

# **Introduction**

## **Syrian Women's Network**

Syrian Women Network launched the first phase of a campaign called "Syria, a Home or a State of Detention" two years ago. The aim of this was to demand the release of the detained women and men in Syria, whether they had been detained by the Syrian Regime or by any other group.

The above mentioned Network comprises independent, democratic, non-governmental figures and organizations working together to maintain equality between the two sexes, in addition to consolidating democracy, human rights, civil peace and eventually transitional justice. Beside this, the Network accentuates women's role in making the critical decisions in establishing the new Syria in the future by forming efficient power for the process of democratic transformation towards a free, democratic, civil Syria that is unified and enjoys total independence. Thus it would be a state built on equal citizenship that acknowledges no discrimination on sex, religious, ethnic, national, ideological or wealth and power grounds. The power of the law has the upper hand in that state and it guarantees equal rights for all the citizens living on its land. Furthermore, the Network works on making alliances with the organizations and groups that share similar objectives to help women occupy their rightful positions on all levels.

## **Network Objectives**

The Network works on ensuring that the next Syrian constitution will include laws that guarantee human rights as established in the international declarations of human rights and in the two international covenants related to political, economic and social rights together with the seven main international agreements and all protocols relevant to these agreements and the agreement of abolishing all forms of discrimination against women known as " CEDAW " in particular, and committing to this very agreement without any reservation and adopting it as a reference in making laws and legislations and activating the role of the Constitutional Supreme Court.

The Network works also on including, in the next Syrian constitution and all other Syrian laws, equal footing for both men and women in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and all arenas of public and private life before and according to the law.

The Network works on supporting women's efficient participation in society so they occupy 50% of decision-making centers, legislative, executive, judicial bodies; state institutions, political parties, and civil society institutions. Moreover, women should occupy the same percentage when it comes to the committees appointed to draft the new constitution or determine the mechanisms for maintaining transitional justice in addition to national reconciliation and settlement committees chosen for any mediation or arbitration.

The Network works on obliging the government to fight and incriminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and children including domestic violence, sexual abuse, honor killing together with all sorts of human trafficking. This has to be accompanied by developing legal mechanisms to secure protection and therapy for victims of such abuses.

Furthermore, it is of great significance to do one's utmost to alter every article in the personal status law that is not in accordance with the principle of complete equality; both men and women should equally enjoy similar rights.

The Network works on securing social, economic and educational care for both women and children who belong to the affected social groups particularly the displaced, those who support their families; those with detained, missing, dead or injured men. This has to be carried out according to developmental and lasting programs.

### **The Network Agenda**

The Network Works on:

1. Accentuating the participation of women in the transitory phase in all fundamental bodies and in drafting the constitution and making laws for future Syria.
2. Standing firmly against the culture of marginalization and exclusion and the oppression traditionally practiced against women. Instead, the Network promotes the culture of citizenship, human rights and equality in the Syrian society.
3. Establishing general strategies and policies to qualify women to enable them to achieve the target of occupying 50 % in decision-making posts, ministries, directorates, state agencies and local councils.
4. Committing itself to dedicating all concepts of human rights.
5. Cooperating with the international organizations for the purpose of training and developing female activities in a way that serves the issue of making women more efficient and activating their role both in government and society.

6. Spotting and documenting the violations of human rights in general, and women and children abuse in particular.
7. Starting and upholding projects that help in maintaining civil peace, settling disputes and qualifying the needed women cadres.
8. Altering the stereotyped image of women in both media and educational curricula asserting the positive role women can play in building up society and qualifying the female key staffs required for this mission.
9. Including women in reconciliation and settlement committees in a way that accords with the mechanisms of the transitory justice, benefitting from the diverse experience that women have in making peace; qualifying the staffs needed for that purpose.

### **The Network Campaigns**

The Syrian Women's Network is now launching the second phase of "Syria, a Home or a State of Detention":

"Throughout the last two years and a half, the Syrian government has been carrying out widespread random arrests imprisoning so thousands of civilians including peaceful demonstrators, civil activists, politicians, aid workers, journalists, doctors, and lawyers showing no special treatment of women, children, disabilities or those who suffer serious illnesses. The documented reports by Syrian legal organizations have revealed that thousands of detainees have already passed away in the governmental detention centers whose arresting conditions can by no means rise up to meet the lowest standards of human rights or humanity.

