespread participation across society. As one explained, the commissions must "guarantee the protection and participation of all people from different backgrounds." That must include participation by locals who remained in Syria for the duration of the war and returnees. In addition, participants in Homs emphasized the importance of youth engagement across justice initiatives to promote healing and recognition.

Young people who participated in the sessions highlighted their unique status as both inheritors of trauma and potential builders of peace. In Al Atarib, participants who grew up during the war spoke of internalizing violence through games and media and underscored the urgency of addressing intergenerational trauma. As one 17-year-old put it: "As children, we played games of torture and pretended to make arrests at checkpoints because that's all we'd seen. But we don't want to be like them. We want something different."

Comprehensive Transitional Justice Measures

Although some participants prioritized certain transitional justice measures over others (for example, several proposed that accountability should take precedence over truth seeking), most supported an "all encompassing" approach to accountability, acknowledgment, truth seeking, reconciliation, reparations, and memorialization.

This sentiment points to a broader understanding of justice as both legal and social. Although not universal, most did not equate accountability with vengeance. Instead, survivors and affected communities articulated a desire for dignity, acknowledgment, and institutional reform—not retribution. This includes the use of symbolic accountability measures such as community service and truth-telling initiatives for lower-level offenders, coupled with prosecution for those responsible for mass atrocities, curriculum reform, and equitable access to public services to ensure dignity is restored.

In Al Atarib, a youth activist noted, "Justice isn't about revenge. It's about telling the truth and protecting people from suffering again." His comments were echoed by others who called for trials, but also for community dialogue, documentation, and apology. "We want our children to know the truth, not just the version written by those in power," said a mother in Homs. In Damascus, one former detainee summed it up well: "We don't just want courtrooms. We want acknowledgment, in our neighborhoods, our schools, and our lives."

Gender Sensitivity

Another consistent thread in the dialogues was the role of women in justice processes and the need to document and acknowledge the gendered aspects of transitional justice and victimization. Many of the women in attendance spoke of the burden of assuming sole responsibility for their families after their husbands were killed or disappeared. Some faced sexual violence, others endured prolonged displacement, one spoke of discrimination against non-veiled women, and nearly all reported being stigmatized for being connected—even tangentially—to conflict-related trauma. A participant in Daraa explained: "People look at me like I'm broken because I survived prison. They say I'm dirty or dishonorable. But I kept my children alive. Why is that not seen as strength?"

At the same time, several women emphasized their dual role as victims and agents of change. Many have been at the forefront of local advocacy, documentation, education, and care work. "We are the memory of this war," said a woman in Afrin. "We remember who was taken, who fled, who helped, and who betrayed. If justice is to mean anything, it must include us." Another woman stated plainly, "We don't want flowers. We want a seat at the table where our pain is turned into policy."

To address the gendered impact of Syria's conflict will require more than acknowledging women's suffering; it demands the systematic integration of gender-based solutions into all aspects of transitional justice, governance, and recovery. Women across the dialogue sessions shared experiences of loss, displacement, sexual violence, and economic exclusion, while also demonstrating their roles as caregivers, community organizers, and memory keepers. To respond effectively, transitional justice mechanisms must ensure women's full participation in design, implementation, and oversight processes, including in truth commissions, reparations programs, and local justice initiatives. This includes creating safe reporting channels for survivors of gender-based violence, legal and psychosocial support tailored to women's needs, and targeted economic empowerment measures.

Sexual and gender-based violence, though rarely spoken about during the sessions, was present in the background of many testimonies. Women expressed fears of harassment at checkpoints, violations in detention, and societal blame that silenced their experiences. One woman from Damascus stopped sending her daughters to school after hearing of girls being targeted. "We are not just victims of war," she said. "We are victims of silence."

As such, mainstreaming gender will also mean addressing structural inequalities, such as discriminatory family laws and exclusion from property rights, that have long undermined women's agency. A justice process that overlooks gender not only fails women but also weakens the foundation for a truly inclusive and durable peace.

