



Syrian Civil Society meeting with the Syrian and French Foreign Ministers in Paris: Calls for Justice, Accountability, and the Rebuilding of a New Syria

Paris – 13 February 2025

A delegation of Syrian civil society organisations, victim associations, and the Syrian Foreign Ministry met with the French Foreign Minister on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting on Syria, which was held in Paris with the participation of Arab and Western countries.

This meeting followed a discussion session organised by [Madaniya](#) the previous day at the Arab World Institute, which aimed to highlight key priorities in the justice and accountability file, drawing on the outcomes of the Damascus Justice Conference. The meeting sought to ensure that international positions and decision-making processes reflect the voices of survivors and victims, as well as the efforts of Syrian civil society actors.

On the 24 and 25 of January, a wide range of Syrian civil society organisations, victim associations, and families of victims had previously convened a Syrian-Syrian dialogue conference in Damascus, attended by representatives from the Syrian Ministry of Justice, to discuss justice priorities at this critical stage. The dialogue resulted in a set of recommendations presented to the current

government, which also served as a key reference for the recommendations developed during the discussion session in Paris, aimed at addressing the international community ahead of the ministerial meeting.

The meeting between the Syrian civil society, Syrian Foreign Ministry, and the French Foreign Ministry was opened by French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot and Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shaibani. Minister Barrot reaffirmed France's unwavering commitment to supporting the path of justice and accountability in Syria, as well as its continued backing for Syrian civil society and activists who had endured repression under the previous regime. He reiterated France's support for achieving a fair political transition in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime.

For his part, Minister Al-Shaibani expressed his appreciation for the role of Syrian civil society and the efforts of Syrians both inside and outside the country. He emphasised that Syria needs these efforts now more than ever and acknowledged that the current government has inherited a collapsed state. He stressed that rebuilding Syria requires the participation of all Syrians and support from the international community.

Syrian Civil Society's Recommendations to the International Community: Justice First

During the meeting, members of the victims' associations and Syrian civil society delegation commended French efforts in combating impunity in Syria. The delegation put forward a series of recommendations focused on transitional justice, accountability, and building Syria's future, including:

1. The Role of Victims in Transitional Justice Processes

Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that victims, survivors, and their families play a leading and active role in all stages of transitional justice, from planning to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. They stressed that achieving genuine stability requires comprehensive justice with victims' participation that prevents the recurrence of past violations, guarantees reparations for victims, and ensures remedy for the harm suffered. This should be achieved through a comprehensive national plan, supported by the international community, while avoiding politicisations.

2. Holding perpetrators accountable and recovering stolen assets

Participants underscored the necessity of holding all individuals responsible for crimes against the Syrian people accountable, including all parties to the conflict, with Bashar al-Assad at the forefront. They highlighted the role of the international community in pursuing fugitives abroad and enforcing measures to recover looted funds and smuggled assets.

3. Acknowledging past violations and establishing an inclusive Syrian narrative

Participants highlighted that the Syrian revolution was a response to decades of oppression and systemic violations that must be addressed through transitional justice. They stressed the need to

preserve this history in Syria's collective memory, ensuring that any official narrative encompasses all crimes and violations—those committed before the revolution, as well as the grave human rights abuses during the conflict.

4. Ensuring women's access to justice without fear or stigma

Attendees emphasised that Syrian women have endured severe violations, including sexual violence in detention centres and sexual slavery. They called for a gender-sensitive approach in transitional justice programmes that recognises women's experiences and specific needs, ensuring their access to a dignified justice.

5. Combating sectarian and incendiary rhetoric

Participants urged the adoption of an inclusive, human rights-centred discourse that upholds equal citizenship for all Syrians. They warned against rhetoric that fuels sectarian and ethnic divisions, including the international community's tendency to view Syrians through a majority-minority lens. In that context, they highlighted the dangers of individual acts of revenge in areas with sectarian tensions, emphasising that such actions deny Syrians their right to truth and justice and further deepen divisions.

6. Supporting social recovery, reconstruction, and lifting economic sanctions

Participants stressed the interconnection between social recovery and economic recovery, linking both to the broader justice process. They insisted that investments and reconstruction efforts should be guided by human rights principles, social justice frameworks, and reparation measures. They called on the international community to lift economic sanctions that hamper economic recovery and restrict civil society operations. Furthermore, they urged international donors to shift from short-term crisis response to long-term, flexible development programmes that address the needs of Syrians and contribute to rebuilding efforts.

7. Ensuring continued support for Syrian civil society and its independence

Participants emphasised the vital role played by Syrian civil society organisations, including women-led initiatives across various sectors. They called on the international community to continue supporting these organisations, ease restrictions on their operations and legal presence in Syria, and guarantee their full independence.

8. Ending all hostilities and protecting civilians nationwide

Participants stressed the urgency of achieving a political solution that ensures an end to all military operations across Syria and protects civilians' lives. They emphasised the right of all displaced Syrians to return home safely, voluntarily, and with dignity, ensuring that their rights and properties are restored.

9. Developing strategic solutions for the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees

The discussion underscored that current conditions in Syria are not suitable for the large-scale return of refugees due to deteriorating public services, infrastructure destruction, and economic decline. Participants called on the international community to develop well-structured plans to facilitate the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees. They emphasised the need for legal and logistical mechanisms that allow refugees to visit their homeland safely on a temporary basis to assess the situation and contribute to Syria's reconstruction.

At the close of the meeting, participants reaffirmed that a successful political transition in Syria is in the best interest of all parties. They emphasised that achieving this transition requires collective efforts, with justice and accountability serving as fundamental pillars for a comprehensive and sustainable peace. The discussion concluded with a call for establishing a state that upholds human rights and promotes equal citizenship for all Syrians.





