

MEDIA release: for immediate release

Monday 23 April

[English, German, French, Italian and Arabic-speaking spokespeople available](#)

Syrian organisations ask the UN and EU not to give up on Syrian civil society

Peace is only possible if Syrian organisations and democratic institutions play a leading role in the humanitarian response and any rebuilding of the country, a coalition of human rights and humanitarian groups said today, on the eve of the second Brussels conference.

The UN and EU must assure the protection and involvement of Syrian human rights and civil society groups to ensure that abuses such as sexual violence, forced displacement and targeting of civilians are documented, monitored and ultimately, prevented, the alliance [We Exist](#) said. A Special Tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria, should be established, they added.

Syrian organisations are providing millions of people with education, food, water, healthcare and humanitarian aid, despite daily bombardment and combat. Their work is vital to protect and serve people who are struggling to survive or to return home.

Maria Alabdeh, Executive Director of Women Now for Development, said:

“Investing in an active, vibrant and fully-funded civil society is the only hope for a peaceful and democratic Syria. As Syrian human rights and humanitarian workers, we are doing all we can to empower young men and women, train local leaders, document human rights abuses, advocate for property rights and treat traumatised children but we can’t do it alone.

“International aid needs to help heal the emotional and physical wounds, hold perpetrators to account and stitch the fabric of society back together again. Our work is fighting extremism and challenging the continued war crimes but we are operating under fire from Russian and Syrian planes, on shoestring budgets, trying to make the books balance from one month to the next.”

As the United Nations and European Union chair a conference in Brussels to boost humanitarian funding and strengthen the Geneva peace talks, civil society groups are calling for their demands to form the basis of every decision.

They are calling on the UN and EU to help:

1. Stop the bombing of civilians and use of prohibited arms (not just chemical weapons), as well as the deliberate targeting of schools, hospitals and civilian infrastructure.
2. Halt the forced displacement of civilians. People have the right to remain in their homes, safe from bombardment or illegal detention.
3. Guarantee safety for civil society organisations, including legal recognition and protection.
4. Support survivors of sexual violence and prosecute the perpetrators.
5. Ensure humanitarian programmes address the need of young men and offer alternatives to violence.
6. Anyone who wishes to return home, needs support to do so – with health, psychological and education services, as well as reconciliation programmes.
7. Pressure the Syrian government and all warring sides to release a list of names of all detainees, along with their current locations and statuses, and to immediately stop torture and mistreatment.
8. Abolish exceptional courts, especially field, sharia law, war and counter-terrorism courts and guarantee fair trials under a supervision from the United Nations. Establish a Special Tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria.
9. Consider Civil Society a leading partner in all issues concerning the future of Syria -- whether it is humanitarian or development work, reconstruction or rebuilding.
10. Accountability should be ensured for all war crime committed and for the use of all prohibited arms, not just chemical weapons.

For an interview contact the alliance coordinator on lead@weexist-sy.org

Notes to editor

We Exist is an Alliance of Syrian Civil Society organizations, supported by international partners, working together to ensure the role of Syrian Civil Society is present and central to any thinking and planning on Syria.

At the 24/25-04 Representatives from **We Exist** will be stationed at the corner of round Schuman at EXKi Berlaymont & ANSA ready to give out interviews in these languages English, German, and Italian. To arrange for interviews please contact:

Email: lead@weexist-sy.org

Phone: +49 176 24417246

Link to spokespeople bios and contacts

<https://goo.gl/ZKVCJf>