



We Exist! coalition asks the UN and EU not to give up on Syrian civil society

English, German, French, Italian and Arabic-speaking spokespeople available (bios and contacts attached)

Monday 23 April 2018

Peace is only possible if Syrian organisations and democratic institutions play a leading role in the humanitarian response and any rebuilding of the country, a coalition of said today, on the eve of the second Brussels conference.

The UN and EU must assure the protection and involvement of Syrian human rights and civil society groups to ensure that abuses such as sexual violence, forced displacement and targeting of civilians are documented, monitored and ultimately, prevented, the alliance [We Exist](#) said. A Special Tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria, should be established.

Syrian organisations are providing millions of people with education, food, water, healthcare and humanitarian aid, despite daily bombardment and combat. Their work is vital to protect and serve million people who are struggling to survive or to return home.

[Maria Al Abdeh](#) said:

“Investing in an active, vibrant and fully-funded civil society is the only hope for a peaceful and democratic Syria. As Syrian human rights and humanitarian workers, we are doing all we can to empower young men and women, train local leaders, document human rights abuses, advocate for property rights, treat traumatised children but we can’t do it alone.

“International aid needs to help heal the emotional and physical wounds, hold perpetrators to account and stitch the fabric of society back together again. Our work is fighting extremism and challenging the continued war crimes but we are operating under fire from Russian and Syrian planes, on shoestring budgets, trying to make the books balance from one month to the next.”

As the United Nations and European Union chair a conference in Brussels to boost humanitarian funding and strengthen the Geneva peace talks, civil society groups are calling for their demands to form the basis of every decision.

They are calling on the UN and EU to help:

1. Stop the bombing of civilians and use of prohibited arms (not just the chemical), as well as the deliberate targeting of schools, hospitals and civilian infrastructure.
2. Halt the forced displacement of civilians. People have the right to remain in their homes, safe from bombardment or illegal detention. Demographic engineering is a war crime, EU and UN should not support any reconstruction that
3. Guarantee safety for civil society organisations, including legal recognition and protection.
4. Support survivors of sexual violence and prosecute the perpetrators.
5. Ensure humanitarian programmes address the need of young men to propose alternative to violence
6. Anyone who wished to return home, needs support to do so – with health, psychological and education services, and reconciliation programmes.
7. Pressure the Syrian government and all warring sides to release a list of names of all detainees, along with their current locations and statuses, and to immediately stop torture and mistreatment.
8. Abolish exceptional courts, especially field, sharia law, war and counter-terrorism courts and guarantee fair trials under a supervision from the United Nations
9. Consider Civil Society a leading partner in all issues concerning the future of Syria: whether it is humanitarian work, development work, reconstruction, rebuilding, or other.
10. Establish a Special Tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria.
11. Accountability should be ensured for all war crime and for the use of all prohibited arms, not just chemicals.

For an interview contact the alliance coordinator on: lead@weexist-sy.org