

04/02/2016

Response to the London CSO Conference

Six of our organisations were represented in the 3 February 'Supporting Syria Conference' in London. We appreciate the clear solidarity expressed by individuals and the good intention and noble cause behind this conference. We are also thankful for the immense efforts that have been put in by individuals and organisations to achieve Syrian representation in the process leading up to the London donors conference. However, we have a number of pressing concerns which we feel compelled to share regarding the 3 February conference:

1. Syrian civil society organisations (CSOs) were consulted in a secondary and not primary manner. This meant that:
 - a. Syrian CSOs received invitations to this conference at a very late stage, leading, among other things, to difficulties in obtaining visas. This meant that there was an underrepresentation of Syrian CSOs and the exclusion of some which should have been present.
 - b. Syrian CSOs were not consulted on the funding priorities for the donors conference. With the greatest experience on the field in Syria and the best understanding of the conflict, we should be the leaders in a) determining policy towards Syria; b) determining funding priorities; and c) implementing the projects on the ground (i.e. receiving direct funding for the implementation of projects).
2. The panel session in which CSOs discussed the issues of protection, women, jobs, and education was cut down from 90 minutes to 30 minutes. This was hardly enough time to discuss many of the highly complex issues that this conference grappled with.
3. Within this panel session, each group was asked to report back with only two general recommendations. This highly constrained the ability of Syrian CSOs to relay their key demands which are complex and range over a number of key issues.

We did feel that the final conference [statement](#) adequately reflected the key demands of Syrian CSOs and is representative of the Syrian voice. In this, we applaud that a favourable final outcome was achieved to the CSO conference. However, we stress that the means, and not only the ends, must be Syrian-led. Only by listening to Syrians can the conflict in Syria begin to be addressed.

We stress that listening to Syrians begins by listening to our demands for protection from the attacks that are being inflicted upon civilians by Assad's and Russia's forces. In this, we note the collapse of the Geneva peace process and stress that without an end to such indiscriminate attacks, we cannot begin to address the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Signatories:

Dr. Haytham Alhamwi, Rethink Rebuild Society (represented in CSO conference)
Abdullah Hourani, Syria Solidarity UK (represented in CSO conference)
Dr. Amer Masri, Scotland4Syria (represented in CSO conference)
Reem Assil, Syrian Platform for Peace (represented in CSO conference)
Dr. Talal Al-Mayhani, Centre for Thought and Public Affairs (represented in CSO conference)
Mazen Ejbaei, Help 4Syria (represented in CSO conference)
Dr. Mohammad Alhadj Ali, Syrian Welsh Society
Dr. Mohammad Tammo, Kurds House
Dr. Sharif Kaf Al-Ghazal, Syrian Association of Yorkshire
Dr. Fadel Moghrabi, Peace and Justice for Syria