



12 March 2019

Statement on the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria
UN Human Rights Council, 40th session (25 February to 22 March 2019)
Interactive Dialogue with Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) welcomes the Commission of Inquiry's report. We echo the Commission's assessment that the current situation in Syria "undermines the feasibility of the return of internally displaced persons and refugees."¹ We also firmly believe that with the present environment of impunity and continued armed violence in the country, the prospect to safeguard a voluntary, safe, and dignified return process to Syria is devoid, and returnees could face human rights violations and abuses, including persecution, discrimination, arbitrary detention, and torture.

This year marks the eighth anniversary of an uprising that demanded freedom and justice but was met with unprecedented repression and violence by the Syrian regime, leading to a violent conflict where armed groups proliferated and which now encompasses regional and international powers, with all parties committing war crimes and grave human rights violations and abuses against civilians. It is crucial to look at conflict-related rights violations and harms suffered by women, men, girls and boys during the conflict and their specific needs, as well as the gender and power dynamics that stem from those violations. The armed conflict in Syria has impacted women and girls disproportionately as the systematic targeting of civilians, proliferation of arms, and collapse of the rule of law exacerbated pre-existing economic, social and political inequalities that they suffered from. In Syria, women and girls have different experiences in conflicts compared to men and boys because they are afforded a different status and place in family and public structures. They are often assigned different roles in the home and given differential access to the labor market. They also have different mobility patterns and options and differentiated access to information.

This is why we firmly believe that any reparations or broader transitional justice mechanisms in Syria must follow fair, transparent and transformative principles, based on an intersectional feminist perspective that analyses how the interconnectedness of social categorizations such as ethnicity, class, and gender creates overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Such an approach puts a spotlight on underlying inequalities as root causes of the conflict and on the differential impacts of the conflict on individuals and groups. Sustainable peace cannot be built without socio economic security, underpinned by justice and equality.

Ahead of the third Brussels Conference on Syria taking place this week, we urge all States, major donors, as well as UN agencies to:

- Implement the Commission of Inquiry's recommendation from last year calling on all actors to make any provision and facilitation of reconstruction funding contingent upon the fulfilment of benchmarks on accountability and human rights protection; in this regard, we also urge all actors to make sure that such provisions give priority to the rehabilitation of infrastructures and services that primarily respond to civilians' needs and are contingent to a fair and democratic political solution and to the implementation of relevant international resolutions, such as UNSCR 2254 (2015);
- Adopt a feminist political economy analysis in the planning and allocation of investments that enable victims of human rights violations in Syria to access gender-sensitive services necessary for their rehabilitation and unimpeded and equal participation in society, and ensuring that conflict sensitive human rights due diligence, including gender and human rights impact assessments, is carried out in the planning phase of investments, including by IFIs and companies;
- Ensure that plans for justice and accountability, including restitution and reparations, are based on fair, transparent and participatory mechanisms allowing diverse groups at the grassroots level to bring their individual and collective lived experiences of the conflict with the aim of addressing the harm suffered within the conflict, as well as the pre-existing inequalities that contributed to its differential impacts among individuals and groups.

¹ A/HRC/40/70, paragraph 96.