

Syrian Women, a Strong Constituency for Peace

A panel of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board to the Special Envoy for Syria

**A high-level side event on the margins of the
UN-Women Executive Board Second Regular Session
31 August 2016, 3-4:30 p.m. in CR 3**

1. Background

Five years into the Syrian crisis, more than 250,000 people have been killed. The resulting chaos has rolled back human development achievements by almost 40 years, leaving 50% of the population (12.6 million people) in poverty, 14 million in need of humanitarian and development assistance, and 7 million internally displaced.

Syrian women and children continue to bear the brunt of this violent conflict and the mass displacement of its population. Violent extremists such as ISIL continue to subject Syrian women to gross human rights abuses including abductions, human trafficking, torture, forced marriage, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

While Syrian women and girls have been disproportionately affected by this crisis, they are not only victims but also leaders and a strong constituency for peace. Syrian women started organizing at the community level in relation to humanitarian needs, forming networks and coalitions along their geographic, political and ethnic lines to respond to urgent needs. Syrian women have been engaging actively in international-level advocacy for a political solution and women's representation in peace talks.

Over the past 3 years, UN-Women with the generous support of the Government of the Netherlands and the Government of Norway, and in close collaboration with the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria (OSE) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), has been engaging in high-level advocacy and supporting Syrian women's leadership, capacities and coalition-building. These efforts were in support of the meaningful participation of Syrian women as a strong constituency for peace at all levels of peace efforts.

Joint advocacy, coalition and capacity-building efforts culminated in three milestones:

- 1) In January 2014, with the launch of the Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy; a coalition of diverse women from inside and outside Syria with a common agenda of a peaceful political solution to the Syrian crisis and a strong call for women's participation and representation in peacebuilding.

2) In February 2016, when the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura formed a women's advisory board to engage in the political process, which includes 12 members. With the technical and logistical support of UN-Women, the Syrian Women's Advisory Board continues to bring together Syrian women as civil society actors and has been engaging in Geneva III talks with the Special Envoy to amplify the voices of the women's movement, to discuss negotiating issues, and raise key matters missing from the agenda.

3) In May 2016, when UN-Women convened a Syrian Women Peace Makers Conference which brought together the most diverse and representative group so far in terms of allegiances, ethnicities, religious backgrounds, age and geographic distribution, with members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board to the Special Envoy. Over 130 Syrian women, including political and civil society activists, came together and forged a statement of unity despite significant political divides.

This latest effort opens a new era of engagement for the Syrian women's movement as they work together towards a greater role and representation for women in the political process and forming a strong coalition for peace on the ground.

2. Objectives of the event

On the occasion of the upcoming second regular session of the UN-Women Executive Board, UN-Women is organizing a side event where the Syrian Women's Advisory Board to the Special Envoy and UN-Women will shed light on the Syrian women's experience in coalition-building and engagement in Track I and II processes as a constituency for peace. The side event will:

- Raise awareness of the plight of Syrian women and the impact of the conflict on women and girls.
- Share the Syrian women civil society experience in coalition-building and good practices in supporting women's engagement in Track I and II initiatives.
- Bring visibility to the leadership role of Syrian women as peace assets to the political process.

3. Modality

The side event will include, an opening statement by the UN-Women Executive Director, presentations by Syrian Women's Advisory Board members, and a Q&A session.

4. Date and Venue

The side event will be held on 31 August 2016, at UN Headquarters, Conference Room 3, from 3:00 to 4:30 pm.