A report made by the European Mediterranean Network entitled "Violence against Women in Syria, the Bleeding Wound in the Syrian Conflict" came out in 2013 to reveal that the Syrian Network for Human Rights has estimated the cases of women's rape to reach up to 6000 cases; many of which have resulted in compulsory pregnancy. Moreover, women there in Syria face all forms of sexual abuse including verbal harassment in governmental detention centers, in addition to documenting several cases of actual rape during the time of their detention. Furthermore, the female opposition activists and those who defend human rights are particularly targeted in such arrest campaigns in areas known to be under the control of the opposition. In the period between March 2011 and April 2013, 5400 women had been arrested by the Syrian Government including 1200 university students whose place of detention remained unknown. According to the Syrian Network Centre of Human Rights Violations, 766 women and 23 girls under the age of 18 were kept in detention centers. The center has also referred to 810 cases of women's arrest between September 2012 and February 2013. Human rights organization estimate the cases of enforced disappearance -between March 2011 until now- to rise up to at least 60 cases including indefinite number of women. The Syrian Centre of Research and Statistics has documented 340 cases of women's arrest, most of them have been referred to the court of terrorism. The report has also notified that the cases of women arrest are in increase with the aggravation of the current conflict. Human rights activists in Syria have constantly pointed to women who have been arrested without being brought before the court, without being allowed to engage a lawyer, without being allowed to see their own families. Moreover, these women have been tortured and treated cruelly in a stark breach of both local and international laws.

The European Mediterranean Network for Human Rights has also declared that the violations practiced against women in Syria have been intentionally done to inflict symbolic and psychological defeat on their opponents at least. The report has stressed the idea that the war in Syria establishes a convenient frame for violence against women including sexual violence.

It is true that most of the aforementioned violations of human rights - documented by local and international organizations- by the government armed forces, still the armed opposition has done its share of such violations as well. Such violations comprise: killing and torturing intelligence agents and other militants captured by them, killing civilians known for their loyalty and support for the government or work for it, kidnapping civilians and keeping them as hostages to exchange them later for prisoners held by the government.

Syrian Women's Network expresses its worry about the random breakings in that target all Syrians including women and children; and about the persistence of the intelligence agencies to keep on torturing detainees using methods forbidden by both human and international conventions related to the treatment of detained women's treatment. Women are thus tortured and used to exert pressure on the other detainees in particular and on the whole society in general. This using of women as a weapon in war and its consequent effects- whether social or economic- on the Syrian women (who could be arrested themselves or threatened socially if their husband or children are arrested) has motivated the Syrian Women's Network to act urgently and work on the detainee's file and to protect the Syrian women from all types of violations and exploitations practiced against them as prisoners of conscience or war victims within the general scope of the objectives of the Network.

Simultaneous with the call of the European Mediterranean Network for Human Rights to free all prisoners of conscience and other detainees in Syria

( a call espoused and signed by 46 organizations from Syria, the regional countries and other world countries, together with the intensive work made by international legal and humanitarian organizations like general Amnesty and Human Rights Watch about the file of the detainees) and due to the approach of Geneva Convention 2, the Syrian Women's Network has launched a campaign called "Syria, a Homeland not a Prison" to support and exert pressure on all parties to take part in the coming convention and to commit themselves to the terms of Geneva Convention 1 in relation to the release of all prisoner of conscience and to ratify Security Council resolution No. 1325 and any other relevant international conventions.

We, the members of the Syrian Women's Network comprise independent, democratic, no-governmental figures and organizations working together to maintain equality between the two sexes, in addition to consolidating democracy, human rights, civil peace and eventually transitional justice. Beside this, the Network accentuates women's role in making the critical decisions in establishing the new Syria in the future by forming efficient power for the process of democratic transformation towards a free, democratic, civil Syria that is unified and enjoys total independence. Thus it would be a state built on equal citizenship that acknowledges no discrimination on sex, religious, ethnic, national, ideological or wealth and power grounds. The power of the law has the upper hand in that state and it guarantees equal rights for all the citizens living on its land. Furthermore, the Network works on making alliances with the organizations and groups that share similar objectives to help women occupy their rightful positions on all levels.

Currently, the Syrian Women's Network is launching the second phase of its campaign in the memory of the advent of the Syrian Revolution. Follows the fundamental manifesto of the campaign:

"During the last five years, the Syrian Regime has shown no abstinence to commit all forms of violations against the Syrian people. Such violations are, in the mildest description, crimes against humanity, war crimes and mass killing. These crimes which have been committed under the nose of the whole world comprise: random bombardment, using internationally forbidden weapons, dropping barrel bombs on peaceful civilians. In addition to this, the Syrian regime is besieging cities and towns and sniping whoever tries to break these sieges to secure a bite for his/her family. Moreover, the besieged cities and towns are suffocated by military barricades and checkpoints that would very often than not do irritating and humiliating check of both luggage and bodies and would, on several occasions, arrest some people."

Despite the gravity of crimes constantly committed in Syria, the international community has not, up till now, reacted to them but rather watched motionlessly, the thing that has eventually led to turning Syria to a huge prison suffocating civilians and driving them outside their own country in an attempt to save themselves and their families by throwing themselves in the midst of the sea in search for a safer land.