Addressing Distrust and Fragmentation Within and Between Communities

Much like the disruption in vertical relations between state institutions and Syrian citizens, trust within and among Syrian communities has also been deeply eroded by years of dictatorship and war and the harms perpetrated during both, including incalculable acts of violence and betrayal at the interpersonal, community, and institutional levels. Across dialogue sessions in cities like Al Nabek, Daraa, Homs, and Salamiyah, participants described how community trust—once a part of the complex fabric of Syrian social life—has unraveled under the weight of betrayal, fear, and political manipulation. That distrust takes different forms and extends to relations between and among various populations in Syrian society.

Participants described longstanding tensions between families who remained loyal to Assad and those who supported the opposition, a divide encouraged by the regime. A participant in Salamiyah spoke of how this divide is being carried forward today: "Even after the revolution and liberation, we still fear each other. The wound is deep." These wounds are not limited to the regime's crimes or armed groups' violations—they extend to neighbors who reported on one another, families divided by politics, and communities shaped by propaganda-fueled hate.

In Homs, one mother recalled how "we used to eat at the same table," only for her neighbor to later turn her cousin in to the security services. In Al Nabek, others spoke of social stigmatization that outlasted violence: mothers being told they did not deserve condolences because their sons were labeled "terrorists."

These dynamics are further exacerbated by unpunished perpetrators living alongside their victims. "My neighbor, who turned my brother in to the regime, is back now, acting like nothing happened," said one participant. "How can we trust again without justice?"

With the large influx of refugees returning to Syria from abroad, other tensions are surfacing, now between families who remained in Syria and those who recently came back. As anticipated by ICTJ's report, "An Uncertain Homecoming: Views of Syrian Refugees in Jordan on Return, Justice, and Coexistence," returnees do not feel understood or safe.[18] As one participant reported, "People don't know what Syrians abroad suffered. I find it funny how regime supporters now call for a unified Syria, peace, and forgiveness, while during the conflict, they stoked divisions in support of the regime."

Likewise, people who remained in Syria for the duration of the conflict are feeling hatred and enmity toward those who fled. They see returnees as divisive and accuse them of "committing violations against the locals who never left, punishing them."[19]

There are also tensions between communities and victim populations, a trend observed by the facilitators of the sessions. Across sessions, there was a lack of awareness of what other communities suffered during the war and the magnitude of the atrocities committed in other parts of the country. As one facilitator observed, "people were shocked by how other Syrians had been affected. It was a wake-up call of what people suffered and what needs to be done."

The breakdown of trust extends into families too. A participant from Damascus explained how her husband concealed his time in detention for years out of fear. "He never told me the truth," she said. "He thought I would report him, just to protect our children."

As participants in nearly every session described, distrust and fragmentation corrode all aspects of life, with fear, social ostracism, and communal suspicion dominating. In Al Nabek and Homs, survivors spoke of being unable to mourn their dead publicly due to stigma. Discrimination in basic functions like registering a newborn child is common.

The stressors feeding distrust and burdening Syrian society at all levels are many, including ethnic, sectarian, and class divides and widespread trauma and economic hardship. Although this is not the place to delve deeper into these factors, it is crucial to consider the ramifications of distrust and fragmentation on future justice processes and what can be done to help mitigate the divides to allow these processes to move forward.

As one participant explained, "Syrians do not trust each other. We did not trust the old regime, and we do not trust the new regime. We do not trust other areas and sects. As a result, it is unclear how justice will be achieved."

Despite the extreme nature of the atrocities committed and the multifaceted and complex trauma suffered, the reality is that some Syrians celebrated the violence. Forms of sectarianism, betrayal, and symbolic violence—often fueled by social media, politicized religious discourse, or opportunistic local actors—have created a society in which processes aimed at social cohesion are not just difficult, but potentially incendiary if not genuine and appropriately administered. As participants stressed, no justice mechanism will succeed in Syria if it ignores the deep fractures within society itself.

