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Vienna, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016

## CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE CONSTITUTION OF SYRIA

from April 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>st</sup>, 2016 in Vienna and the Peace castle of Schlaining

### 1. General objectives and history of the Initiative

Since approx. three years 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 not possible and the bloodshed has to be stopped.

Gathering around the need for a POLITICAL DIALOG the promoters of this initiative went in different occasions to Damascus, Beirut, Istanbul, Qamishli and Aleppo in order to contact the main political actors from each side:

- First 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.
- Then a delegation of European journalists went first to Aleppo and then to the Hasaka province of Syria, in order to talk with the political forces on the ground.
- And finally our international initiative invited about 30 representatives of the Syrian civil society covering the whole political spectrum to an ALL SYRIAN CONSULTATION ON PEACE IN SYRIA to the AUSTRIAN STUDY CENTER FOR PEACE STUDIES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION in Stadt Schlaining in the Southern part of Austria (approx. 100km South of Vienna).

As a result of these discussions the Syrian participants concluded their deliberations with a common declaration<sup>2</sup> which highlighted the need for an immediate cease fire, the expulsion of all foreign fighters and the constitution of a NETWORK ON PEACE IN SYRIA as well as an ALL SYRIAN

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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 Alí (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).

PEACE ASSEMBLY inside the country. Half a year later these decisions have been ratified by a meeting of a working group of the above mentioned network in Vienna, Austria, where important civil society actors from Latakia, Aleppo and Quamishli declared that they would promote PEACE ASSEMBLIES on a regional level.<sup>3</sup>

Finally the initiative held a public meeting of the representatives of the main opposition forces at the World Social Forum in Tunis on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015 where it decided to call for different peace assemblies on the local level. Furthermore our international peace initiative [www.peaceinsyria.org](http://www.peaceinsyria.org) decided to send a fact finding mission of five independent journalists to the area of Hasaka who came up, on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 with an extensive report<sup>4</sup>. Whilst all these events, meetings and missions were taking place on the level of the international and Syrian civil society the expansion of the so called Islamic State (Daesh), the explosion of terrorist attacks in Tunis and Paris and the sudden avalanche of Syrian refugees towards European countries motivated the foreign stakeholders in the Syrian conflict – particularly Russia, the United States of America, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Jordan – to follow up, under the auspices of the United Nations, the peace process of GENEVA II which had been abandoned for more than a year. The conferences in Vienna and New York towards the end of 2015 and the first round of the Geneva talks in March 2016 are giving some hope for a peaceful transition through negotiations of the conflicting forces in and on Syria.

### **Second All Syrian Consultation: on the future constitution of Syria**

It is the outspoken objective of our initiative to support this peace process through helping to create the conditions among the Syrian social, political and religious actors by establishing a consensus on the future constitution of Syria. This constitution should reflect the structure of a democratic, interreligious and multicultural State of Syria, where equality and social justice are the guiding principles for its economic and social conviviality.

**The All Syrian international Network [www.peaceinsyria.org](http://www.peaceinsyria.org) therefore proposes to hold a conference on the FUTURE CONSTITUTION OF SYRIA from April 25<sup>th</sup> to 28th, 2016 in Vienna and/or the Peace castle of Schlaining, Austria.**

#### ***The participants in the Conference***

According to the objective of the initiative only those persons are going to be invited who - independently from their political orientation, religious belief and ethnic or geographical origin - 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. The participants come from different parts of the country and do represent the most important traditional and new political entities, religious confessions, ethnicities, local councils and women's organisations. All together they reflect the different sectors of the Syrian civil society.

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<http://www.peaceinsyria.org/downloads/PRESS%20RELEASE%20ON%20A%20MEETING%20OF%20SYRIAN%20CIVIL%20SOCIETY%20LEADERS%20IN%20VIENNA.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.peaceinsyria.org/downloads/Report%20FFM%20Rojava.pdf>

Following the request of the participants in our Network the conference will be attended also by some international experts and observers from countries who are not directly involved in the conflict like Austria, Norway, Greece, Mexico and Nicaragua.

## ***The program of the Conference***

### **I. The identity of the Syrian State and the political system**

Starting with a reflection on different Syrian constitutions of the past the conference is going to work out, through the following working groups, a general outline of the guiding principles of a future constitution:

- 1) Nature of the political system: presidential, parliamentary, participatory?
- 2) Principles of a democratic State: division of powers (executive, legislative, judiciary), pluri-party system, the role of the regions
- 3) The High Constitutional Court and its functions within the political system
- 4) "Positive neutrality" with regard to the religions: what does this mean?

### **II. Citizens Rights and the freedom of individuals, groups and ethnicities**

- 1) Equality, non discrimination and equal opportunity. Freedom of speech and freedom of religion.
- 2) Women and children rights and special needs of the population.
- 3) Individual and collective rights: ethnic and religious rights.
- 4) Family rights of the different components of the Syrian society.

### **III. Steps to be taken towards a constitutional process in- and outside Syria**

One of the first steps would be the issuing of a common declaration as a result of this Conference. Another step could be the organisation of a much larger Assembly in Athens, Greece in order to get a broader acceptance of the milestones of a constitutional process elaborated during this conference. It goes without saying that the concrete time table will depend a lot on the result of the peace negotiations which are taking place by the International Community of States under the auspices of the United Nations.

***For the Preparatory Committee of the International Initiative [www.peaceinsyria.org](http://www.peaceinsyria.org):***

**Leo Gabriel, Wilhelm Langthaler, Evangelis Pissias, Fernando Romero-Forsthuber**