# SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

# Global Crisis in Implementing the 2030 Agenda

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After more than five years, the conflict in Syria[1] represents a catastrophic failure of the "international system" in terms of maintaining basic human rights (including the right to live), peace and stability. This system, including the UN as well as influential world states and organizations, has failed to reduce the escalation of conflict, let alone create effective mediation processes to reach a decent solution. Furthermore, many international and regional actors have fueled the conflict by providing political, military, logistic and financial support to the warring parties, investing in identity politics to deepen polarization and strengthening hostility and a spirit of revenge in their local affiliates. The conflict has largely destroyed Syria's economic structure, foundations and institutions, severely depleting resources and capital, human capital, social capital and economic governance. Economic priorities shifted as all subjugating powers reallocated resources to fuel violence and its related activities. This economic environment came along with the absence of rule of law, property rights, and accountability, in addition to a surge in corruption. It generated new actors and/or changed the behaviour of previous actors to be part of new rules of game: that of imposing hegemony by force and building new political economies to sustain the conflict. Effectiveness and equity, as goals of economic policy, have been diminished as the authorities sacrificed the core development goals and achievements to serve the new "development in reverse" dynamics.

Globalization has shaped the new international system so substantially that it has intensified global political, economic, social, military, and cultural interconnectedness. Moreover, the shift in the nature of the political authority has reduced the role of the State, particularity in terms of monopolizing the legal right to violence, which has paved the way to the emergence of "new wars".[2] While interconnection can expand integration between people globally, the increase of wealth inequality[3] due to unequal socioeconomic neoliberal policies, in addition to the post-modern disintegration of international values and norms, and privatization of State functions, including the use of legal violence, have aggravated fragmentation across the world and triggered identity politics and conflicts. According to Amartya Sen, ignoring the relevance of all other memberships and relations, and redefining the demands of one specific identity in an aggressive way, turned the sense of self-understanding into deadly tool.[4]

The Syrian conflict today, after more than five years, represents a catastrophic failure of the "international system" in terms of maintaining basic human rights (including the right to live), and peace and stability. This system, including the UN as well as influential world states and organizations, has failed to reduce the escalation of conflict, let alone create effective mediation processes to reach a solution. Many international and regional actors have fueled the conflict by providing political, military, logistic and financial support to the warring parties, investing in identity politics to deepen polarization and strengthening hostility and a spirit of revenge in their

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1 This report is substantially based on two SCPR reports: Alienation and Violence 2015, and Confronting Fragmentation 2016.

2 Mary Kaldor, New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in Globalized Era, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012).
3 Thomas Piketty, Capital in the Twenty-first Century (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
4 Amartya Sen, Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny (London: Penguin books, 2006)

local affiliates. The support of de-facto militarization has been to large extent linked to internal political and economic and cultural concerns of the external actors. The international political and humanitarian support for the Syrian people and civil society has been extremely humble compared to the support for armed conflict. Noticeably, Syria is not the only such case in our region which has had many examples, including Palestine, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Sudan.

### A divergence from sustainable development

Before the crisis, Syria's development record was hindered by "institutional bottlenecks"[5] which marginalized large segments of society and deprived them from effectively contributing to political, economic and social development. Syrian institutions were unable to evolve to be able to reflect the aspirations, interests and expectations of society. As a result, the social movement in Syria in 2011 was political "par excellence". It has from the beginning upheld and consistently adhered to the values of freedom, dignity and social justice demanded by most parties in different organizations. It has come as an expression of the essence of the crisis that is marked by denial of political freedoms and lack of efficient, transparent and representative institutions.

However, the social movement in Syria was driven to violent confrontation by the level of violence used by the power apparatus of the State against the mobilizers and the population, and the level of regional and international interventions to transform the political and social crises into an armed conflict enforced on the country. The conflict in Syria as a result is having a salient impact on international relations and is imposing international challenges to peace and stability across the world. The international and regional interventions, the mobilization of cross-border State and non-State military organizations, and the indiscriminate use of violence are all driving and magnifying the cost of the conflict. Consequently, human development, rights, and dignity

have been comprehensively ruined, creating an environment where anti-development and violence institutions dominate and drive present and future generations to additional conflicts, thus leading to more poverty and misery.[6] As a result, Syria is heading in the opposite direction from the 2030 Agenda and its conflict is widening the gap on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets.