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[18] ICTJ, "An Uncertain Homecoming: Views of Syrian Refugees in Jordan on Return, Justice, and Coexistence," (2019).

[19] Some participants accused returnees of committing crimes and attempting to take control of local affairs and committees, which is increasing resentment against them.

To move forward, urgent steps should be taken to start building a base level of trust through additional dialogues, consultations, and other transitional processes. Other contexts transitioning from conflict have shown that as this dialogue process builds, it is then important to dig deeper to understand the root causes of the conflict, which include legacies of economic, ethnic, sectarian, and political exclusion and inequality. If done correctly, transitional justice can bring people together to face the consequences of a legacy of abuse, while building a shared bond to define the future.

The Realities of Economic Injustice and Reconstruction

Economic collapse and the physical devastation of infrastructure were identified during the sessions not only as humanitarian emergencies, but also as core justice issues. Participants emphasized that peace cannot be sustained in conditions of mass poverty, displacement, and systemic inequality. The widespread destruction of infrastructure, politicized access to services, and denial of livelihoods have entrenched deep divisions across Syrian society. One participant in Salamiyah summarized this reality: "Without economic justice, there will be no peace."

The impact of international and unilateral sanctions was repeatedly raised. Although sanctions are designed to pressure abusive actors, participants noted that they often hurt ordinary civilians the most, creating dilemmas for transitional justice.[20] They limit access to international markets, inflate the cost of basic goods, and paralyze local initiatives. Justice actors, local councils, and civil society organizations described struggling to maintain operations with almost no resources. As noted by one participant in Homs, "Even justice needs electricity and paper. How can we talk about reform when we can't pay rent or print materials?"

Across nearly all locations, people described how housing, employment, and aid are routinely weaponized. In Afrin, displaced Kurdish families spoke of homes being confiscated and reallocated by armed factions. "I live in a tent," one elderly man explained, "while someone else lives in my house with papers signed by warlords." In Daraa, people said access to food and healthcare was dependent on political affiliation or family ties. "If you didn't have the right flag, you didn't eat," another participant added.

Services such as water, fuel, and education were also used to reward loyalty or punish dissent. These structural injustices were compounded by a broader sense of economic hopelessness, particularly among youth and returnees. Many feared that without justice-driven recovery efforts, the economic collapse would trigger new cycles of violence and exploitation. "Justice means dignity," said a woman in Damascus. "And you can't have dignity when you beg for food from the same people who once arrested you."

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[20] Elena Naughton, ICTJ, "Of Two Minds: Sanctions as a Form of Accountability and the Dilemmas for Transitional Justice," (February 2025).

In response to questions about reparations, participants called not only for compensation and reconstruction, but also for ethical rebuilding. Property restitution, equitable employment, and housing access were consistently emphasized, particularly for the displaced and marginalized. Specific requests were made for reparations in the form of jobs, livelihood support, and education for their children. Participants also urged that international aid be conditioned on reforms, warning against reconstruction efforts that enrich warlords or reward those responsible for past abuses.

Support Community-Driven Solutions and Local Initiatives

Despite the widespread pain and institutional collapse caused by 14 years of conflict, Syrians have not waited passively for solutions to come from above. Across all seven dialogue sessions, participants emphasized their capacity for innovation and resilience. They articulated a strong preference for community-led approaches to justice and healing that are rooted in local values, social norms, and lived experiences.

Rather than relying solely on centralized or foreign-led models, participants called for locally developed transitional justice initiatives led by the same communities that have borne the brunt of violence and displacement. In the words of a civil society leader in Homs: "We are the ones who buried the dead, hid the children, and kept schools running in basements. Let us also be the ones to write the story of justice."

