

Focused Dialog Session: Opportunities and Challenges in Developing Comprehensive Model of Transitional Justice in Syria



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[Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#), in collaboration with the [Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights](#) and with support from the European Union, conducted a focused dialogue session in Qamishli, northeastern Syria. The session sought to explore the opportunities and challenges of establishing a comprehensive model of transitional justice in Syria. Over 25 human rights and civil society activists from al-Hasakah, Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zor participated in the session, both in person and online.

Held on 12 March 2025, the discussion centered around four key themes: (1) the opportunities and challenges of implementing transitional justice in the Syrian context; (2) accountability and the pursuit of comprehensive justice for all Syrians; (3) truth-revealing; and (4) reparations along with institutional and legislative reform. The session concluded with recommendations and proposals for the new Syrian government, international stakeholders, and Syrian civil society.

1. The Challenges of Implementing a Comprehensive Model of Transitional Justice in Post-Assad Syria

In the first theme, writer and researcher Abbas Musa, the coordinator of [the Missing Persons' Families Platform in North and East Syria \(MPFP-NES\)](#) established by the [Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims](#), discussed the elements of transitional justice and the goals we hope to achieve through it in Syria. Mr. Musa emphasized the crucial role of victims' associations at every stage of transitional justice and the significance of developing a comprehensive model for it.

Lawyer Mahmoud Omar discussed the challenges of implementing the transitional justice model in Syria, highlighting the absence of legal provisions within Syrian law that penalize war crimes and crimes against humanity committed over the years.

As the session coincided with a rise in hate speech following recent [events on the Syrian coast](#), participants emphasized the need for increased legal awareness about transitional justice rather than retaliation. They also highlighted the importance of parallel processes that engage local communities to promote effective dialogues that can support the implementation of comprehensive justice.

Additionally, one participant emphasized that various forms of violations, particularly forced displacement, have continued even after the regime's fall. This participant pointed out that the involvement of those responsible for these violations in political decision-making in Syria poses "the most significant challenge facing the transitional justice process."

2. Documentation Gaps and Accountability Opportunities at the National and International Levels

The second theme centered on the necessity of addressing documentation gaps to uncover the truth. Fourteen years of conflict, differing areas of influence, and multiple parties responsible for violations, along with the challenges of accessing victims in certain parts of Syria for documentation purposes, have exacerbated this gap. Ezzedine Saleh, Executive Director of the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims, asserted the need to "focus on areas previously marginalized by the regime and to publicize the stories of these violations," as well as to address "the discrimination against the Yazidis and the difficulties faced by the Kurdish people in obtaining Syrian identity cards." These actions would diminish retaliation and ensure accountability for criminals and aggressors.

Regarding the role of victims' associations in transitional justice processes, Saleh argued that "The participation of victims is the only guarantee for the success of transitional justice in Syria." He highlighted the need to "involve victims of violations in designing the transitional justice process, led by civil society organizations, until it is fully implemented." He added, "We must not ignore the divisions within the Syrian context. To achieve comprehensive and sustainable peace, we need to ensure genuine participation from victims, disseminate the truth, and document all acts of tyranny and oppression, supported by information and real monitoring from UN bodies and both international and local organizations."

Regarding accountability at the international level, the Executive Director of STJ highlighted the importance of understanding "the working mechanisms involved, their mandates, whether existing evidence supports the documentation process, and the appropriate methods for submitting documents." He stressed some families' fear of voicing their opinions, which creates an additional barrier to uncovering the truth. "The mechanisms for justice and accountability are accessible; we must grasp the methods and means to utilize them to ensure rights and achieve effective results. It is also essential to convey these methods to the public in clear language that enables them to understand the appropriate mechanism for each incident."

Regarding the challenges of accountability at the national level, Judge Riad Ali, legal advisor to STJ, stated that the lack of independence in the Syrian judiciary and the absence of laws to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity hinder effective national justice processes for the widespread crimes committed in Syria. He emphasized that "Legislation and laws urgently need amendments, as they lack justice; the security apparatus lacks expertise, and there is a shortage of specialized forensic doctors."

Participants in the session highlighted that bridging the documentation gap is crucial for achieving accountability. One participant remarked, "Real political change capable of enabling accountability and prosecuting criminals, violators, and their supporters has not yet been realized." Another participant indicated that pursuing universal jurisdiction to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria is essential at this time, given the lack of local avenues for accountability. Additionally, one participant suggested developing "judicial institutions free from any political influence," emphasizing that "To redress victims, justice must be comprehensive and based on civil peace."

