The Project of a Democratic Syria

Tev-Dem (Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk /Movement for a Democratic Society)

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Syria has entered a state of chaos, in which violence and counter violence, backed by power centers that benefit from it, prevail. Its scenarios surpass the potential of people to understand, let alone challenge. If current trends continue, Syria faces fragmentation and dissolution. The "Syrian opposition" is locked in a maze that it can neither understand nor extricate itself from. Many of them have ended up swearing allegiance to Daish and to Salafi jihadist groups, participating in collective massacres, undeterred by either morality or conscience.

The crisis is larger, deeper, and more dangerous than a mere adjustment of the Assad regime, its masters, and its codes. It has resulted from the evolution of society itself into the state, in a concentration of state power so intense as to constitute a diseased condition. The state does not accord with the natural, pluralist, and participatory reality of human society; it is limited to short-sighted visions that deepen and even deify unilateralism. Denial, exclusion, domination, slavery, and injustice were and are created by states, by dictatorships, and by fascist or semi-fascist systems; the most recent of these security systems suffocate life, allowing no potential for opening up and development. As a result, the Syrian situation is careening toward explosion and chaos. It can be saved only by new combinations that are able to keep pace with the era and its enormous scientific and technical developments.

No vision of a viable future Syria can be projected without considering the area's history and geography. So let us first clear away all the rubble, and instead of focusing on the deviant ravages of ideologies and paradigms that favor authoritarianism, let us search for an integrated theory that embodies the zeitgeist, one that effectively provides for the participation of peoples and of diverse small groups and even individuals, so as to build, protect, and develop a new democratic regime.

Syrian's Constituent Groups

The states of the Middle East were formed as a reproduction of the experience in Europe, which imposed its unified model on the region by relying on an ideology of nationhood that had arrogance and denial at its core. They adopted methods that diverged from morality, to serve the interests of particular groups at the expense of the society as a whole. As a result, Middle Eastern societies have become susceptible to manipulation and distortion. The peaceful and positive coexistence, based on pluralism, that prevailed for centuries in the region has been overturned.

Among the constituent peoples of a society, domination of one by another is an insult to their natural coexistence. The constituent peoples of Syrian society are Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Turkmen, Chechens, and Circassians. All are genuinely native in this land, all participated in creating the region's history and culture, and all contribute to its social balance. Over long centuries, folk, clans, tribes and other human groups intermingled, conflicting continuously but also cohering in the struggle against invaders and demographic changes. Together they created a wondrous mosaic—indeed, Syria abounds with vast and genuine cultural diversity.

To understand the relationships among the multiple intermingling Syrian constituent peoples, we must plumb the depths of the country's history, even to its earliest human communities. For thousands of years in ancient history, they achieved development and progress while living in the "natural" situation that preceded the state. During this time they achieved the most important development in the history of mankind: the agricultural revolution.

Many religions, cultures, languages, alphabets were born in these lands, during the civilizations of the Sumerians and Akkadians, the Assyrians and Medes, the Mitanni, Hurrians, and Phoenicians. Mesopotamia was a creative civilization; subsequent changes, and shifts built on what this civilization had created. Features of its magnificence and originality are visible in the myths and legends that have survived. Thousands of years of common history among these peoples created a harmonious social understanding. Diverse ethnic and religious groups cohered in a mass bond that was far removed from the exploitative practices of rulers and authoritarian groups.

Syria's diversity extended as well to the seacoast, where its peoples could communicate and intermingle with others beyond the horizon. No borders existed between peoples, who formed an integrated unit able to accept diversity both within and without. No single constituent can claim unilateral ownership of the region where so many have participated—they have integrated to form one colorful picture.

In many stages of its history, Syria had leaders who combined the region's different origins, religions, and cultures. Even the empires that once prevailed in this land accommodated differentiation and cultural riches and rejected alienation, denial, and exclusion. To be sure, the Syrian picture was not always peaceful. It suffered from wars, conflicts, and invasions that often left wounds that took a long time to heal. But it nonetheless managed to create a way of life based on integration and brotherhood. Indeed, one could argue that conflicts and contradictions themselves induced the constituent peoples to grasp the need to cooperate with those who are different from oneself on the basis of parity and equality.

