

A vision from Syrian civil society organizations about the General Principles of the Rebuilding process of Syria

In some political circles, discussions have already started about the rebuilding process of Syria as some began to study possible options for this process and how to strengthen their roles in it for when the time is right.

When examining these discussions, we clearly see how the rebuilding process is being linked to possible international arrangements, mainly between the United States and Russia and to a lower extent other international and regional parties, while they tend to focus less on the required conditions of justice and democracy.

In addition, such discussions seem to assume that through the so-planned rebuilding process, the whole of Syria would have equal opportunities and that consequently all Syrians would be treated fairly in this process, where in fact reality contradicts such an assumption.

As Syrians, and as a part of Syria, and since our existence and future as civil society are associated with democracy and seeking justice, we found ourselves directly concerned with the rebuilding subject, seeing it as the main determinant of the future of our country and our people defining whether there will be democracy at any time in Syria, or whether tyranny and injustice will be sponsored and rebuilt with a long-term impact on our country's future.

We see a real danger in the use by the coalition of Russia, Iran, and the Assad's authority of the international aid, presented as "gifts" coming from any of the three, to "compensate" pillars and followers of the regime who participated in killing Syrians and to bribe entire sectors of people surrounding them; trying thus to rebuild the authoritarian regime.

This coalition could also use the "Reconstruction Funds" as political rewards focusing them on those areas that it considers as "loyal" while bringing the majority that have rebelled back to silence and humiliating obedience.

If such scenarios happen – we can see these three parties actually preparing for them as indicated by their actions– then the "Reconstruction of Syria" would be a reward, not a punishment, by the international community to war criminals and a funding to rebuild the tyrant regime.

In order to ensure that the funding of the international community to rebuild Syria is allocated in respect of the principle of justice and democracy, it is vital to stick to conditions that guarantee such a course rather than the opposite direction that is being prepared by Russia, Iran, and the Syrian regime. Therefore, the international community must link its gradual contribution for the rebuilding (including the gradual lifting of sanctions) with the respect of such conditions and standards.

We emphasize here that democracy, which guarantees freedom of self-organization, freedom of expression, freedom of the press and the participation of people from planning to final review, is a

condition for the success of the rebuilding process in the case of Syria, as elsewhere; otherwise “Reconstruction” will lead to a corrupt and irreversible authoritarian regime and a sustained social disintegration.

Based on this, we, a group of civil society organizations, are providing our vision about the **Rebuilding of Syria** with the aim to:

1. Establish, enrich and promote essential principles and criteria to ensure that rebuilding process is implemented in accordance with human rights and the international law, in order to ensure a genuine and sustainable peace for our country.
2. Benefit for this from the vast experiences, visions, and specialties of the participating group of civil society organizations.

The devastation currently taking place in Syria at every level (state, community, individuals, buildings...) requires a **participatory reconstruction process** that responds to the wishes and needs of local communities, in a democratic environment. Assessing the basic needs of the inhabitants, identifying the architectural style that would encourage displaced civilians to return to their residences, monitoring the rebuilding process from planning to implementation, and ensuring that the process is efficient and corruption-free; all require citizens to be empowered to create their local representation mechanisms as well as the existence of free press through which they can express themselves. This implies **the need to have freedom of the press and organizations** (unions, associations, local administrative councils...), which would enhance the role of citizens in assessing the extent of damage caused to their region and identifying their needs, as well as guarantee a fair distribution of production and services projects that takes into consideration the real levels of destruction of each region.

It is also essential to avoid the creation of new grievances and therefore **to involve all citizens regardless of their age or gender** so that rebuilding efforts are distributed fairly and equitably.

In addition, a good cooperation and a **clear and defined distribution of roles and responsibilities**, are required to ensure on one hand national ownership, legitimacy, accountability and coordination among actors in different regions, and on the other hand a process leading to reduced poverty and unemployment rates, improved quality and reduced costs of services, diversified sources of income, reduced burden on the national budget, attraction of foreign investment for large projects, stabilization of local capital, and creation of good financing opportunities for local markets and financial institutions.

Finally, in order to ensure the rights of all civilians and the success of the rebuilding process, there must be **public oversight as well as public and media supervision** of this process to keep everyone informed of all steps, thus strengthening the rule of law, enabling accountability, preventing violations, and instilling trust and legitimacy. For this, **the participation of the civil society in such oversight is necessary** as it will also help attracting donors to contribute to the rebuilding process by securing independent competencies operating with international standards capable of overseeing the process, enforcing discipline in the funding disbursement mechanisms and preventing any leakage coming from inefficiency or corruption, similar to what occurred in Lebanon and in Iraq.