To strengthen the quality and impact of local initiatives, efforts should prioritize national institutions and local mechanisms, not only international actors. To do that, steps should be taken to build mutual trust between the state and civil society and between civil society and local leaders. This trust cannot be restored by one side alone. While government accountability for past harms is essential and remains a core demand of participants and policymakers alike, there is an equally critical need for civil society actors and local leaders to demonstrate accountability, transparency, and fairness in their own conduct. Trust must be rebuilt by all sides. Maintaining opposition toward the state or favoring certain groups risks reinforcing divisions and undermining transitional justice. Mutual responsibility, shared standards, and inclusive engagement are necessary for genuine and sustainable reform.

It is also essential to consciously engage women in community initiatives to counter their being sidelined from decision-making processes. In Afrin and Salamiyah, women described founding support programs and organizing relief efforts, only to be told that political discussions or transitional justice planning were not their domain. A participant in Al Atarib recalled, "They told me to cook for the meeting, not to join it."

Despite these challenges, women voiced strong demands for recognition, inclusion, and justice reflective of their lived experiences. Participants proposed the creation of trauma-informed support centers for women, legal clinics to assist with inheritance and custody claims, and storytelling circles to document and preserve women's histories of survival and resistance. In Daraa, a group of women called for truth-telling initiatives led by female survivors to ensure the next generation learns a more inclusive account of what happened.

Participants offered a range of practical, grassroots ideas designed to address local harms, rebuild trust, and sustain long-term reconciliation.

Local Justice Committees

In nearly every location, participants proposed the establishment of Local Justice Committees made up of respected community members, victims, civil society actors, and traditional leaders. These bodies would be empowered to mediate disputes, document abuses, refer serious crimes to higher authorities, and oversee reparations and memorialization at the local level. Such committees were envisioned as semi-formal mechanisms with moral authority rather than legal enforcement power. As a youth activist in Al Atarib put it, "People won't come to a state court. But they will come to their neighbors—if those neighbors are fair."

In Al Nabek, some participants recommended training these committees in trauma-informed mediation and ethical documentation, with support from international organizations. This would help ensure their work aligns with broader human rights principles. In addition, to ensure procedural consistency and fairness across communities, it is crucial that the processes follow certain standards, are monitored, and meet nationally guided criteria (including for recordkeeping and documentation).

Community Archives and Testimonial Centers

Participants in Homs and Damascus stressed the importance of preserving memory as a form of justice. Several proposed the creation of community-run archives and testimonial centers to collect, digitize, and curate personal narratives, photos, videos, and other evidence of loss and survival. These centers would serve a dual purpose: honoring victims and offering the community a sense of shared history. In Afrin, a group proposed turning destroyed buildings—such as former schools and municipal buildings—into "memory sites" that double as cultural and healing spaces. A participant from Salamiyah illustrated the power of shared memory after hearing a friend's story publicly for the first time: "I had known her for 20 years, but never knew she lost two brothers. That moment changed how I saw her and the war."

Safe Spaces and Trauma-Informed Programming

Recognizing the deep emotional toll of the conflict, participants across locations emphasized the need for safe spaces for psychosocial support—particularly for children, women, and former detainees. These would include community centers offering counseling, group therapy, and creative outlets like art and theater.

For instance, in Daraa, women proposed "listening tents" where survivors could share stories with trained facilitators and peers in a secure, supportive setting. These would be especially important for survivors of sexual violence, many of whom remain isolated due to social stigma. Several participants noted that even basic social spaces—such as sports clubs or libraries—could become platforms for healing and reintegration if appropriately resourced and guided.

Modified Traditional Mechanisms

While participants were wary of integrating customary practices as a form of restorative justice because of their potential to reinforce patriarchy, many were interested in reviving traditional dispute resolution methods, such as tribal councils or religious mediation, provided they are adapted to ensure inclusivity and prevent impunity. For instance, in Salamiyah, local leaders have long mediated land disputes using oral agreements and compensation. Participants proposed modernizing these practices by including women and youth on decision panels and documenting outcomes for public review. "Not all traditions are bad," said a Kurdish participant in Afrin. "Some just need to evolve. They can be the bridge between pain and peace."