Relations Among the Constituent Peoples

Syria's deep intercultural and interethnic relationships are as old as history itself. They began with the first migrations of tribes and Semitic groups from the Arabian Peninsula toward Iraq; they spread across the Tigris and Euphrates and into the plains of Mesopotamia. Later the Arab Islamic invasions into Kurdish areas caused a turning point: while the Islamic policies in some stages governed on a national basis, the Kurds remained distant from this approach and stayed true to their faith. Hence, the important leadership of Saladin in the liberation of Jerusalem.

Because of its material riches and strategic location, Syria has always been the object of invaders' ambitions, so that invasions by successive migrations exposed the land to instability, chaos, destruction, loot, and plunder. On the other hand, those invasions and migrations left behind significant cultural effects and a superb cultural interaction. They made the Syrian people a harmonious mixture, as races and nations that had built their own civilization left deep effects on the region's rich human spirituality and in the common values shared by its different ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups.

Kurdish-Arab relations evolved, with the spread of Islam, on the basis of tolerance, brotherhood, and belonging to a cultural nation, distinct from the national chauvinism in later stages of Syrian

history. The Ottoman Empire did not deny the existence of different peoples, tribes, and clans; rather, it accepted pluralism, even in the name of the caliphate. The empire played an important role the history of peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Kurds, especially as the majority of Kurds converted to Islam. This convergence had a positive impact on the relationships between Kurds and others, including Christians and other religions and sects. Those positive relations continued into the time of the French Mandate and struggles against that colonial occupation. And they continued after the 1946 independence, when Kurds played a crucial role in the liberation and early development of the modern Syrian state, until the Baath Party took the helm and imposed its unilateral, national-chauvinistic thought.

That racist regime of denial, exclusion, and repression adopted chauvinistic policies and projects that in turn, for half a century, gave rise to problems, events, and uprisings. The culture of denial of the other is imported and exotic, far from the original concepts of the Syrian people; the denial and exclusion of the Kurds, the Syriacs, and other groups has nothing to do with the authentic Syrian spirit. But the regime's exclusionary policies never penetrated into the depths of society; instead they remained confined to the mentality of the politicians and other authoritarians. They never tore the fabric of Syrian society or destroyed the culture of peaceful coexistence. Indeed, the vision of a common life based on freedom, justice, and equality, in which no group denies another, remained the highest value defended by Syrians.

Kurds, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Armenians, Chechens, and Turkmen share a common home in Syria, and their peaceful relations extend far back in history. Many factors contributed to the consolidation of these relationships and to the spirit of understanding and coexistence. But no single one had a warrant to dominate the others; all authentically possess rights in this great place, in their common home, regardless of the ruling regimes that constantly tried to disseminate the spirit of division and foment hostility among them.

The Current Crisis

After Syria gained its independence in the wake of World War II, it enjoyed a short period of political prosperity characterized by diversity and pluralism and an element of democracy. Perhaps the process of achieving independence had effects that persisted, so the name "Syrian Republic" continued, in recognition of the diversity of its national, religious, and cultural diversity.

However, this relatively democratic phase lasted only a decade, when national Arabist tendencies arose in both Syria and Egypt. The process climaxed in the 1958 union between the two countries, after which freedoms began to recede and the relative democracy of the state ended. Society too receded as nationalist policies began to play a role. The union was named the United *Arab* Republic, and the Syrian Republic was renamed the Syrian *Arab* Republic as an explicit declaration of the state's nationalism and of the denial and the exclusion of all other constituent peoples, including those that had effectively participated in achieving independence and maintaining political life, such as the Kurds and the Syriacs. A few years later the chauvinist Baath Party seized power, and freedoms receded until they finally were strangled.

On all fronts, racial projects, arbitrary exceptional measures, persecution, and coercion accelerated against Kurds and other constituent groups. The unjust census and the creation of the Arab belt were prominent markers of injustice and denial of the Other, but injustice affected everyone when

the regime declared a state of emergency—which lasted half a century. It paralyzed political life and democracy and untied the hands of the chauvinist Baath, which unleashed security forces with no moral deterrent, until Syria came to resemble a huge prison, confining peoples, freedoms, and human values.

