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Vienna, January 2014

## CONFERENCE ON PEACE IN SYRIA

from March 8/9th, 2014 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 Coordination 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.

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. 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.

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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).

According to this objective 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. 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.

## 2. 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: local ceasefires and 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 the political, cultural, economic and ethnic identities among the Syrian society.
- 6) Aim of the conference is to compose a follow-up committee able to implement its decisions within Syrian society.