3. Truth-Revealing, Reparation, Institutional and Legislative Reform

The third theme explored non-judicial measures in the transitional justice process. Attorney Delsha Ayo, Advocacy Officer at the [Dar Association for Victims of Forced Displacement](#), discussed the significance of establishing truth commissions and the specific factors that must be taken into account to adapt these commissions to the Syrian context. She underscored that, given the current circumstances, there is no substitute for truth and reconciliation commissions in pursuing justice. Ayo stated, "These commissions must represent the social fabric of our society. The significance of establishing them lies in preserving existing documents before new challenges impede their work." She further highlighted the importance of "promoting the principle of forgiveness following a fair trial for criminals to eliminate vengeful thinking and achieve transitional justice."

Jalal al-Hamad, the Executive Director of [Justice for Life \(JFL\)](#), emphasized the critical importance of reparations as a fundamental aspect of constructing a new Syria, despite the existing complexities. He stated, "Reparation is not merely financial; it must involve acknowledgment of the violation, recognition of its consequences, and then addressing these consequences."

He further explained, “The contexts in Syria are different, and the consequences vary accordingly. We need to understand the rights and needs of those impacted, as well as their desired form of involvement in reform and achieving justice for their community. Additionally, any compensation for the harm done must meet the expectations of local communities.”

Human rights activist Nalin Asaad highlighted the potential for institutional and legislative reform. She emphasized the necessity of “a new, satisfactory constitution that fulfills the aspirations of the Syrian people, along with the restructuring of state institutions and authorities, including the Ministry of Interior, military, security, and judicial bodies. Representatives of these institutions should be Syrian nationals dedicated to serving the Syrian people, achieving national reconciliation, and ensuring transitional justice.”

4. Recommendations, Proposals, Conclusions from the Focused Dialog

STJ concluded with the following recommendations from the focused dialogue, which included Syrian civil society actors in northeast Syria:

4.1. To the Syrian Transitional Government:

1. Cease military operations and violence, and respect the dignity of all citizens to foster trust between the state and its people;
2. Work to prevent hate speech and ensure the release of detainees in regions of Syria controlled by Türkiye;
3. Acknowledge past violations and permit human rights organizations access to document these issues, filling gaps in documentation;
4. Build trust with civil society and victims of violations, promote a culture of tolerance, and subsequently initiate the transitional justice phase;
5. Establish the truth, provide accountability, and ensure that violations do not recur by all involved parties;
6. Revise the constitution to reflect the people’s demands, genuinely involving them in its drafting through legal technical committees, ensuring rights and justice for all;
7. Establish the truth and deliver justice for victims by launching programs to collect testimonies from survivors and victims’ families, ensuring their privacy and legal protection;
8. Support initiatives to locate missing persons and create a mechanism for compensating those who have been affected;
9. Ensure civil society’s freedom to document violations and bolster these efforts by providing funding and advanced technologies to preserve evidence and prevent its loss;
10. Implement legal accountability mechanisms and provide redress for harm through laws and legislation, rather than relying on specific visions, positions, or past experiences;
11. Ratify unratified international agreements, expedite the rehabilitation of institutions, and emphasize the separation of powers by ensuring these institutions are managed by competent and experienced individuals;
12. Support both national and international accountability processes.

4.2. To the Syrian civil society:

1. Fostering openness and clear communication channels within Syrian society;
2. Striving for active involvement in decision-making and institutional reform;

3. Strengthening programs for human rights, citizenship, and democracy, while advocating for curriculum reform in education;
4. Promoting a culture of tolerance following the restoration of rights, considered a fundamental pillar of transitional justice;
5. Urging the Syrian government to include women in transitional justice processes and decision-making roles;
6. Expanding dialogue opportunities and addressing misconceptions at cultural, political, and geographical levels.

4.3. To the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES):

1. Supporting the efforts of human rights activists and ensuring the return of individuals forcibly displaced from their homes;
2. Freeing detainees and disclosing the whereabouts of missing persons .

4.4. To the UN mechanisms:

1. Strive to work efficiently and directly across all Syrian territories.

4.5. To the international community and the Security Council:

1. Monitor the progress of the transitional justice process and the political transition in the country while ensuring inclusivity;
2. Provide material and technical support to the Syrian transitional government during the comprehensive transitional justice phase when it begins.

ABOUT STJ



Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

ABOUT CEASEFIRE



The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights is an international initiative to develop civilian-led monitoring of violations of international humanitarian law or human rights; to secure accountability and reparation for those violations; and to develop the practice of civilian rights.

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