In fact, the situation demanded a comprehensive democratic solution, one that democratized both state and society and thereby solved the issues of the constituent peoples. A popular revolutionary movement arose as a response to the situation of suffocation that prevailed under the regime, in which solutions seemed almost impossible.

But as the crisis unfolded, the popular movements in Syria showed themselves to lack the effective leadership needed to lead the democratic transformation. The reasons are many: they lacked a proper understanding of Syria's reality and a vision of its future; they lacked strategies and suitable plans for the development of this revolutionary movement; and they failed to rely on their own power, allowing foreign countries to intervene. Syria became an arena for endless interventions, in which foreign powers settled their accounts with one another and served their own strategic interests.

As a result, the radical Islamic currents grew until they seized control of the fragile and disorganized opposition forces, starting with Al-Qaeda and Jabhat Al-Nusra and continuing with Daish. This most dangerous of all radical terrorist organizations is now fighting a bloody war on behalf of Islam against all contemporary values. In fact, the opposition's failure to address the issues of Syria's constituent peoples is one of the most prominent reasons for its collapse into radical jihadism.

The regime took strategic advantage of the opposition's political and military weakness to impose a choice: either one supports the regime, or one is necessarily supporting "radical Islamic forces." And to a large extent it has succeeded. The only exception has been in Rojava, which declared from the outset that it stood by its revolution on its own path. Later developments in the Syrian arena have proved correctness of this peaceful democratic approach.

The Democratic Solution

Considering the huge number of complex problems that it faces, Syria requires a radical solution that addresses not only the symptoms but also the causes, lest reaction reemerge. In fact, this solution is the comprehensive democratization of Syria, one in which all the constituent peoples obtain on their full rights and have the freedom to develop and produce so that Syria becomes a home where everyone participates and enjoys its wealth.

A truly comprehensive democratization would touch all aspects of life, in a complex process that requires time and effort. No one has a magic wand to achieve it in a matter of moments. But we may define its basic principles. Above all, we must emphasize that the nation-state model is a deadly trap for Syria's peoples and communities, one that must be overcome and replaced with the model of the Democratic Nation, which refuses narrow political boundaries and supports pluralism and coexistence.

The Democratic Nation is able to freely contain these elements in all their cultural diversity, promote them toward development, and recognize their existence and their rights to survival.

Thinking nationally, religiously, or doctrinally and trying to impose unilateralism will lock us into the zero point. The solution must lie in turning Syria into a common entity for all the constituent peoples, saving everyone together because none of the constituent peoples will be free if any one of them is enslaved.

If we are asserting that Syria is a nation, in a new and modern concept, then what is its nationality? Its nationality is not ethnic, religious, economic, cultural or linguistic. Rather, Syria will become a nation of formative pluralism—a Democratic Nation, based on foundations of democracy, freedoms, and coexistence for all the constituent peoples, one that builds an appropriate ground for the emergence of the individual and the free citizen. This proposed solution gives both the individual and the community the possibility of mental evolution.

Foundations of the Democratic Solution

The Democratic Self-Administration is the tangible expression of the democratic solution in the context of solving all ethnic issues, including the Kurdish issue. The traditional approach was to try to get a share in the Syrian state, or form semi-independent ethnic states, or create a federal state or confederation. However, the first demand of a democratic Syria is that it recognize the rights of all ethnic and religious groups to manage themselves according to their own free will, and to put no obstacles on the path of becoming a national democratic society. It must affirm the democratic the right of peoples to self-determination.

Democracy and the state can play their roles under the same political roof, and the democratic constitution sets the boundaries between their spheres of influence. If the ruling state is really committed to democracy, it should not hamper it or impose a ban on the formation of a democratic society.

These are the foundations for the new democratic solution:

Social Foundations

Under the nation-state, authoritarian developments froze the social movement and its evolution. But it also marginalized both the community and the individual, reducing their activities so significantly that they faced disappearance and "death" as if they had a social cancer.

