

Statement by Syrian human rights organizations on the invitation to the Civil Society Support Room in Geneva

On November 21, 2017, several Syrian human rights organizations received official invitations to attend the Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) meetings in Geneva on November 28-30, after the UN Special Envoy to Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, called for the convening of the next two rounds of the Geneva peace talks on Syria. The invitation also stated that the CSSR's meetings will focus on the issue of constitutional reform and issues concerning the detainees, abductees and missing persons, as well as refugees and displaced persons.

The signatory organizations to this statement thank the Special Envoy for his invitation. And based on prior experiences with the Civil Society Support Room meetings, would like to point out the following:

1. The results of the discussions that took place during previous CSSR meetings were not fully reflected in the periodic briefings of the UN Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to the United Nation's Security Council. In addition, the organisations have a growing sense of a lack of seriousness necessary in dealing with the discussions of Civil Society Support Room and its outputs.
2. The topics of the meetings of the Civil Society Support Room are chosen in a manner that is not systematic. This process lacks a specific methodology that follows up on, builds upon, deepens and addresses previous discussions. In addition, the invitations are not based on clear work programs for the meetings, but rather on general titles for the different issues. Disregarding detailed discussion points threatens to impact these important issues and isolate them from their content. Continuing to discuss these issues at a general level leads to dealing with form rather than substance.
3. There has been no prior consultation with the organizations to develop the topics and frameworks for discussions. Invitations are sent a few days before the meeting to the concerned organizations, leaving no room for any prior preparation that would be necessary for benefiting and enriching the discussions.
4. Points of contacts with organizations who send invitations to organizations and institutions do not have sufficient knowledge or information about the nature of the topics of discussion for which the invitations are sent. They are unable, therefore, to provide clarifications or answer the questions of those invited from the Syrian organizations.

The signatory organizations, therefore, apologise for not being able to accept the invitation of the special envoy. The organizations emphasise their commitment to support the Geneva process and the importance of the participation of civil society organisations. They suggest the following:

1. Prior involvement of civil society organisations in identifying the topics for the meeting in consultation with the office of the special envoy.
2. The contribution of the organisations in developing frameworks and discussion points for the meeting.
3. The assignment of people who are specialised in the topic of meeting in the process of sending invitations and communication with the Syrian organizations.
4. The full inclusion of the results of the Civil Society Support Room meetings in the periodic briefings of the Special Envoy to the Security Council.
5. Concluding the work of the Civil Society Support Room with a press conference that communicates to the Syrians and the world the results of the Civil Society Support Room meeting.

Signatories:

1. AlKawakbi Center For Transitional Justice and Human Rights
2. Association of Detainees and The Missing in Sednaya Prison
3. Baytna Syria
4. Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC)
5. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
6. Syrian Lawyers Aggregation SLA
7. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
8. Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ)
9. The Day After (TDA)
10. The Violations Documentation Center (VDC)