Based on the above, we have defined the following principles that we will be constantly promoting and advocating for, in order to ensure that the rebuilding of Syria is carried out in accordance with human rights and the international law and guarantees a genuine and sustainable peace for our country. These principles are valid for all the phases of rebuilding and they cover all regions in Syria.

These principles are:

a) A rebuilding process that prevents the continuation or the reproduction of violations:

- All those who are accused or suspected of being involved or participating in crimes against humanity and war crimes should be excluded from any role in the rebuilding process.
- The process should be based on the state's duty to protect human rights, and on the corporate responsibility of respecting human rights and avoiding complicity in war crimes and crimes against humanity. In addition, victims should have access to effective, judicial and non-judicial compensation mechanisms.
- The process should ensure that the rebuilding funds will not be used to commit new crimes or to reward any criminal.
- The process should be in full compliance with the provisions of the international human rights law and the international humanitarian law.
- The process should not compromise the rights and properties of Syrian citizens under the pretext of reconstruction by issuing laws and legislation and taking unfair actions as happened with the law no. 10.

b) A fair rebuilding process based on the principles of democracy, transparency and national interest:

- The rebuilding process should be built on democracy. It should allow the participation of the public through self-organized mechanisms (unions, associations, local councils, etc.).
- The process should include the participation and the supervision of a free, independent, transparent and democratic civil society in all of the phases of the process until its completion: planning, implementation and monitoring.
- Ensuring the freedom of the press in covering the rebuilding process must be secured in order to enhance the transparency and the credibility of the process.
- The process should rely on the local workforce and the local structures throughout all of its stages.
- Reconstruction projects should lay the fundamentals of a sustainable economical, social, cultural, scientific and political development.

c) A sustainable rebuilding process involving local communities:

- Administrative decentralization should allow an important role for local administrations in complement with the central authority both working on defined rules and national objectives. These local administrations have to be inclusive, representative of all segments of the community, including internally displaced persons, and democratically elected. They should not involve people accused or known to have participated in crimes against humanity or war crimes. They should be formed within the legal framework of

the formation of local units, taking into account the official administrative distribution in Syria that was in place before 2011.

- The role of local administrations that have achieved a minimum level of representation, institutionalization, and service provision, should focus on
 - on one hand on involving the local community in the planning of the rebuilding projects through: suitable needs assessments, participatory mechanisms emphasizing community dialogues on local priorities and developing effective complaint mechanisms;
 - on the other hand on having an active role as administrative and local governance structures in the implementation of the rebuilding projects.
- Civil society organizations working at the local level and the national level should also play an important role as mentioned above and in particular the knowledge of civil society about the local situation should be used in order to prevent any further violations or any contribution of the rebuilding process to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Upon the recommendation of the **Workgroup for Building Free Syria**, the following organizations have signed this document endorsing the principles that are listed above:

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| 1. Alkawakbi Center for transitional justice and Human Rights | 20. Rethink Rebuild Society |
| 2. Alkawakibi Organization For Human Rights | 21. Save The Rest |
| 3. Badael | 22. Shaml Coalition |
| 4. Baytna Syria | 23. Space of hope |
| 5. Dawlaty | 24. Syria Legal Network-NL |
| 6. Decostamine Initiative | 25. Syria Relief Organization |
| 7. Democratic Republic Studies Center | 26. Syrian Engineers for Construction and Development |
| 8. Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights | 27. Syrian Forum |
| 9. Hoffnung Fur Syria | 28. Syrian Freedom Youth |
| 10. Jusoor for studies | 29. Syrian League for Citizenship |
| 11. Kesh Malek | 30. Syrian Legal Development Programme |
| 12. Lawadessa Development Center | 31. Syrian Network for Human Rights |
| 13. Local Administration Councils Unit, LACU | 32. Syrian Women League |
| 14. Local Development and Small-Projects Support (LDSPS) | 33. Syrian Women's Network |
| 15. Maan Org | 34. The Day After |
| 16. Masar | 35. The Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research |
| 17. Obaida | 36. The Syrian Journalists Association |
| 18. Omran Dirasat | 37. Wisdom House |
| 19. Palmyra For Human & Community Development | 38. Women Now for Development |