As for woman, the oldest slave, modern life turned into a trap that surrounded her. In the era of the regime, woman was cast as a free laborer in the position of "housewife," at the top of the work detail. She was a machine that produced new generations for the existing regime. And as the crown of the advertising industry, moreover, she was "the queen of commodities." She was a tool of pleasure and unlimited power for all authoritarians, ranging from the world emperor to the small emperor inside the family. Social life in current Syrian society consists of old men who have become children, and females who have lost their will. And the family, one of the oldest and most prestigious institutions of society, has suffered complete dissolution.

By contrast, the democratic solution includes the principle that women's freedom is the freedom of society and that the freedom of women is the guarantee of all other freedoms. Building a democratic Syria requires ridding it of the concept of central state authority, which has led it to the

brink of destruction, and democratizing the social structure. Social relations are the original premise, so we must correct the situation, status, and role of woman in society by developing the mechanisms of her participation and effectiveness in various spheres of life. Only then can we configure a situation befitting her in all other respects, including the adoption of a culture of equality in the community.

In every aspect of Syrian society, from the smallest social unit, the family, and to society as a whole, privacy has been sabotaged. It is necessary to respect the private social status of all the constituent peoples with their cultural and national characteristics. Such respect can truly ensure the continuity of the relatively independent societies, once freed from pressure by ruling authorities, and keep them from sinking once again into the swamp of a specific identity subject to discrimination. Syrian society, that is, must respect the multiplicity of identities and social affiliations of all constituent peoples, as well as their social identity. That will pave the way to achieving the most important foundations of the democratic solution.

Here too the rights of the individual and the free citizen appear. Children, the elderly, and people with special needs should get, in this new home, what they need to become free citizens, able to produce and innovate in all aspects of life. The constituent peoples represent a basic building block of Syrian society as a whole. Thus, we have to preserve and protect their communities, which long suffered from oppression, injustice, genocide, and exploitation.

Protecting the social structure of the constituent peoples—from Arabs, Kurds, Syriacs, Assyrians, Turkmen, and Chechens, to Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Druze, and Alawites—is almost one of the most important tasks that can bring about a democratic solution. Each of the constituent peoples must become part of a democratic family in a comprehensively democratic society, because only such a society is able to ensure the existence of these communities. The prerequisite to achieving their permanent existential, mental, and institutional integration into the society is to create a free individual citizen.

Building a democratic society first requires a free individual who is able to exercise his or her freedom in a democratic political and social environment and indeed in any group to which he or she belongs. Furthermore, in Syria's democratic solution, the individual becomes a citizen within the framework of constitutional citizenship, while also being a free individual in his democratic society. So too the constituent peoples retain their democratic social identity in the framework of constitutional citizenship.

In the Democratic Nation, those rights will be guaranteed in a constitution, including a right to semi-democratic independence. Thus, all of Syria's genuine social constituents can have the character of free individual in a democratic community along with the constitutional citizenship of the mother state, interactively and synchronously. In other words, citizenship will be bilateral and dual.

Political Foundations

No social entity can exist without having its own administration. In Syria we must provide for the cultural diversity of the constituent peoples at all levels and in all directions, reserving the Syrian state as a "special" reality. We must emphasize a sort of independence and freedom for all the peoples, identities, and affiliations while retaining the democratic central entity. This is possible

only through a combination of centralization and decentralization, because Syria is the country of constituent peoples, all of whom must be allowed to enjoy their rights fully.

We reaffirm the need for a compromise formula that (1) brings together the parts and the whole, yet (2) ensures the rights of the parts, which the basic constituents of the community, and (3) maintains the unity of Syrian society as a whole. The role of the center should be to the benefit the parties, and the powers of the central authorities should be reduced in favor of local self-administrations.

The transformation of Syria's political structure could occur through either reform or revolution. In both cases, we will be at the forefront of an essential structure that unites the various constituent peoples that make up Syria as a whole. In other words, centralization will overlap with decentralization, allowing the constituent peoples to appear, develop their identities, and express themselves.