The Syrian Regime has not only committed such crimes but also turned a blind eye to all international conventions that assert human rights and the basic right of freedom of speech. As a matter of fact, since the early days of the Syrian revolution, all prisons in Syria have been stuffed with political prisoners and prisoners of conscience where they have been tortured both physically and psychologically. Systematic torture, starvation, negligence of

health conditions have been carried out thoroughly leading in most cases to the inevitable death. Women, however, have not been spared; they have also suffered the harsh experience of arrest. In several cases, they were subjected to systematic arrest, humiliation, beating and sometimes rape.

Many Syrian families, nowadays, have no clue of the whereabouts of their missing children who have been imprisoned by the regime. Many mothers are desperate to hear a soothing piece of news that would inform them that their dear ones are not yet lost to death. The Syrian Regime, however, is constantly holding mock trials against the detainees in which many of them are convicted and executed without consulting any legal texts or having a fair trial.

All these crimes are committed in Syria where the Regime takes lightly all international laws and conventions, especially the international laws of human rights which acknowledge the equal inalienable rights of all human beings. Such rights establish the basic ground for liberty, equity and peace in the whole world. One of these laws is the International Declaration of Human Rights and Article No.7 of the International Covenant on Civil political Rights. Both of the aforementioned laws have stated the inadmissibility of exposing anybody to torture, maltreatment, severe punishment or humiliating inhumane treatment.

Several reports by legal and international organizations have monitored an increase in the arrest rate in Syria. The Syrian Network for Human Rights have lists of 110 thousand people still detained by the Syrian Regime. However, estimations raise the number of detainees to reach up to twice the above mentioned figure minimum. Giving exact statistics of the true number of detainees is unattainable due to difficulties in obtaining information of all the people detained by the Regime.

The Syrian Network of Human Rights has also documented at least 2020 cases of women arrest, of which 674 women are adults and 318 young girls. Moreover, there are 1115 cases of enforced disappearance among those female detainees.

On the other hand, the armed groups in Syria have also made serious violations including recruiting children, kidnapping, torturing during detention, and arresting and torturing civilians. Up till now no one has any information about Razan Zaytoonah, the prominent human rights activist, and three of her colleagues: Wael Hamada, Sameerah Khalil and Nazem Hamadi who were kidnapped in December 9 2013 in Duma near Damascus outskirts; Duma is anyhow controlled by opposition armed groups like The Army of Islam. These four people were still being detained when this campaign was initiated.

Moreover, the radical groups known as ISIS and Jabhat Alnusrah (loyal to Qaeda) have practiced systematic and widespread violations including targeting civilians, kidnapping and execution. The Legal Network has documented the deaths of 81 women at the hands of ISIS and 250 women at the hands of other various armed groups which have also detained over 500 women throughout the ongoing war in Syria.

To shed light on the suffering of those detainees, the Syrian Women's Network has announced launching the second phase of its campaign "Syria, a Homeland not a Prison" in the purpose of forming a public opinion about the issue and gaining its support for the Syrians' right to maintain freedom of speech and democracy, together with the demand to put an end to such random arrests they are constantly subjected to, and releasing all detainees and making known the fate of those who suffered enforced disappearance and terminating the torture inflicted to detainees whether they are physical or psychological,

together with securing medical and health care and decent living that corresponds to the standard set in the Human Rights Declaration and all other similar international covenants in this respect. The campaign aims also at bringing the issue of the Syrian detainees and those who suffered enforced disappearance before the eyes of the international and Syrian communities.

Here are a few facts and figures to prove what has been said earlier:

1. The Syrian Constitution (old and new)

2. Common Laws:

Martial law- juridical authority law- criminal procedure rules- demonstration law- labor law- press ordinance- journalist union law- Association law- election law- syndicate law

3. Exceptional laws:

Protection of revolution objective law

Intelligence administration law

Internal security law

Economic sanctions law

4. Exceptional Courts

State security Supreme Court (which has been lately cancelled)

Court of Terrorism

Field Court

Military Jurisdiction

Security Courts

The Laying-off of Laborer Committee

5. Public Bodies, Agencies and Institutions

General Corporation for the Distribution of Publications

Public Body of Inspection and Control

6. Populist organizations

Baath Vanguard

Baath Revolutionary Youth

The National Union of Syrian Students

The major purpose of the above survey is to point out the major mechanisms manipulated by the Syrian authority to suppress liberty and violate human rights. First and foremost, we need to point out that the Syrian constitution (in both its old and new versions) although has stressed the concept of segregation of duty, yet has laid all powers in the hand of a single person, namely the president of Syria. According to the constitution, the Syrian president should be male, Muslim and Baathist. It is worth mentioning here that the Syrian authority has done its utmost to protect its agents who violate human rights by making laws that spare them all forms of accountability and punishment.