

Table of Contents

- [*Syrian women rise above differences and forge a statement of unity*](#)

Syrian women rise above differences and forge a statement of unity

UN Women (23.05.2016) - <http://bit.ly/27TRrd8> - In an effort to build consensus to end the Syrian crisis, a diverse group of over 130 Syrian women political and civil society activists met in Beirut, Lebanon from 20-22 May and forged a [statement of unity](#), overcoming significant political divides.

The group met for a conference entitled “Syrian Women Peacemakers”, building on three years of UN Women’s advocacy and coalition-building work with Syrian women peace activists. Participants included members of the [Syrian Women Initiative for Peace and Democracy](#)—a network supported by UN Women since 2014—and members of the Women Advisory Board, a committee of Syrian women advisors to Steffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria, and many other women leaders and gender advocates from inside Syria.

“You are making a historic move. One day in Syria, it will be remembered that there was a time before this coalition existed and a time after this coalition existed and the difference will be clear,” said UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the closing session. “Standing here among you, I see the future presidents, ministers, judges and rulers of Syria. Go out there and take the leadership, it belongs to you.”

Conference participants discussed the role of the [Women Advisory Board](#) and ways to increase women’s representation in the formal peace process. Discussions also tackled key issues including the refugee crisis, the status of education, food security, healthcare services and infrastructure inside Syria, the impact of economic sanctions on Syrians inside and the issue of detainees and the kidnapped. Throughout the sessions, the women’s rights agenda and the mutual suffering and personal loss of women from across the political spectrum served as unifying factors among the participants, even as political debates intensified.

“UN Women also supports women peace activists in Libya and Yemen. And every time, I stand before women’s amazing ability to rise above differences with a sense of regret for the time that passed with the Arab world missing out on the opportunity of giving women their equal share of leadership,” said Mohammad Naciri, UN Women Regional Director for Arab States, at the closing session.

After three days of emotionally charged exchanges, conference participants issued a unified statement for peace, demanding more representation of women in the formal peace process (women are currently around 20 per cent of delegates, but they want at least 30 per cent representation) and supporting the role of the Women Advisory Board. Attendees also expressed a willingness to engage in coalition-building groups in support of sustainable peace and a better response to humanitarian crises.

“Syrian women showed that they are a strong constituency for peace, rising above their differences and uniting in their common desire to work together for an end to the

bloodshed, for a lasting political solution and for forming a strong coalition to this end,” said Hiba Qasas, UN Women Head of Arab States Section.

Messages for the World Humanitarian Summit:

On the eve of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul on 23 May, conference participants sent messages to world leaders who will attend the Summit and asked UN Women’s Executive Director to deliver them. These are some of their messages:



Photo: UN Women/Emad Karim

“The women of Aleppo are suffering greatly because of the economic sanctions. We have all these women who used to own or run small factories and workshops and now I see them begging on the streets. Water is scarce, so much that we only use water three times a day. We have been without electricity for the past three months. We grind pasta to make bread because there is no flour. We are not beggars and we do not want aid. Lift the economic sanctions and we will manage on our own.” —Marina El Hanash, Aleppo



Photo: UN Women/Emad Karim

“The first step to ending the humanitarian suffering of Syrians is to end the war. You must find a way to end the war, otherwise the suffering will never end. I’m a theatre

artist and I would like to tell everyone working on peacebuilding in Syria: never tell us this is not the time for theatre or a short film. This is the time for it because our need to express ourselves is at its highest when the situation is most difficult.” —Rawan El Takriri, Jozoor (youth CSO), Damascus



Photo: UN Women/Emad Karim

“If educational facilities [close], Syria will collapse. In order to save the educational process in Syria, terrorism must end. My students at Damascus University face danger on their way to campus and sometimes on campus. Also, the poor do not invest in education. Lift the economic sanctions so Syrians can continue to learn.” —Rima Al Hakimi, Professor at Damascus University, Damascus