Surely, the new administrative divisions must be commensurate with the distribution of constituent peoples and identities. In each one, each part will be represented in the self-administration. Decentralization will guarantee both centralization and common life, because the common citizenship will be a mental and practical expression of the free administration of all members of any group. On this basis, Syria will become the home for all its peoples despite their differences; it will embrace everyone and represent everyone.

The most appropriate name for this "home," taking into consideration that the republican system is the closest to democracy, would be "the Republic of Syria" or "the Syrian Democratic Republic," in which the constitution identifies the rights and duties of all constituent peoples.

Economic Foundations

Many nation-states, including Syria, carried out looting and exploitation under nationalist slogans. All economic, political, and social institutions have been developed to justify the looting and to give legality to the tyrant's continuing to protect their own interests. Economic occupation is the most serious type of occupation and the one that most undermines and fragments it. Thus, economic captivity becomes the deadliest way to deny identity and eliminate liberty.

The economic system of the Democratic Nation and the Democratic Self- Administration stops this barbaric practice and works to restore community control over the economy, and at the lowest levels to reconcile the state and self-administrations. So the semi-independent economy basically works under the ecological industry and the commune economy as a reflection of democracy.

The semi-independent economy accepts markets and trade but does not allow the economy to achieve profit for the accumulation of capital. Based on economic colonialism, the present governing laws restrain economic creativity and ecology. There is a need instead for a legal basis for a semi-independent economy favouring local market dynamics.

Legal Foundations

Democratic law is based on diversity, which however rarely resorts to legal arrangements and is characterized by simple structures. Over history, the nation-state has shaped legal proceedings, due to its involvement in every arcane detail in society. It has sought to eliminate the moral and political community, even though ancient societies resolved a large proportion of their issues through such communities.

Rights originated in social customs, values, and morality, but over time the state, as it arose, sought to increase its influence and control the values of society. To that end, it enacted laws and constitutions that suited its interests at each stage. The law became a way to protect the state figures and institutions, to allow them to continue looting, and to give legitimacy to its practices. Courts, laws, decrees, and special legislation affected all aspects of life, becoming tools to suppress, kill, loot, and deny entire peoples. The state embarked on racist projects and carried massacres under the constitution and laws.

In the democratic solution, the Democratic Nation is based on social morality more than on law. It meets the need to develop lawful organizations and organizes the community according to ethical standards for the positive application of rights and constitutions.

Foundations of Self-Defense

Every living organism has a mechanism for self-defense.

Among human beings, with the development of civilization, the emergence of countries, and the growth of conflicts, the need for special defensive organizations crystallized in the form of troops and armies. All international laws and treaties legitimate the right to self-defense, but the task of defending the community has often turned into a tool for suppression, one that authoritarian regimes have used to support and consolidate their policies and interests both externally and internally

So, self-defense that depends on the activation of the community need not await any state approval, support, or guidance. In the democratic solution, the democratic constitution will organize the work of the defense establishment. Inside the country, the society should build community and civil society institutions in all areas, despite possible exposure to attacks on anything from language to economy, security, etc.

An organizational structure on all these levels is needed to enable the society to defend its essential elements. In the Democratic Nation, all civil society organizations, as a means of protection and development, will organize defense institutions, including the military and security forces, in accordance with the established format for the democratic homeland, which we aim to build from self-willed institutions.

The system will defend the nation as a whole, represented by the state and the relevant public institutions. Here, it is necessary to regulate the relationship between state institutions, insofar as they are national, and the local institutions of decentralized Syria. Syria should be divided administratively, and each province or administrative region can and should form its own forces. But it does so without compromising the unity of the homeland and its centrality; at one level, centralization and decentralization will merge harmoniously.

Cultural Foundations

Culture is one of the most important foundations of democracy—indeed, democracy itself is a cultural issue, permeating all aspects of community life and defining its general character. Culture is the community's spiritual and moral situation. Like all other phenomena, it influences and is influenced by events but always actively shapes the general direction of the community. Political systems have therefore worked hard to penetrate into the cultural system to mold it according to their interests. Syria is the cradle of cultures, indeed a land of numerous constructive cultures. Cultures and languages vary wonderfully with the multiplicity of peoples; Syrian culture has become the compound culture of many languages and cultures in all their historical and geographical depth.