Public Storytelling and Cultural Engagement

The use of arts and media also emerged as a powerful theme across sessions. Participants described how theater, poetry, oral storytelling, and documentary films could create emotional openings for dialogue across deep divides. In Al Atarib, one group proposed hosting a monthly "Justice Tent" where residents could gather to hear testimonies, recite poems, or view photo exhibits documenting their community's wartime history. Others suggested mobile theater productions that travel between neighborhoods, using humor and metaphor to broach difficult topics. A former teacher in Homs reflected: "We taught children to fear each other. Let's now teach them how to grieve, to question, and to imagine something better."

These cultural initiatives were also seen as tools to engage youth, many of whom feel disillusioned or radicalized by years of violence. Participants emphasized that justice must be intergenerational and future-oriented, not only retroactive.

Cross-Community Exchanges

In diverse regions such as Afrin and Salamiyah, participants proposed cross-community exchange programs where Syrians from different religious, ethnic, or political backgrounds could share meals, visit historical sites, or collaborate on public projects. These encounters were viewed as essential to dismantling the stereotypes and narratives that have fueled conflict. "We need to see each other again—not just as victims or enemies, but as neighbors," said a participant from Daraa.

Several civil society organizations present at the dialogues expressed willingness to facilitate these exchanges, suggesting that partnerships with local municipalities and schools could further embed them into everyday life.

Trust Deficits in International Actors

During the in-person dialogues and separately in various online platforms, participants across Syria expressed deep mistrust toward international actors, including humanitarian organizations, foreign governments, UN agencies, and international justice mechanisms. While this mistrust was widespread, it took on different tones and intensities depending on the location and context, shaped by each community's lived experiences of neglect, betrayal, or manipulation.

Many Syrians described international engagement as selective, politicized, and ultimately complicit in prolonging suffering. In Daraa, where civilians faced broken reconciliation deals and ongoing violence, one participant asked, "How can we trust international courts when those who bombed our homes now sit at the same tables with diplomats?" In Afrin, where residents experienced forced displacement and governance by armed factions, another said, "The world watched our suffering and did nothing. Now they come with projects and seminars. We need action, not more meetings." These statements reflect a broader perception that international institutions have prioritized politics and process over protection and justice.

This erosion of trust is also visible online. A February 2025 analysis by Insecurity Insight of over 7,000 Syrian social media comments found overwhelmingly negative sentiment toward organizations like the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Accusations included corruption, regime collusion, and the manipulation of aid. One user wrote, "Most of them were supporters of the regime, and they were part of its corruption. I dealt directly with them. They always look down on people, and they are usually selective with the problems that fit their agendas."[21] While leadership changes generated brief optimism, many online voices dismissed these changes as superficial, noting that trust can only be rebuilt through transparency and accountability.

Operational challenges facing international organizations have also contributed to this credibility crisis. As highlighted in a May 2025 report by Refugees International, aid agencies in regime-held areas often operate under tight surveillance and restrictive approval processes.[22] These realities force them into quiet compromises that undermine neutrality and public trust. In Salamiyah, participants described how aid is used to reward loyalty or enforce compliance, rather than respond to needs. This instrumentalization of humanitarian assistance reinforces local perceptions that international engagement is not only ineffective, but actively harmful.

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[21] Insecurity Insight, "Calls for Aid, Local Resilience and Distrust: The Complex Landscape of Sentiments Towards the Humanitarian Efforts in Syria," (February 2025), 13.

[22] Jesse Marks and Hardin Lang, Refugees International, "Beyond the Fall: Rebuilding Syria After Assad," (May 2, 2025).