### Economic destruction

The conflict has largely destroyed Syria's economic structure, foundations and institutions, thus severely depleting tangible and intangible resources and capital, human capital, social capital and economic governance. Furthermore, economic priorities shifted as all subjugating powers reallocated resources to fuel violence and its related activities. This economic environment came along with the absence of rule of law, property rights, and accountability, in addition to the surge of corruption. It generated new actors and/or changed the behaviour of previous actors to be part of new rules of game: that of imposing hegemony by force and building up new political economies to sustain the conflict. Further, effectiveness and equity, as economic policy goals, were diminished as the authorities sacrificed the core development goals and/or the historical development achievements to serve the new "development in reverse" dynamics. The accumulated total economic loss by the end of 2015 is estimated at USD 254.7 billion. This loss consists of GDP loss (64.1%), damage to capital stock (26.4 per cent), additional government military expenditures (5.7%, armed groups military expenditures (2.3%), and informal production of oil and gas (1.5%). Total economic loss is equivalent to 468 percent of the GDP of 2010 in constant prices.

By the end of 2015, the consumer price index is projected to show an annual increase of 53.4 percent compared to 25.8 percent in 2014. This is a result of several factors including the devaluation of the Syrian pound, Government policies of increasing basic goods

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5 This report defines institutions broadly as the "rules of the game" in society; see D. North, Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

6 Syrian Center for Policy Research, "Confronting Fragmentation," February, 2016.

prices as an attempt to bridge the budget deficit, and the scarcity of many commodities and services due to the security conditions. In general, the surge in the cost of living in 2015 is reflected in further deterioration in the welfare of households; particularly the poorest families who became unable to sustain their basic needs.

The budget deficit decreased from 41.2 percent in 2014 to 28.1 percent in 2015 owing to Government efforts to increase public revenue based on a "subsidies rationalization" policy that reduced dramatically subsidies. However, this has adversely impacted the economy and contributed to deeper recession as it increased the cost of domestic production as well as inflation pressures, and thus, a depreciation in the currency.

Syria's unemployment rate surged from 14.9 percent in 2011 to 52.9 per cent by the end of 2015.   An estimated 2.91 million unemployed persons; among whom 2.7 million lost their jobs during the conflict, with the loss of income further impacting the welfare of 13.8 million dependents. Tragically, around 17 percent of the active population is estimated to be involved in the conflict economy.

### Severe deprivation and inequality

The deep economic recession continued between 2011 and 2015, as armed conflict intensified and destroyed major parts of the country's wealth, infrastructure, establishments and natural resources. The violence-centred economy also diverted national income and wealth redistribution to benefit of subjugating powers and rent-seeking actors. This was mainly accomplished by direct and indirect tools like taxes, monopoly, pillage, trafficking and smuggling among other things.  These factors in addition to loss of household's sources of income, prices surge, and lack of basic goods and services have forced most of Syrian people into a poverty trap struggling to survive.

Government neoliberal economic policies that caused huge damage to the economy and equality before the crisis, continued during the crisis and have expanded since 2014; a direct example was the dramatic increase of

prices of bread and other basic food items and oil derivatives in addition to increased fees and indirect taxes. Starting from 2014 these policies caused a surge in prices and mounted pressure on foreign exchange rates, which led to an increase in the cost of living for most Syrians and affected the welfare of many people, particularly the poor. By the end of 2015, most Syrians have been trapped in poverty, suffering from multidimensional deprivation not just money poverty.

The overall poverty rate reached 85.2 percent by the end of 2015, compared to 83.5 percent in 2014, and 73.3 percent in 2013. On the regional level, the governorates where intensive conflict and violent activities are taking place and where there were originally higher historical rates of poverty continue to suffer the most from poverty through 2015.

### Population dispersion

The armed conflict has had a drastic demographic impact in Syria; the numbers of internally displaced people, migrants, refugees, and conflict-related deaths and injured have continued to increase, hollowing out the residential population and thus changing the demographic structure significantly. Hundreds of thousands of people, particularly male breadwinners, have been killed, injured, arrested and kidnapped, endangering their lives and the living conditions of their families. The widespread insecurity and unbearable economic conditions and hardship, have forced millions of Syrians to resettle inside or outside the country and to depend completely on local and international humanitarian aid. This loss of security in all its forms has compromised human rights and dignity of the Syrian population.