The new Syria should be able to embrace this diversity, which it can do as free spaces of culture protect the existing heritage and develop and integrate it with the democracy. It must reject all kinds of cultural chauvinism, all kinds of linguistic and religious and ethnic intolerance, and replace it with common cultural respect.

The long years under fanatical nationalist chauvinism distorted Syrian culture so that it denied and deliberately excluded, and we should not forget that the different ethnic and religious groups that make up Syrian culture have cultures, customs and tradition, and languages that are authentic to this region. A democratic Syrian culture should organize all these elements through various civil society organizations at all levels and provide the necessary resources on both the central and decentralized levels. By constitutional guarantee, Syria will be common homeland of all religions, creeds, languages, beliefs, who will all coexist.

In short, ours is a democratic cultural revolution of multilateralism against unilateralism, of expression rather than denial. The revolution will adopt all the authentic languages as official languages. It will enable citizens to learn and teach one another's languages, opening linguistic and cultural academies and cultural centers.

Diplomatic Foundations

Between nation-states, diplomacy has been a tool of manipulation, one that ignites the fuses of war. But in the democratic nation, diplomacy becomes a tool for the establishment of peace, collaboration, and creative exchange, resolving issues between communities rather than sharpening them. The diplomacy of democratic nation consecrates peaceful and beneficial relations. Conducted by wise people, it expresses moral policies and supported moral functions. It promotes friendly and mutually beneficial relations among neighboring peoples. The units of the Democratic Self-Administration can maintain diplomatic relations with other units provided they respect the laws and the constitution of the center.

The Syria of the Future

The complex catastrophe that is the Syrian scene demands that we respond decisively. We are rapidly descending into the abyss, as the nation-state model has caused tragedies and crises that

tear the community structure. Only a real democratic and radical transformation can avert disaster, a transformation of Syria into a homeland consistent with the today's values and principles yet respectful of the country's historical originality, its constituent peoples, heritage, culture, civilization, and pluralism.

We face great challenges that give us only two choices: either participate effectively and practically in the democratization of Syria, so as to ensure free and equal democratic participation for all the constituent peoples; or to abandon Syria to the rotten clutches of the reactionary Salafist jihadist groups and reduce Syria to a social desert.

The democratic transformation will create a common democratic country for all constituent peoples. In a democratic Syria the citizen will be free, and all the constituent peoples will share in building, defending, and protecting it.

As a centralized authoritarian state, Syria excelled in the production of a chauvinistic system that denied the dignity and worth of its peoples and became a prison in which the jailers worked systematically and structurally to eliminate basic freedoms and preconditions for a decent life.

A democratic Syria would respect pluralism and ensure the participation of all groups and individuals in the community by guaranteeing freedoms and providing opportunities for all. Syria as a unilateral and centralized state cannot achieve this; it must decentralize in order to enable all constituent peoples to enjoy the rights and perform the duties of their common home. Without exclusion, control, monopoly, or oppression, the new Syria must be dominated by fair laws in a democratic framework that is constitutionally guaranteed.

Decentralizing Syria does not mean canceling the center entirely; rather, the functions of the center will shift from controlling to coordinating and unifying the parts that make up the whole, while retaining the essential functions of the overall strategy.

In the Syrian Republic, the state must stand equidistant to cultures, religions, and languages. Separating religion and state will be one mission to secure the atmosphere of democracy, so that no religious constituents of the community control or marginalize any of the others. The new administrative divisions must accord with scientific criteria that take into account the fact of Syria's cultural diversity, after getting rid of the mentality that dominated the country during the previous decades.

Applying Democratic Self-Administration first requires the existence of a democratic system. No democracy can exist in Syria unless self-administrations have been established to solve its problems democratically. Only then can the democratization of the society and the state solve all the constituent peoples issues and the Kurdish issue firstly.

