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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Transitional Justice in Syria after Vienna Process: Achieving Justice and Accountability

On December 29-30, 2015, [The Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies \(SCPSS\)](#), in cooperation with the [Syrian Expert House \(SHE\)](#), held a conference entitled “Transitional Justice in Syria after Vienna Process: Achieving Justice and Accountability” in Istanbul, Turkey.

Among those in attendance was: Dr. Ahmad Toumeh, Prime Minister of the Syrian Interim Government, Dr. George Sabra, President of the Syrian National Council, Mr. Riad Seif, Member of the Coordinating Committee of the opposition negotiating body at the talks in Riyadh, and various other members of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. In addition, lawyers and judges from the Ministry of Justice in the Syrian Interim Government attended, as well as representatives of the Free Independent Judicial Council, the Free Syrian Lawyer's Association, and the Syrian Islamic Council. Furthermore, various different civil society organizations and human rights NGOs participated in the conference, including: the Syrian Network for Human Rights, the Syrian Center for Statistics and Research, the Day After Project, Woman Now Lebanon, Alkawakibi Human Rights Organization, Omran for Strategic Studies, Enab Balady Newspaper, and other Syrian human rights activists and politicians.

The conference aimed to gather and connect political opposition leaders with civil society and human rights groups, to discuss the absence of transitional justice from both the Vienna statements concerning the crisis in Syria, and the UNSC 2254 resolution. In addition, political opposition representatives were encouraged continue to include justice in their policies, by holding the war criminals accountable, and providing redress to victims. In particular, it was stressed that transitional justice should be included in the upcoming political negotiations based on UNSC 2254.

The conference was divided into six main sessions. The first session discussed the political solution and whether it would include guarantees of accountability or achieving justice. During that session, Dr. George Sabra, member of the Syrian National Coalition, further explained the articles of Vienna conference and the UNSC resolution 2254. Dr. Sabra then went on to explain the disadvantages of these resolutions. After that, Dr. Ziadeh, the executive director of SCPSS, presented the audience with the most recent field map of Syria, comparing it to previous maps from 2014 and 2015. Dr. Ziadeh highlighted the retreat of the Free Syrian Army, and the territorial expansions of ISIS and Democratic Union Party (PYD) Kurdish forces. Dr. Ziadeh underlined that the only mention of transitional justice in the Geneva Communique involved the provision of redress to victims—while neither the Vienna conference, nor the most recent UNSC resolutions have included any transitional justice whatsoever. Finally, Dr. Ahmed Toumeh, the Prime Minister of the Syrian Interim Government, and Mr. Mohamad Yahya Maktabi, the Secretary-General of the Syrian

Coalition, both participated as part of a panel, where they emphasized the importance of the political solution and the implementation of transitional justice, accountability, and reconciliations.

The second session focused on achieving justice for victims in Syria, and on motivating families of the victims to work within the transitional justice process. After that the third session discussed options and alternatives to transitional justice in Syria now and into the future, on the national and international planes. Finally, the fourth session, which ended the events of first day, was a screening of a documentary film about the experience of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), with a discussion about the similarities and differences between that court and the Syrian situation.

The events of the second day began with the fifth session, which highlighted the idea of transitional justice in a divided and sectarian societies, and the role of civil society will play in achieving transitional justice in Syria. After that the sixth session concluded the conference with a round-table talk about the upcoming political negotiations in Geneva in 2016. [The Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies \(SCPSS\)](#) then proposed holding smaller events, in cooperation with Human Rights NGOs, civil society organizations, and activists in order to raise awareness about issues of transitional justice.

The conference ended with a private screening of "[Little Gandhi: The Lost Truth of the Syrian Uprising](#)", co-produced by [The Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies \(SCPSS\)](#). The film depicted the life of Syrian peace activist Ghiyath Matar, who became internationally known as “Little Gandhi” for his initiative and bravery in facing security service guns and violence with flowers and bottles of water. Ghiyath’s brutal torture and death at the age of 26 outraged the international community and was a cause of one of the most violent uprisings in modern history. The screening was followed by a panel discussion with director Sam Kadi, Ghiyath’s family, and several activists featured in the film.

The conference: “Transitional Justice in Syria after Vienna Process: Achieving Justice and Accountability”, was an extension of the [Syria Transition Roadmap](#) plan, a document published by [The Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies \(SCPSS\)](#), and the [Syrian Expert House \(SHE\)](#), on the democratic political transition in Syria, which covered the topics of constitutional reform, political and administrative reform, electoral reform, economic reform, transitional justice, and security sector reform.

[Syria Transition Roadmap](#) is the result of a year-long consensus-building research process conducted by the Syrian Expert House, a group of approximately 300 Syrian human rights activists, academics, judges, lawyers, leaders of the political opposition, defected government officials, defected military officers, members of local revolutionary councils, and commanders of the armed opposition.

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