During the conflict, the population of Syria has decreased from 21.8 million in 2010 to 20.21 million inhabitants by the end of 2015. Counterfactually, the total population would have reached 25.59 million inhabitants in 2015 if the conflict had not emerged, thus, the real population decreased by 21 per cent. At the end of 2015, it is projected that there will be 3.11 million Syrian refugees in addition to 1.17 million persons who migrated in search of work and a safer

life. Within the remaining population, some 6.36 million people have been internally displaced from their homes and neighbourhoods due to violence, fear, intimidation and homelessness.

During 2015, the number of Syrian refugees who managed to reach Europe, via both legal and illegal routes, has increased significantly. The absence of safe routes caused many lost lives, with an increasing number of people who have drowned in the Mediterranean, or who have been abused and violated by criminal and human trafficking networks. This issue raised world concerns for refugees and immigrants and accelerated political efforts to solve the Syrian crisis. It is only when the crisis had international consequences, specifically on Western countries that political leaders started to address it. However, the approach remains limited to interventions to mitigate the refugee crisis, and denying the humanitarian causes of the population displacement.

## Educational loss

The education sector continues to face enormous difficulties with 45.2 percent of school-age children no longer attending school during 2015-2016. Several conflict-related factors have contributed directly to the loss of education and learning opportunities, affecting the population in various parts of the country unevenly. These factors include parents' fears for their children's safety and the difficult security conditions, child labour and the destruction and dysfunction of the educational infrastructure. The lost years of schooling in all educational levels by the end of 2015 represents a human capital debit of 24.5 million lost years, which represents a deficit of USD 16.5 billion in human capital investment and will have a dramatic impact on the country's future.

According to the 2014 population status survey, the total damage to education sector buildings reached 28 percent in mid-2014, and it is projected to reach about 35 percent by the end of 2015, taking into account the intensification of military operations in some regions. Survey results show that the damage in total educational equipment reached 35 percent in mid-2014, and it is projected to reach 43 percent by the end of 2015. Educational staff

have suffered from forced displacement and some of them have been killed, injured, kidnapped or detained.[7]

The educational system has witnessed a loss of stewardship as it has fragmented as an institution across the country. This has resulted in the establishment of new curricula and promotion of values and attitudes that are serving the ideologies of the different fighting parties. Each fighting party has involved children as part of their machinery of violence and deprived them of key life chances and development. However, few civil society initiatives have aimed at providing minimum teaching by providing basic learning activities and psychosocial support to the children and young people in conflict areas and among the internally displaced population.

## Health system collapse

The loss of lives due to the conflict remains the most catastrophic visible and direct impact of the ongoing crisis in Syria. The 2014 population survey shows that 1.4 percent of the population lost their lives, among whom 11.4 percent were children, bringing the rate of mortality up from 4.4 per 1000 in 2010, to 10.9 per 1000 in 2014. By the end of 2015, the death rate is projected to be 10 per thousand,[8] with the number of wounded expected to reach 1.88 million people. This estimates that 11.5 percent of the population inside Syria were killed, injured or maimed due to the armed-conflict in 2015.

The disintegration of the health system as a public service network has caused a lack of highly needed services to the population. Moreover, the lack of information on the health situation and alternatives created by the conflict, in addition to the poor and corrupt dominant institutions have led to a fall in social support to an increasingly vulnerable population.

7 Syrian Center for Policy Research, "Human Status in Syria," forthcoming 2016; UNDP, Human Development Report, New York, 2010.
8 Based on population status survey, 2014, and SCPR calculations.

## Alienation and fragmentation[9]

The squandering of consciousness and status of the human being that was practiced before the crisis has increased manifold, even to the level of eradication of the human being's right to live. The subjugating powers have taken advantage of the state of violence to instil a culture of fear, terror, polarization and submission.[10] They have mobilized local economic resources to fuel the machinery of violence, where they have been deployed as incentives to feed the conflict and economies of violence. Within this state of exception, the remaining economic powers have been leveraged to continue the conflict. The tools used to by the parties to the conflict serve their ends are not ones that are available to those who seek positive change through non-violent means.