A democratic Syria can live in peace and harmony with its neighbors and indeed could serve as a model of authentic democratic transformation, in which everyone enjoys the respect of all neighboring peoples and communities. A democratic Syria will form a new ground for the proper construction of human and society and will push for the creation of a free individual citizen.

All the constituent peoples in the Syrian community— Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, and Turkmen, as well as Muslims, Christians, and Yazidis—cross boundaries: that is, the lands where they live do not begin or end at the state borders. This diversity will foster correct and healthy relations with neighboring countries, and it will also form a fertile ground for the construction of

democratic confederal relationships that will spread in the Middle East, one that inherently rejects ethnic and religious nationalism as well as the nation-state.

Achieving a free and democratic society will require consciousness, confidence, and commitment to the supreme ideals of humanity, as well as a commitment to work systematically and consciously to build it, through the creation of the free individual citizen in a common free democratic homeland for all of his people.

Implementation: A Practical Plan

Today the Syrian social fabric is being torn, and national unity has cracked, because the warring sides insist on using violence constantly to push for the division and fragmentation. An explosion threatens the entire region because of these similar positions and combinations. So we must put an end to the deterioration that is bringing us to the brink of collapse. We must find practical solutions to salvage what can be saved from Syria and avert the explosion that threatens not only the Syrian state but the constituent peoples of the region.

The only alternative to the military solution is a political one, in the framework of Syrian unity, in which the conflicting parties respect the diversity of the constituent peoples. We must eliminate the central state, with its procedures and institutions of denial and unilateralism, to clear the way for a democratic and pluralistic society, in which all members play a real role in a future Syria. Moreover, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Syrian crisis has become a regional and international crisis as a result of foreign intervention on the ground.

In order to stop Syrian bloodshed and end the fragmentation that wastes the energies of Syrian society, we must crown the Syrian Revolution with victory and rebuild a free democratic Syria on the basis of unity in diversity and mutual respect among all the constituent peoples. We need to develop a road map to solve the Syrian crisis on the basis of consensual democracy, justice, equality, and positive discrimination between the genders, as the freedom of women is the guarantee of all freedoms.

Basic Principles

The Syrian forces must commit to several basic principles for a realistic political solution:

1. The transition from an authoritarian, nationalist, and chauvinistic structure to a decentralized democratic system in which everyone shares in self-management

2. The struggle against Salafist jihadist groups of any name.

3. The unity of the Syrian nation.

4. Respect for the diversity of the Syrian community with all its constituent peoples.

Based on these basic principles, we believe that the Syrian forces active on the ground must advance a common proposal as follows:

1. Draft a statement of a peaceful and democratic solution, and discuss it with all political forces that support it.

2. Form the largest possible grouping of these political forces, and hold an expanded meeting of their representatives. This meeting will decide on ways to follow up on the project and implement it on the ground.

3. Hold a Syrian national conference (Syrian Democratic Solution Peace Conference), sponsored by the United Nations, in which all political forces that believe in a peaceful resolution participate, including civil society organizations and community actors.

4. Elect a council of the conference with specific powers. The Syrian Democratic Council must include members of all the constituent peoples, taking into account the proportion of women and youth. This council is responsible for these tasks:

   ○ Call for a cease-fire.

   ○ Seek the release of political prisoners.

   ○ Communicate with countries relevant to the Syrian crisis and with the United Nations

   ○ Manage preparations for general elections

   ○ Form a committee to draft the Syrian democratic constitution, and a second committee to determine the manner and the form of general elections.

5. The powers and the functions of the council end with the end of the transitional period.

There are no ready and complete recipes for ending the Syrian crisis that threatens the region and the world. But we also recognize and believe that the good efforts of the people of this country, and its friends, will be able to save what is left of Syria and to protect others from its shrapnel if it explodes. But it needs objective visions. We have developed this modernized project through discussion in various forums and bodies that feel morally and emotionally responsible for finding a solution to this crisis. This in turn requires determination and commitment to a constructing a democratic, pluralistic, decentralized, secular Syria based on respect for the democratic rights of each constituent as provided for by laws and international norms and guaranteed by a new democratic constitution.