

## Tuesday 7 April | Syria: Alternative Roads to Peace?

What are the initiatives Syrian citizens take at home and abroad? How can the international community meaningfully contribute to these? In other words, what are the alternatives to the repeatedly-failed United Nations initiated peace talks? This debate highlights alternative pathways of creating substantial and long-lasting peace in Syria. Rafif Jouejati (FREE-Syria) & Rajin Alqallih (ISS) were joining this unique gathering to share their stories, experiences and opinions on an alternative road to peace. (This debate was organized in collaboration with "het Grote Midden Oosten Platform" and "the Hague Talks".)



### Representation & Reconciliation

Representation in Syria lacks, **youth** and **women** are largely excluded at the negotiating table. However, Jouejati stressed the lack of opportunity for political experience in Syria under Assad. The **power vacuum** created by the escalation of the Syrian War gave rise to a unique momentum in which new coming political players could get a hold of political power. In this regard, Jouejati emphasized Syria needs to be represented at the international negotiation table. A transitional framework which brings justice, protects minorities and sets the boundaries for a fair electoral system needs to be developed. "**The day after**"\* is such an example. Alqallih also stressed the importance of engaging Syrians now in bottom-up processes of reconciliation.

### What do the Syrian people want?

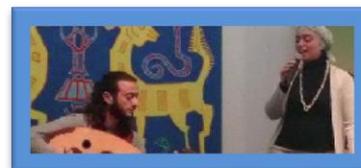
Alqallih: *"If we want to think of really long-lasting peace that is inside Syria that should be in the hands of us"*

To start off the debate, Jouejati talked about the **The Freedom Charter**\*. This is an initiative of FREE-Syria\* and the Local Coordination Committees\* (LCC) to survey more than 50 000 Syrians from various backgrounds in order to develop well-grounded principles which represent the will of the ordinary Syrian citizens in the formal peace process. The aim is to create an end result which can be considered a statement of the people. Through this initiative the Syrians are empowered again to be the architects of their own futures.

### The Root Cause

Jouejati: *"Fundamentally the issue in Syria is that the people dared to stand up and to say no to the dictator, and the response was military"*.

Jouejati continued by revisiting the underlying causes of the Syrian War. In 2011, a group of **youngsters**, united by their struggle for human dignity, social justice and democracy, initiated **non-violent** protests against the tyranny of the Assad regime. Extremely violent regime-repercussions followed. The conflict, which started off with peaceful protests, increasingly militarized and escalated. Jouejati emphasized that organized self-defense is the normal response to threats from regime militia's.



### Foreign Intervention

Jouejati: *"It is not an issue of sectarianism, but interest"*

According to Jouejati, the **Russian** support for Assad increased the militarization of the conflict, the amount of civilian casualties, and the misery of the Syrians on the ground. The Kremlin supported a ruthless dictatorship by enabling Assad to use force, instead of exploring ways to halt him.

**The West** is not addressing the root cause of the problem to the extent they should. The narrative Assad presents stating his regime and IS are the only two viable options is not thoroughly and critically reconsidered. According to Jouejati the West should be supporting civil society initiatives in Syria on a larger scale.

**United Nations** initiated peace efforts repeatedly failed. Syrian activists on the ground would refer to these "efforts" as a way of **the West** to buy of their feelings of guilt.

### The Hope of Education

Alqallih: *"The moment we lose hope, we lose everything"*

Alqallih stressed the importance of education, in particular **human rights education**. Syrian children were exposed to and witnessed war crimes on gross scale. Human rights and dignities are the hallmarks of long-lasting peace.

Written by Marijn Clevers.

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