Objective

This meeting aims to create a platform for exchange and provide recommendations on how to create conditions for a gender-inclusive and transformative approach to peace in Syria.

These recommendations revolved around areas, such as:

- Ensuring women’s meaningful political participation in all parts of a peace process.
- Reaching a political transition in line with UNSCR 2254 as a prerequisite for sustainable peace in Syria.
- Sustainable peace and the right to return – working towards an atmosphere conducive for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and IDPs
- Including gender dimensions and perspectives in all crisis response, including all economic relief and recovery efforts.

Recommendations

Women’s meaningful participation goes beyond representation – it means ensuring that women’s diverse interests and rights are fully reflected and included through sincere efforts to address the machinery of exclusion represented in the set of patriarchal and structural obstacles women are faced with (Kvinna till Kvinna 2012). This requires paying close attention to fostering an enabling environment for women to contribute and co-own spaces for contribution in peace processes.¹

The discussion will cover questions like: ‘What does a feminist peace look like in Syria?’ (Feminist peace is understood as state of sustained peace characterized by the absence of all levels of structural violence, where all individuals can thrive and enjoy a state of human security in an inclusive gender equal society. It is also understood that a feminist peace is interlinked with social justice. As a state without structural violence would also be one that considers economic inequalities, which if not addressed is at many times reinforced through peace making processes.)

1- How can Member States and UN agencies ensure women’s effective influence and gender considerations in multilateral and bilateral responses to the Syria crisis?

- Women should be meaningfully included in economic processes, including economic reform and recovery plans, in their countries through, but not limited to, facilitating spaces for women to develop their own economic reform visions.
- The international community needs to understand the longitudinal aspects of women’s economic empowerment as it requires a normative change in the society. It is not enough just to give women short term training.
- Support the creation of Women and Girl Safe Spaces (WGSS) in Syria and the need for protection services to be incorporated. Those safe spaces play an integral role in addressing problems of violence in the short-term for women in conflict zones. They are also a fundamental preliminary step for women to meet and discuss matters that tackle their daily lives.
- Realise the importance of the media’s role in creating peace discourse and promoting women, peace and security’s agenda. Support the Syrian media, especially emerging alternative media, to ensure efforts and to encourage women participation in peace building and endure coverage on women are meaningful to local actors. It is important to highlight the role that women journalists are playing in Syria as WHRDs and to address the safety issue of women journalists in particular.
- Advocate for joint monitoring and women’s inclusion:
  - Contribute to joint monitoring and reporting on situation of women and girls, marginalised groups/areas, and operating space/restriction on civil society (particularly women-led organisations) and consequently develop joint advocacy messaging and actions.
  - Support inclusion of women leaders, women-led organisations/networks as critical partners in covid-19 response plans.
- Broaden networking channels and strengthen existing ones among women-led and feminist organisations operating inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, in order to promote solidarity and to create feminist support networks for these organisations. This encourages such organizations to share experiences and mobilize resources, etc.
- Institutionalise organisational competencies on gender-sensitive advocacy and gender mainstreaming skills.
- Structure and coordinate existing feminist activisms, knowledge production initiatives and groups through virtual and non-virtual platforms.
- Write and document Syrian women and civil society history of the past and present.
- Disseminate intellectual and theoretical critical feminist tools that would support the development of Syrian women feminist thinking and activisms.
- Develop gender inclusive framework for peacebuilding processes for all communities including LGBTQ+, where binary language/structures are not being reinforced.
2- What are the steps needed to sustain synergies across the ongoing UN-facilitated political process, the Covid-19 response and the design and implementation of confidence-building mechanisms?

