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Vienna, October, 19th 2013

## CONFERENCE ON PEACE IN SYRIA

from December 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in Vienna and Burg Schlaining

### 1. General objective and history of the Conference

Since approx. one year the promoters of the international peace initiative [www.peaceinsyria.org](http://www.peaceinsyria.org) have mobilized a great number of peace activists and outstanding personalities of political and cultural life in Europe, Asia and Latin America<sup>1</sup> – all of them deeply convinced that a military solution of the Syrian conflict is neither possible nor desirable.

Gathering around a common platform under the title: YES TO DEMOCRACY – NO TO MILITARY INTERVENTION the promoters of this initiative went in different occasions to Damascus, Beirut, Istanbul and Aleppo in order to contact the main political actors from each side: the president, his advisors and some of his ministers on the one side and representatives of the Syrian National Coalition, the National Body for Democratic Change and the Free Syrian Army on the other. Finally a high ranking delegation consisting of 13 personalities from 9 different countries of Europe and Latin America visited Damascus in June, 2013 proposing to the government and the opposition there to initiate in the near future a POLITICAL DIALOG among representatives the Syrian civil society in order to create the conditions for a political settlement in the framework of a Conference of the Syrian civil society, which due to the extreme polarisation and militarisation of the conflict cannot be held inside the country.

In various meetings of representatives of the initiative with the government (including President Bashar al Assad and his advisor Bouthaina Shabaan, the Ministers Kadri Jameel, Ali Haydar and Faysal al-Mikdad) as well as with leaders of the Syrian National Coalition and the National Body for Democratic Change, a clear preference was given to Austria as a meeting ground for being a neutral country, by principal opposed to military solutions of political conflicts, which hosted several peace initiatives in the past.

Following the request of the Syrian parties involved in the conflict the project has been favourably discussed not only by the Syrian parts in conflict, but also in the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> Amongst others the Peace Nobel Prize winners Adolfo Perez Esquivel (Argentina), Mairead Maguire (Ireland) and Rigoberta Menchú (Guatemala), Bishop Raúl Vera (Mexico), the authors Jean Ziegler (Switzerland), Tariq Ali (GB), Francois Houtart (Belgium) and Ignacio Ramonet (Spain), experts in peace building like Hans von Sponek (Germany) and Alejandro Bendaña (Nicaragua), parliamentarians like Walden Bello (Phillipines), Wolfgang Gehrcke (Germany) and Odysseus Voudouris (Greece), and peace activists like Evangelis Pissias (Greece), Mireille Fanon mendes France (France), Leo Gabriel (Austria) and Wilhelm Langthaler (Austria).

Also contacts with the United Nations in Beirut and Damascus and in the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs have shown a great interest and support of the project.

To all of the actors mentioned above it has been clear however that at the difference of the Peace Conference which presently is promoted by the United Nations (GENEVA II), this Conference should only have a deliberative character involving Syrian actors who are willing to tackle with the overarching political design of an eventual transition period as well as discussing the concrete measures to be adopted in order to diminish the loss of human lives and the destruction of the country.

Whilst the different parties of the conflict are still involved in consultations about whom to invite from which sectors and regions of Syria, the AUSTRIAN STUDY CENTER FOR PEACE STUDIES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION in Stadt Schlaining in the Southern part of Burgenland (approx. 100km South of Vienna) has accepted to host this conference from December 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013, depending on the funding of their facilities.

## 2. The participants of the Conference of Civil Society on Syria

According to the above mentioned objectives of the initiative only those persons are going to be invited who- independently from their political position - share the conviction that this war must stop as soon as possible proposing concrete steps to diminish the daily bloodshed and the proliferation of violence throughout the country.

According to an agreement of all parts involved in this project the participants of the conference are going to be personalities and activists close to the civil population on the ground and not representatives from the hierarchies of political organisations. This implies that a variety of sectors like religious confessions, educational and health-care institutions, different ethnicities (e.g. Kurdish population), women, workers and small or bigger businesses etc. from different parts of the country are going to be present at the Conference, although each of the participants only speaks for him/herself and not on behalf of the institutions which they eventually represent.

During the Conference also some of the international promoters of the initiative from different countries of the world are going to be present, some of them as facilitators of the panel discussions and/or as observers who only should intervene in the discussions at the end of the two days of the meetings in Schlaining. However their role will be limited according to the understanding that the peace-process should be led essentially by the representatives of the Syrian civil society.

## 3. The program of the Conference

Like the selection of the participants also the subject-matters to be discussed at the conference should be chosen beforehand by a common agreement of all parties and parts involved. According to the general objectives of the Conference a special priority should be given to the most urgent needs of the Syrian population.

According to previous talks with the representatives of both sides of the conflict these needs could be structured in the following way:

- 1) Peace-needs referring to the demilitarization of the conflict: demilitarized zones, access for humanitarian organisations, release of prisoners and hostages etc.
- 2) Basic economic, ecological and cultural needs referring to the livelihood of the civilian population: management of natural resources like water and food, health care, education, protection of the environment and national patrimony etc.
- 3) Political needs referring to the right and possibility for self-organisation on the ground, in and outside of the areas of combat; means of communication; right to form political parties on the ground etc.
- 4) Needs of refugees in and outside the country: means of transportation; security need and food and health care of refugees, right to return; right to self-organisation of refugees etc.
- 5) Political solution and transition. All these steps should be considered as part of an overarching political architecture which eventually should lead to a process of democratic transition based on the will of power-sharing among those who are struggling for a political solution of the conflict.