

**On the occasion of the International Human Rights Day
December 10th, 2021**

**The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut
is organizing with our partner The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs a**

Global Webinar

on

***The Disproportionate Impact of the Syrian Crisis:
A Feminist Approach to Transformative Reparations***

**A draft concept note
November 16th, 2021**

Background and Rationale

The Syrian revolution which started over ten years ago as a peaceful civilian movement for peace, freedom and rights unfolded into a brutal war which has caused the loss and displacement of hundreds of thousands of innocent individuals.¹ Millions of Syrians were forced to seek refuge in neighboring and foreign countries and many others are internally displaced within Syria. As of 2021, 6.6 million Syrians are internally displaced and 5.6 million are refugees in neighboring host countries.² The humanitarian and living conditions of displaced Syrians have worsened due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic hardships and crisis in neighboring countries and an ongoing lack of respect for their human rights. To date, there are more than 23 million people in Syria and neighboring host countries in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.³

Armed conflict in Syria has been shown to have a particularly brutal and long-term gendered effect on vulnerable groups that compounds the impacts of war and increases vulnerability, marginalization, while decreasing life chances and the possibilities of any meaningful and empowering recovery. Data and information abound on the significant risks and challenges faced by refugee women and girls including heightened sexual and reproductive rights violations and

¹ UNICEF. (2021). *Syrian refugees appeal*. <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/syrian-refugees>

² International Organization for Migration. (2021). *Syrian Arab Republic crisis response plan 2021*. <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/syrian-arab-republic-crisis-response-plan-2021/year/2021>

³ Saieh, A., & Hadid, S. (2021). (rep.). *The darkest decade: What displaced Syrians face if the world continues to fail them*. Norwegian Refugee Council. <https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/the-darkest-decade-what-displaced-syrians-face-if-the-world-continues-to-fail-them/>

sexual and reproductive health risks⁴, lack of access to health, absence of legal recourse, and the multiple layers of unfettered abuse and exploitation.⁵

Transformative reparations imply that the root causes that enabled violations to happen during the conflict are addressed, transformed, and remedied to ensure guarantees of non-recurrence. Structural inequalities and systems of discrimination were – and still are – rife in Syria. Prior to the war, and despite the regime’s rhetoric which *pretended* to look favorably at women’s participation in public, economic, and social life but in reality instrumentalized women’s rights for its own image and political agenda, religious laws governed the lives of women as subordinate and dependent family members rather than fully-fledged citizens with rights and entitlements. As such, the regime shied away from addressing substantive issues related to gender equality such as gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights, personal and individual freedoms, as well as other key issues. Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) were also operating in a restrictive and volatile environment and organising beyond the scope and frame of the Syrian Women Union (a tentacle of the regime’s party in power) was legally prohibited: independent feminists often worked under the radar at great risk to their lives and safety.

According to many feminists from Syria, the conflict has, amongst other things, exacerbated inequalities which have always been there in laws and in practice and were even codified and institutionalized way before the conflict started.⁶

Objectives of the December 10th, 2021 Convening

In celebration of International Human Rights Day, the Asfari Institute at the American University of Beirut, in collaboration with the Arab Reform Initiative, the Issam Fares Institute and the Embassy of Sweden, will be convening a multi-stakeholders dialogue on the disproportionate gendered impact of the conflict in Syria on vulnerable groups.

⁴ Yasmine, R., & Moughalian, C. (2016). Systemic violence against Syrian refugee women and the myth of effective intrapersonal interventions. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 24(47), 27–35.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rhm.2016.04.008>

⁵ Aburas, R., Najeeb, A., Baageel, L., & Mackey, T. K. (2018). The Syrian conflict: A case study of the challenges and acute need for medical humanitarian operations for women and Children Internally Displaced Persons. *BMC Medicine*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-018-1041-7>

⁶ WILPF. (2016). (rep.). *Violations against women in Syria and the disproportionate impact of the conflict on them*. Retrieved November 9, 2021, from <https://www.wilpf.org/report-release-violations-against-women-in-syria-and-the-disproportionate-impact-of-the-conflict-on-them-ngo-summary-report-for-the-universal-periodic-review-of-syria/>.

The objectives of this event are the following:

- Create a space for feminist activists and scholars engaged in work on Syria to discuss and exchange their experiences, insight, and analysis on major yet invisible and poorly addressed gendered impact of the conflict in Syria,
- Identify accordingly a joint homegrown agenda for feminist action research which is likely to inform the work of activist as well as peacebuilding processes connected to Syria,
- Engage accordingly in evidence-based multi-stakeholders advocacy and policy dialogue to influence global mechanisms aiming at building a restorative justice system in Syria (e.g., the Women, Peace and Security agenda, UNSCR 1325, etc.),
- Highlight and raise awareness on the increased vulnerability and marginalization of vulnerable groups in Syria due to war.

Format of the December 10th, 2021, Convening

The event will address the following topics (as well as other) in a participatory format:

- Women ex-detainees (survivors of detention and abuse by all protagonists of the war)
- Retaliation against women and girls in their diversity
- Forced return of women and children in Syria
- Questions around sexual and reproductive health and rights
- A feminist critical review of WPS and UNSCR 1325
- Pathways for global intersectional feminist solidarity with women and girls from Syria

The panelists include the following:

From Syrian Civil Society:

- Women Now – Mona Zeineddine
- Dawlaty – Roula Baghdadi
- Badael – Oula Ramadan
- Reham (young intersectional feminist from Syria) (TBC)

From AUB:

- Dr. Lina Choueiri, AUB Deputy Provost (TBC)
- Dr. Joseph Bahout, IFI (TBC)
- Dr. Tania Haddad, PSPA
- Youmna el Zibaoui, MEPI-TLS student
- Carla Akil, AI

From international community:

- Sussan Thamassebi, Femena (TBC)
- Nadim Houry, Arab Reform Initiative
- Christoffer Burnett-Cargill, Swedish Embassy
- UN Women (TBC)
- Canadian Embassy (TBC)

Moderator:

- Paola Salwan, Geneva, Urgent Action Fund Board member

Webinar Invitation:

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: Dec 10, 2021 at 10:00 AM Beirut Time

Topic:

The Disproportionate Impact of the Syrian Crisis: A Feminist Approach to Transformative Reparations

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87100351294>

Webinar ID: 871 0035 1294

International numbers available: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87100351294>