Another recurring theme was the failure to meaningfully include Syrian organizations and communities in decision making. A January 2025 report by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, developed with more than 20 Syrian NGOs, documented widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of localization. Syrian groups described being treated as implementers rather than equal partners.[23] One civil society actor in Homs said, "They ask for our help, but never listen to our ideas." Another in Al Nabek remarked, "We are brought in at the end—when everything has already been decided." These experiences fuel resentment and contribute to the belief that international actors are more accountable to donors than to Syrians.

While the mistrust is consistent across the country, each region experiences and expresses it differently. In Daraa, it is rooted in the perceived betrayal of broken ceasefires and false guarantees. In Afrin and Al Atarib, it is tied to the failure of international actors to prevent abuses by militias and protect communities from displacement. In Damascus and Salamiyah, anger focuses on the complicity of international agencies with regime-aligned networks. In Homs and Al Nabek, frustration stems from exclusion and the lack of long-term investment in local expertise and institutions.

What unites these perspectives is a shared demand for a new approach. Syrians are not asking for more external promises or projects, they are calling for meaningful and principled engagement that recognizes their leadership, prioritizes justice, and restores dignity.

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[23] International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), "Scaling Up In Syria: Opportunities, Potential Pitfalls & Mitigation Measures," January 20, 2025.

Conclusion: Toward a Just and Lasting Peace

After more than a decade of war and repression, Syrians across communities are demanding a justice process rooted not in revenge, but in dignity, truth, and inclusion. Across all the community dialogues facilitated by the BoT project, one message stood out: Syrians are not passive victims. They want to lead in shaping their future. Justice delayed or imposed from above will only deepen wounds.

Across regions, Syrians are not waiting to be handed solutions. They are actively designing them, with detailed, practical proposals for building a transitional justice framework that is inclusive, sustainable, and grounded in local realities. What they require is the political space, material resources, and institutional recognition to do so.

Recommendations

Local Level

1. **Establish Grassroots Justice and Reconciliation Mechanisms**
    - Support the formation of community-led justice committees composed of victims, civil society, youth, women, and religious leaders to facilitate truth telling, reparations, and local dispute resolution. These bodies should function independently of political factions, have access to legal advisory support where needed, and be guided by nationally established standards and criteria to ensure fairness and consistency.
    - Promote inclusive and structured dialogue forums that bring communities together to rebuild empathy and address intercommunal harm. Facilitation should come from neutral, trusted figures such as educators, elders, or religious leaders.
    - Strengthen customary justice mechanisms by modernizing their structures to ensure transparency, gender inclusion, and alignment with human rights standards. Train local mediators in trauma awareness and non-discriminatory practice.
2. **Strengthen Community Healing and Trauma Support Systems**
    - Embed trauma-informed mental health and psychosocial services into existing local infrastructure (such as schools, clinics, and community centers) with specialized programming for women, children, former detainees, and the elderly.
    - Encourage restorative justice alternatives for low-level offenders within comprehensive transitional justice measures, including symbolic gestures such as public apologies, storytelling sessions, or community service, while ensuring these approaches never compromise or overlook victims’ rights to truth, justice, and reparation.

3. **Build Memory, Education, and Cultural Expression Platforms**

    - Fund local archives, oral history initiatives, and "memory houses" to preserve testimonies, artifacts, and narratives from the conflict. These should be accessible and representative of diverse community experiences.
    - Invest in art, theater, and media projects that address themes of memory, trauma, and justice in collaboration with artists, survivors, and educators to ensure authenticity and inclusion.
    - Launch youth-led civic education programs to promote nonviolence, shared history, and intercommunal solidarity through school curricula and extracurricular activities.

National Level

1. **Enact Comprehensive Transitional Justice Legislation**

    - Develop and implement a transitional justice law that addresses truth seeking, reparations, criminal accountability, and institutional reform and is aligned with international norms and crafted through inclusive national consultations.