Subjugating powers have succeeded in recruiting many individuals into the machinery of killing, looting and pillage by influencing their consciousness and using financial, social and political incentives. Those recruited are sacrificing themselves and their dignity to reinforce these powers that work against their interests. This state of alienation and estrangement has led to the eruption of unprecedented levels of violence among Syrians, leading to increasing reliance on institutions that are alien to them from both inside and outside the country. This has fermented social disintegration and aggravated hatred and fanaticism. On the one side, security institutions have become overtly predominant, while on the other side, traditional institutions have abused religion. Both attempt to dominate the human being and the resources and capacities of society.

This could not have been sustained without substantive external support to the conflict parties. Cultural symbols, media and local forces have been utilized to reinforce violence amongst members of the same society, resulting in polarization and rejection of others and the destruction of human values such as solidarity, cooperation and trust. The political powers involved in the armed conflict have predominated and repressed other voices, using "times of war" as a justification to prevent real participation by Syrians.

All subjugating powers involved in the armed conflict have developed violence-based institutions in order to perpetuate and sustain their hegemony. This created the formation of advanced forms of tyranny and terrorism, while the latter is considered to be the ultimate form of alienation, creating a nihilist State that involves alienation from the world, modern times and the human self. Terrorism has contributed to destroying human values, rights and freedoms. Furthermore, terrorism has been able to recruit many squandered individuals from outside the country, using their alienation from themselves and from their societies to abuse Syrians.

## A way forward?

Confronting the Syrian catastrophe starts with the formation of a national vision that is based on overcoming the roots of the crisis. This includes addressing institutional bottlenecks and external hegemony, and engaging the Syrian people as equal citizens, being themselves the major players in the future of Syria to end the crisis, after being marginalized by the subjugating powers. This confrontation also requires working on a new development model that acknowledges and challenges inequality and exclusion that the Syrian population has been enduring for so long.

The way out of the crisis is by restoring the role of the society through allowing the establishment of participatory visions for new social, economic, cultural and political structures by Syrians themselves. Agreement on these new structures will increase the capability to challenge and overcome the effects of fragmentation and rebuild gradually the institutions based on accountability and active participation.

The following short and mid-term approaches can be considered essential steps toward the just solution of the Syrian crisis:

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9 This section is mainly based on J. Jebaie, "Alienation", forthcoming working paper, Syrian Center for Policy Research, Damascus, 2015.
10 H. Barakat, "Contemporary Arab Society", Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut (in Arabic), 2006;
M. Hijazi, "The Squandering Human Being", 2nd ed. Arab Culture Centre, Morocco, 2006.

1. Institutionally, there is a need to activate the role of de facto nonviolent institutions in resolving the crisis; expanding the participation of all men and women regardless of their political, social, cultural and economic backgrounds in all institutions and public life; raising the level of accountability and integrity in dealing with public issues through assuring participation and freedom of speech, and building efficient institutional channels that allow for accountability; developing national political tools to resolve the crisis through developing a shared vision at national level; and decomposing the institutional foundations and powers associated with the violence and oppression.

2. Socially, the urgent need is for restoring social fabric and trust, and dismantling the tools of fragmentation, hatred and fanaticism; enhancing the values of cooperation and voluntary participation, and investing in the positive experiences of social cohesion that emerged during the crisis; building trust between polarized groups based on rights and principles of respect and freedom; strengthening the mutual values in the common culture based on the respect and equality of all; providing social protection by guaranteeing health and educational services for all and without discrimination; respecting the right to live, ceasing the killing, detention and kidnaping; and ensure the appropriate treatment and rehabilitation of all affected by violence without discrimination; and improving security conditions and decomposing factors that enhance the culture of fear and oppression.

3. Economically, there is a need to institutionalize and activate a civil society economy that supports equal opportunities in ownership and investment, and imposes collective control over economic activities. This economy would contribute to accelerating the process of rehabilitating infrastructure and basic services utilities and guaranteeing substantial public participation. Additionally, accountable policies to alleviate poverty should be applied; giving the priority to the most deprived and affected regions, to reduce discrepancy in economic participation and incentives among regions, and to dismantle the institutions of violence and networks of warlords. Moreover, the economy needs to create job opportunities through public and civil work programmes and private sector investment to attract the labor force to productive economic activities and facilitate the inclusion of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, living conditions need swift improvement. Finally, institutions should support local production in all sectors through different financing sources, and activate effective monetary policies for price stability.