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PRESS RELEASE

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As Violence Escalates and Funding Falls, Long-Term Support for Syrians Is Needed Now More Than Ever

[15 March 2025] – Ahead of the Brussels IX Conference on Syria and the Region, over 150 NGOs working across Syria, and in neighbouring refugee-hosting countries, urge the international community to seize this critical moment to double-down on commitments to longer-term, sustainable recovery and prioritize the rights, safety, and dignity of all Syrians.

The fall of the Assad regime four months ago offered cautious optimism that a path to longer-term recovery was finally emerging. However, this shift coincides with unprecedented cuts to global humanitarian aid, stress-testing already overstretched resources amid record-high needs. Renewed conflict in coastal areas underscores the fragility of the situation, with civilians continuing to pay the highest price.

Immediate, strategic, longer-term action is required to protect civilians, bring stability, and ensure communities do not remain trapped in cycles of band-aid emergency assistance. Sustainable approaches are also needed to enable Syrians to rebuild their communities, foster resilience, and self-reliance.

Fourteen years of conflict has devastated Syria, leaving more than 16 million people – almost 70% of the population - reliant on aid. 90% live below the poverty line and more than half struggle to find adequate food. Essential services remain critically lacking; critically needed infrastructure such as Alouk Water Station and Tishreen Dam, which have left hundreds of thousands without access to water or electricity for months. Millions are without electricity, food, education, healthcare, or jobs. There is widespread contamination from explosive ordnance (EO) and war debris, and there has been a 400% increase in the rate of injuries or fatalities from EO in the first two months of 2025 as communities move to or within heavily contaminated areas.

The long-standing impacts of sanctions have exacerbated Syria's humanitarian crisis, restricting livelihoods and impeding longer-term recovery. NGOs acknowledge the steps taken to ease restrictions and urge these to continue to address remaining barriers.

For those displaced by the conflict - both internally and across borders - there is now the possibility to return. However, while intentions to return have increased, structural, economic, psycho-social, protection and legal barriers continue to pose significant barriers to achieving durable solutions. Without these urgent investments to rebuild devastated civilian infrastructure, and restore essential service provision, returns to uninhabitable or damaged areas could deepen poverty and further destabilize an already fragile situation. Protection risks remain widespread with a staggering 400% spike in the rate of injuries or fatalities from landmines, unexploded ordnances (UXO), and war debris in the first two months of 2025 as communities move to or within heavily contaminated areas.

Syria needs more than short-term aid, a meaningful path to stability and recovery. Brussels IX must deliver concrete action that ensures aid reaches those in need, supports essential services, and invests in long-term recovery.

The cycle of crisis must end. Syrians deserve the chance to rebuild their lives, and the time for decisive, coordinated action is now.

Recommendations to Brussels IX participants:

Sustained Financial Commitments:

Support for creating conditions conducive to returns and reintegration must include sustained humanitarian action, restoration of basic services, and strengthening systems. A strong conflict-sensitive approach is vital in supporting returns, reintegration and host communities. Promoting self-reliance and resilience is essential for all communities. Aid must be swiftly disbursed, balancing humanitarian assistance with long-term recovery to prevent cycles of aid dependency. Funding for return programming must not come at the expense of support for refugees or host-communities, both in Syria and across the region.

Immediate and Long-Term Investments into Service Delivery:

A coordinated strategy that prioritizes long-term recovery while addressing urgent needs is vital. Donors should strengthen local governance, infrastructure, and access to essential service provision. Enhancing socio-economic support through targeted livelihood programs and improved access to essential services to reduce economic hardship, which remains a key driver of tensions, is critical.

Housing, Land, and Property Rights:

Without secure property ownership and restitution mechanisms, Syrians – particularly returnees - face risks of displacement, exploitation and deepened social tensions. Funding must support mechanisms that preserve HLP rights, as well as legal identity documentation, for displaced Syrians in both Syria as well as host countries. Programs must address specific barriers that women and children face in securing legal documentation.

Protection & Mine Action:

Protection must be mainstreamed through all aspects of the response. Protection monitoring must be prioritized and rapidly scaled up. Data should be transparently and regularly shared among partners to safeguard returnees' safety throughout journeys. Enhanced coordination with regional refugee hosting protection monitoring mechanisms is vital, while scaled up funding and support for demining is vital as a pre-requisite to recovery efforts.

Locally Led Solutions:

Barriers preventing local organizations from equitable participation must be removed - including in response coordination and leadership. Syrian civil society- for some many years at the forefront of the humanitarian response must have the right to engage and lead efforts moving forward. Coordination mechanisms must reflect the diversity of aid actors and integrate conflict-sensitive approaches that reflect and align with Syria's evolving political landscape. At the programmatic level, donors and international agencies should demonstrate their commitment to local leadership.

Safe, Voluntary and Dignified Returns & Maintenance of Refugee Protection:

Syrian refugees must be given the time, information and legal assurances to make informed and voluntary decisions about return. Host countries must uphold non-refoulement obligations, ensure refugees are not deported, or pressured to return under unsafe conditions, and maintain protections including access to essential service, and legal residency. Services for internally displaced persons (IDPs) must also be maintained to allow such decision-making to take place.

Stabilization of Syria, addressing social tensions

Syrians must be given the opportunity to recover and reclaim control over their futures. To harness the potential of Syria's shifting landscape, the international community must support a peaceful transition that is meaningfully inclusive of civil society, women, and Syrian communities. This requires a multi-pronged approach that strengthens local dialogue mechanisms to address grievances and prevent escalation, ensuring the inclusion of diverse community representatives. Combating misinformation and divisive narratives should also be a priority, with a focus on fact-based public communication and community engagement. The international community must also support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned transitional justice process as a cornerstone of stabilization efforts. Meanwhile, the government and local authorities should co-lead a robust awareness campaign on international humanitarian law (IHL) and civilian protection, with backing from humanitarian actors to maximize reach and effectiveness.

Issued on behalf of the Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF), NWS NGO Forum, NES Forum, Syrian National Alliance, and Syrian Network League, collectively representing over 150 NGOs working in Syria. Contact: info@sirf.ngo