2. **Reform the Judiciary and Security Institutions and Amend Laws and Regulations Consistent with International Standards**

    - Undertake a comprehensive review of existing national laws, policies, and practices to identify, repeal and amend laws in line with international human rights and humanitarian law, the constitutional declaration, and Syria's obligations under international treaties.
    - Implement an effective program for reforming the judiciary and security services to enhance fairness and impartiality, promote transparency and public trust, and ensure judicial independence.
    - Vet and remove individuals implicated in grave human rights violations from the police, military, and judiciary. Establish independent oversight bodies and ethics commissions to monitor conduct and ensure non-recurrence. As part of that process, it is important that any amnesty or reconciliation measures are transparent and developed through participatory processes with affected communities, ensuring respect for victims' rights to truth, justice, and reparations, in line with international human rights law.
    - Criminalize hate speech and sectarian incitement across media, religious spaces, and digital platforms. Launch public campaigns to counter extremist rhetoric and promote peaceful coexistence.

3. **Establish National Truth, Memory, and Reparations Mechanisms**
    - Create a national truth and memory commission with regional chapters to document violations, hear testimonies, and issue findings. Ensure representation of marginalized voices and coordination with local archives.
    - Design a victim-centered reparations program offering material support—such as housing, education, and healthcare—as well as symbolic measures including public apologies, commemorations, and official recognition.
    - Reform education by integrating accurate, inclusive historical narratives into school curricula. Train teachers and develop materials in collaboration with survivors, historians, and civil society.
4. **Protect Civil Society and Enable Civic Space**
    - Guarantee civil society and independent media the right to organize, document, and advocate for justice without interference. Recognize local actors as key stakeholders in transitional governance and national recovery.
5. **Uphold and Sign onto International Conventions**
    - Implement and uphold the international conventions the Syrian government has signed. It should also ratify the 2006 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

International Level

1. **Ethical Aid and Equitable Reconstruction**
    - Tie all reconstruction funding to measurable progress on human rights, inclusive governance, and transitional justice implementation. In addition, that funding must not support reconstruction efforts that reinforce marginalization or injustice. Instead, donors should prioritize community-led efforts, ensure meaningful participation from victims and local communities, and use reconstruction as a tool to dismantle discriminatory systems, promote equity, accountability, and inclusion.
    - Avoid funding projects that entrench elites or empower known perpetrators. Ensure aid reaches marginalized communities and is distributed transparently.
    - Design economic recovery programs that benefit the most vulnerable (such as widows, returnees, and orphans) and reduce reliance on faction-controlled or politicized systems.

2. **Long-Term Support for Justice, Memory, and Documentation**
    - Provide long-term, flexible funding for Syrian-led truth-telling, documentation, and community justice initiatives. Move away from short-term donor cycles toward sustained, locally-owned processes.
    - Offer legal assistance and financial support for property restitution, particularly for displaced individuals and communities who lost land or assets during the conflict.
    - Support the preservation and digital protection of evidence, including forensic data, testimonies, and archives, through cross-border coordination and technical support.
3. **Inclusive Diplomacy and Victim Participation**
    - Ensure victims, civil society, and local leaders have a meaningful presence in international negotiations, peace talks, and reconstruction planning. Provide logistical and security support to enable participation.
    - Ensure women survivors of arbitrary detention, gender-based violence, and other human rights abuses participate fully in justice initiatives. Support survivor-led women's groups that promote equitable and inclusive justice, reflect women's unique experiences, restore dignity to marginalized women, and enable their leadership in decision-making processes.
    - Facilitate peer learning exchanges between Syrian actors and transitional justice leaders from other post-conflict countries, such as Bosnia, Colombia, and South Africa.
4. **Oversight, Neutrality, and Accountability**
    - Publicly dissociate from any entities credibly accused of human rights abuses and explain operational decisions to affected communities. Uphold transparency and neutrality in all engagements.
    - Establish third-party oversight mechanisms to monitor aid delivery, human rights practices, and justice implementation.
    - Promote non-selective accountability that includes violations by all parties—state, opposition, and international—through mechanisms like universal jurisdiction and international prosecutions where domestic options are unavailable.

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