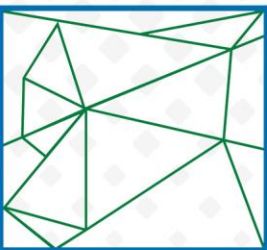


# Brussels Conference: STJ Supports the CSSR Recommendations

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سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



June, 2023

## **Brussels Conference: STJ Supports the CSSR Recommendations**

*STJ stresses the importance of adopting and applying the recommendations of the working groups in Geneva to reach an inclusive national discourse based on democracy, equality, and justice*

As part of the [2023 Seventh Brussels Conference](#) on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region', the representative of the [Civil Society Support Room \(CSSR\)](#), Mr. Bahjat Hajar, delivered a speech at the ministerial meeting that followed the dialogue day. Mr. Hajar conveyed the recommendations and outcomes of the four working groups that brought civil society experts from different parts of Syria to discuss substantive Syrian crisis issues common to all Syrian parts.

The CSSR was established in January 2016 by the [Office of the Special Envoy for Syria \(OSE-Syria\)](#) as a mechanism to consult with a broad and diverse range of civil society actors. Through the CSSR civil society actors can meet, interact, and provide their insights and ideas to the OSE-Syria, relevant UN actors and international stakeholders.

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) stresses the importance of adopting and applying the recommendations of the CSSR, delivered by Mr. Hajar, in order to reach an inclusive national discourse based on democracy, equality, and justice. STJ regrets the inability of two members of the CSSR to attend the conference, wishing for additional efforts from organizers in the coming years to include more voices from inside Syria and neighboring countries.

Here is Mr. Hajar's speech:

"Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, ministers, Ambassadors, envoys, your excellences, and dear colleagues in Syrian civil society, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am speaking to you today as a member of the CSSR, which was established by the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria based on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254 as a mechanism for including the Syrian civil society in the UN-facilitated political process. Over a year and a half, members of the room divided into four working groups, brought civil society experts from different parts of Syria and of different specialties to discuss substantive Syrian crisis issues common to all Syrian parts.

The experts broke up into four groups based on specialization:

- ❖ The civil society space and civic values group;
- ❖ The economy, recovery and development perspectives group;
- ❖ The protection priorities for Syrians group; and
- ❖ The local governance and decentralization group.

The groups involved in constructive deep technical discussions led to reverse political polarization and establish an inclusive discourse based on justice, democracy, and peace.

I am here with you today to faithfully deliver the outcomes and recommendations of the four groups,

**First, the civil society space and civic values group:**

The group concluded that supporting the process of change requires,

1. Protecting the civil society space is a contributing factor in creating the basis for a safe environment; reforming the law governing civil society bodies and organizations is an important stepping stone to regulating their operation.
2. Adopting the concept of citizenship in all education levels and within the relationships of civil institutions towards a new Syrian social contract in tune with civic values.
3. Establishing high-standard transparent mechanisms that promote effective social accountability.
4. Enhancing local community partnership and moving towards development solutions, where local communities are the main guarantors, along with spurring community participation.
5. Promoting civil society participation in the Syrians' most pressing issues, mainly the issue of education addressing the risk of gaps created by the years of war and the resulting multiple educational curricula.

**Second, the economy, recovery and development perspectives group:**

The group made a number of recommendations, the most important of which:

1. Restructuring the economy, where resources are concentrated disproportionately in the hands of a few from the ruling powers.
2. Giving the Syrian society a primary role in supporting economic development through civil society organizations, and informal initiatives, networks, and institutions at the local and national levels, with a special focus on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises.
3. Strengthening the solidarity economy by encouraging alternative economic ventures based on solidarity, which could phase out activities of crisis traders and ensure early recovery.
4. The external actors and donors to adopt a just and principled approach that could contribute to mitigating negative competition between local communities.
5. Focusing on sustainable solutions by linking all the support to the sustainable development goals and to promoting accountability.
6. The group also made important recommendations to enhance food sovereignty, including the implementation of the 'Development Convergence Centers' strategy.



### **Third, the protection priorities for Syrians group**

This group discussed the standards of a safe environment and emphasized the need to provide a basic social protection floor for all Syrians. The group recommended,

1. Curbing lawlessness, stopping arbitrary arrest, canceling security follow-ups, and returning confiscations.
2. Revealing the fate of the detainees, abductees, and forcibly disappeared persons by all parties to the conflict throughout Syria, and releasing them.
3. Ensuring the safe and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees to their hometowns or areas of their choice along with guaranteeing their security.
4. Ensuring flexible access to civil documentation (identity, ownership, travel, etc.)
5. Improving living conditions by rehabilitating infrastructure and supporting early recovery and economic development projects.

### **Finally, the local governance and decentralization group;**

of which I was a member; saw decentralization as an essential step towards ensuring the integrity of the country, peacebuilding, and democratization. The group suggested basing on the current legal framework (The Local Administration Law Decree No. 107) to appraise the country's experience and propose reforms in the political, economic, social, and service frameworks to improve governance by drawing on the experiences of all Syrian parts and the expertise developed. Accordingly, we make the following recommendations:

1. Developing a new legal framework; however, we can build upon some provisions of the current law. For example, Decree No. 107 suggests the development of a national decentralization plan; such a suggestion provides a space for an inclusive dialogue that could help reconsider the powers of local authorities in a way that guarantees a decision-making process more related to the needs of communities and citizens. The dialogue could also include proposals for the development of electoral laws to be more equitable, just, and effective.
2. Expanding the provision of significant shares of national resources to local communities to invest in, with ensuring equitable distribution of the shares.
3. The discussion on decentralization opens the door for the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria to use it in the political process, not only in relation to future Syria but also in finding viable solutions that serve the interests of the Syrians today.
4. We stress the need to support local administrations in all of Syria to carry on their new roles and adopt approaches that bring them together.

All four groups stressed the need to guarantee the rights and interests of women and youth.

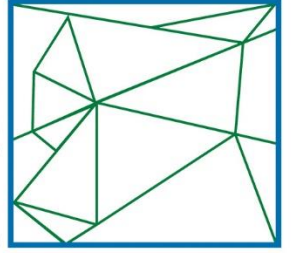
Ladies and Gentlemen,

After Syrians' decades of democratic quest and their 12 years of suffering, we, the Syrian civil society, still striving to achieve a democratic, civil, and modern state free from tyranny, violence, and radicalization, which can fulfill our objectives. We also work to preserve Syria's unity and stability and achieve its social cohesion and build its future.

Despite Syria's deadlock and the divisions between the de facto powers, and in light of the complete stalemate in the Syrian political process, the establishment of parallel tracks that are of no relevance to UNSCR 2254, and the absence of a real international action to address this reality; the Syrian civic space remains a main carrier of the values of the democratic movement of the Syrian people. Furthermore, the safe "common spaces" that provide an opportunity for a Syrian-Syrian dialogue will contribute to making positive progress toward implementing UNSCR 2254. This will be through producing insights, strategies, practical approaches, and new programs that enable us to progress towards achieving our goals within a democratic environment that respects human rights standards and celebrates freedom, difference, and diversity."

Greetings from the CSSR- the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria.

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## About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



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