- Support WHRDs and women peacebuilders in their proactive efforts to address violent extremism by cooperating with the global human rights and women’s rights movements.
- Demographic architecting can have a long-lasting impact on deepening the exclusion of IDP and returnee groups. HLP rights need to be recognised as a local democracy-building issue and a key condition for women’s participation, especially women IDPs and women returnees.
- Support women in gaining necessary documentation that they lacked (marriage, birth, etc.), which is often a major barrier for women in accessing justice avenues.
- Women thematic task force: The views and priorities of women are often absent from certain taskforces that are perceived to be “men’s business” such as the economy, security and military questions. Where it can be argued in a given context that there might be virtually no women in the aforementioned sectors, they actually greatly affect women on a daily basis, and women contribute to them in various ways. Spaces for women to strategise collectively across the sectors can offer an opportunity for the emergence of new views and options beyond the hegemony of the male-dominated mainstream.
- A quota of ideas by women: A quota for women’s ideas in peace processes allows for attributing ideas to women, ensuring that women speak, and facilitates tracking women’s impact on the process. This also signals the value of women’s ideas. The invisibility of women’s qualitative contribution in peace processes poses a challenge to generating substantive evidence on its impact.
- Capitalise on organisations’ existing capacities and competencies through enhancing cross-regional, participatory and collective advocacy work on gender-sensitive transitional justice to complement their existing community-led efforts, and to create organic feminist learning processes.
- A Collective Intersectional Response:
  Donors should adopt a collective intersectional response, taking into consideration that risks are affecting women and girls differently, especially thinking of diverse needs depending on geographical areas in Syria, age, disabilities, marital status, chronic illnesses, etc. Donors and international funders should generally work and collaborate with women’s funds, women and women’s rights organisations as partners who must be integrally included to any crisis response. Protection and prevention measures, whether in response to covid-19 or any other crisis response should include bridging the gender gap of access to information between different communities. Women and girls should be adequately informed about how to prevent and respond to the pandemic, since they play a major role in their communities. The information should be made accessible in various forms and formats, including pictorial to ensure that women and girls with
different educational levels can understand the risks associated to the pandemic. Also, prioritise access to sexual and reproductive health services and ensure that women and girls can seek care despite restrictions on mobility related to covid-19.

- Political transition in Syria must include an amendment of personal status, social affairs and labour laws, ensuring equity, abolishing discriminatory laws and introducing laws that protect women from GBV, as well as ensure that an independent civil society is able to operate freely and with agency across Syria.
- Our experience shows that including women in Syrian peace negotiations has been very ad hoc. What is needed is the meaningful political participation and representation of women which should be based on the recognition of existing power relations between women and across marginalized social groups. Without a clear awareness of the power dynamics based on class, education, ethnicity, religion etc. women’s political initiatives risk reproducing them instead of challenging them.

3- How to resource and adequately finance women's led organisations to enhance the capacity of women to prevent and respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities?

- Independent fund for women in peace processes: Recognise women’s political groups and make independent funds available for women’s political organising. Take women’s political work seriously – it is not just a pastime or a volunteering project.
- More funds and interventions should be allocated to support women's small businesses and other economic ventures, with a strong emphasis on longer-term sustainability.
- More funds should be allocated on mental health support services, especially that they play an integral part to WGSS and activities. This includes knowledge dissemination of GBV and support services.
- Provide technical and financial support for Syrian media and thus promoting women, peace and security agenda in their work.
- Secure long-term funding and feminist support to ensure the stability and sustainability of organizations' work.
- Flexible Funding and Relations Between the Donors and Local Women-led Organisations:
  - Donors need to provide women’s rights organisations with emergency, core, flexible and long-term funding as they adapt their work to respond to the gendered impact of this crisis.
  - Deploy and give access to emergency or rapid response funds to local and grassroots organisations in order to better respond to emerging needs and gender dimensions of the crisis.
  - Make grant-, and application processes more flexible and less burdensome, considering that Syrian organisations were already severely strained by the conflict before the outbreak.
Increase fund to support self-care and mental health support among staff, especially those who face challenges from caretaking children. Convert grants into general operating grants that can cover core operations and staff salaries.

Support virtual and online tools for remote work, IT equipment and cover digital security related costs.

The recommendations were extracted from various documents:

- Women Now for Development Organization, 2019, voluntary return: between international law’s baseline and the priorities of women refugees in Lebanon, Beirut.
- Women Now for development Organisation, 2019, Gender Justice and Feminist Knowledge Production in Syria
- “Turning the Tide: Syrian Women’s Rights Organizations on the Transitional Justice Map”, a mapping report under development by Dawlaty and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), 2020

Signed and endorsed by:

- Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
- Women Now for Development (WND)
- Kesh Malek
- Syrian Female’s Journalists Network (SFJN)
- Dawlaty
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- Mobaderoon