

Supporting Syria and the Region 2016 Conference GAPS & GADN Joint-Position Paper

The *Supporting Syria and the Region 2016 Conference* provides a much needed opportunity to galvanise international support, financial and otherwise, for all Syrians affected by the conflict. For the UK Government, co-hosting the Conference is also an opportunity to demonstrate and deliver on commitments including: the UK's Women, Peace and Security commitments; UN Security Council Resolution 2254; and commitments under international humanitarian law.

The UK Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) network and the UK Gender and Development Network (GADN), both membership organisations, welcome the priority that the UK Government has placed on supporting an effective response in the region. Although a welcome priority, we are concerned that the Conference fails to “shine a torch” on the needs and experiences of Syrian women and that their voices remain largely unheard. We remain concerned about the devastating impact that the conflict has had on women and girls and our members continue to work with and support them.

In addition to calls made in the Joint-NGO Position Paper (January 2016), we make the following recommendations to the UK Government:

For the Conference on 4 February:

- 1. Syrian women should be seen as equal partners in peace and state-building processes.** Women should, at a minimum, comprise at least 30% of delegates in decision-making processes, including those hosted by the UK. Moreover, any meaningful efforts towards peace and state-building need to take into account and adequately address the different vulnerabilities and needs of Syrian women, girls, men and boys, diverse ethnicities and religions rather than providing a one-size-fits-all solution.
- 2. Promote the allocation of funds specifically for women and girls' protection needs.** Despite massive demand, programmes to help protect Syrian women and girls from Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) accounted for less than 0.2% of the whole Regional Response Plan contributions in 2014. Donors should ensure that the UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2016-2017 are fully funded. At least one third of the protection budget should be allocated to addressing the needs of women and girls and ensure the provision of life-saving services for survivors of VAWG.
- 3. Pledges made at the Conference should ensure that funding reaches the local organisations, including women-led civil society groups and informal networks of women from affected communities.** Current funding is too often captured by larger institutions with inadequate support reaching women-led efforts on the ground. Donor administrative requirements and counter-terror policies should be reviewed to ensure funding can reach these small, grassroots women's networks.
- 4. Accountability for gender sensitivity, women's participation and VAWG risk mitigation should be strengthened across all funding pledged at the Conference.** This should build on current efforts to promote basic project-level gender mainstreaming at the proposal stage through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Marker towards 'whole of programme' approaches and also to increase accountability for mainstreaming gender and VAWG risk mitigation.
- 5. Promote a regional approach to strengthen women's participation of women in needs assessments, programme design, implementation and monitoring.** Women are best placed to identify and navigate the complexities they face in this conflict. Learning from the establishment of Women's Committees in

Turkey's refugee camps along with similar efforts in other affected countries, a regional approach to participation by, and accountability to, women and girls in the crisis response is needed.

6. **Funding and political agreements at the Conference with the governments of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, should promote understanding of, and respect for, diverse civil society.** Authorities should enable civil society groups, including women's organisations, the space and entry-points for engagement on policies, strategies and programmes that enable women affected by the crisis to inform the decisions which affect them.
7. **Encourage refugee resettlement programmes to prioritise the most vulnerable refugees including survivors of trauma or torture, and refugees at a heightened risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.** Within the Region, the UK should support long-term programmes which foster the dignity and agency of women and girls in refugee and host communities, for example, through increasing funding to the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and by providing education, empowerment and livelihood training to women in refugee camps.
8. **Identify support for neighbouring states to keep their borders open and provide legal documents (including residency) and visas for women's rights activists to enable their work, as well as for Syrian female refugees, who are more likely to lack basic documentation than men.**

For similar UK-hosted events in the future:

9. **Ensure that local CSOs are equal partners in the process from the outset.** CSOs should make up 80% of secretariats/steering committees mandated to deliver such events and half of CSO representatives should be from women's rights organisations.
10. **Provide funding for meaningful consultation with CSOs** in affected countries/with affected populations to ensure an inclusive and representative outreach. Outcomes from these consultations should feed into the design of such events and additional funding and support should be made available to ensure that representatives from these consultations can actively participate in events hosted in the UK.

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