



CONCEPT PAPER

Citizens for Syria

Revised **September 2013**

The Anna Lindh Forum gave the ALF Secretariat the mandate to develop some activities responding to the situation in Syria, where the ALF has been working during more than 5 years (2005-2010).

“The Forum asked for an urgent response of the International Community and for a sustainable action of the Foundation and its Networks in favour of dialogue, citizenship and peace. We will do it. (...) There is no way to be Citizens for the Mediterranean today, without being first of all Citizens for Syria. Working for a plural and open Syrian Civil Society will be our best contribution to make Democracy viable in Syria.”
(Andreu Claret, ALF Executive Director, Forum closing session. 7 April 2013)

The mandate of the Forum is to make visible our concerns for the situation in Syria and our support to civil society organisations and Syrian individuals that are advocating and working for a plural and open society in their country, sharing the ALF values. Mainly within the framework of Citizens for Dialogue programme, the ALF response to this mandate will be, “*Citizens for Syria*”, a **twofold** programme of activities including the **involvement of Syrians civil society representatives in the ALF Work Plan** and an **“Initiative for Syria”**.

Such activities should be in line with the overall mandate of the Anna Lindh Foundation and with the Work Plan approved by the Board of Governors. Bearing in mind the political complexity of the Syrian conflict, activities should rely exclusively on civil society organisations and individuals developing their actions in the main ALF fields (Culture & Creativity, Education & Intercultural Learning, Media & Perceptions, Urban spaces & Diversity) and should be focused on dialogue and intercultural citizenship. They should be addressed to individuals of the Syrian civil society (coming from Syria or from other countries where they have been forced to relocate) and also involve ALF Networks and other partners, with a plural and open approach, taking into account cultural and religious sensitivities.

Objectives

The main objective of “*Citizens for Syria*” is to contribute to the diversity and plurality of the Syrian society in a future and democratic Syria. Syria has a historical record in this regard, as an Arab country based on the diversity of its society:

Syria’s long history of civilisation and coexistence is known to all, as are the structural reasons behind the triumph of this melting pot in the face of all the discrimination and assiduous efforts to divide and dismember the country. These reasons include:

- 1. Historically, the Syrian people have rallied round a wide array of patriotic and national causes, including the Palestinian cause and Arab unity. This helped promote internal solidarity and integration, and eroded the traditional structures of fanaticism;*
- 2. All Syrians, regardless of their ethnic and religious background, have taken part in the struggle for liberation and independence, and in efforts to build their state and forge its modern history; this made the principles of citizenship and equality the main common denominator among them;*
- 3. There is no history of rancor or serious confrontations that one can exploit among different groups in the country; this is due to its particular demographic mosaic and population overlap, whereby it is hard to find any ethnically pure or isolated region in the country that one minority or the other could claim as its own;*
- 4. The majority in Syria is itself diverse and disunited both culturally and politically, just like the minorities are. What puts it together is a religious tie and traditional, spontaneous piety; however, among this majority’s predominant characteristics are its nationalist sense and wide array of affiliations. It is also divided in its understanding of the relationship between religion and daily life, and its loyalty to a wide array of social and political affiliations, such as the liberal, nationalist and communist currents, with some preferring to turn in the regime’s orbit and support it.*

(‘The Syrian Revolution and Future of Minorities’. Arab Reform Initiative Brief. April 2013)

Preserving this identity and valuing diversity in a new and democratic context is one of the challenges of the democratic change in Syria. The Anna Lindh Foundation can contribute to this objective, **bringing together representatives of the Syrian civil society regardless of their origin, condition and belief, in order to discuss the role of civil society in building the future of their country.**

Restoring trust within the diverse Syrian society and rebuilding bridges between Syrians and Euromed partners is essential in order to facilitate a more comprehensive and balanced picture of the Syrian society and its future in a democratic context.

The Anna Lindh Foundation will therefore provide representatives of the Syrian civil society with a space to share the experience of Dialogue and Exchange with Arab and other Euromed civil societies in order to build cultural and social bridges across the Mediterranean, promote a better understanding and reflect on common challenges in processes of democratic reform or transition. This work is particularly important when Syria and its society are portrayed in a very negative and simplistic way in most of the mainstream Euromed media.

Framework of Activities

The different activities proposed in the framework of “*Citizens for Syria*” will be developed through different components of the ALF Work Programme (ALF awards, meetings related to education, culture and civil society, granted projects etc.). It will combine support to ad hoc activities, promote exchange schemes and encourage collaborations and initiatives.

The most relevant action to be developed will be in the framework of the Citizens for Dialogue programme will consist in an important conference providing space for dialogue and reflection, related to the ALF 4Ds strategy, for Syrian civil society and other Euromed representatives.

Target Groups

Youth, women, activists promoting dialogue from Syria and in the growing diaspora.

Fields of action

Focus on some specific fields such as Culture & Creativity, Education & Intercultural Learning, Media & Perceptions, Urban spaces & Diversity and targets such as youth, women and civil society actors.

Programme for 2013 and 2014

1) Activities for Syria developed in the framework of the ALF Work Plan:

○ *Citizens for Dialogue components:*

- Spaces for dialogue: co-financing several public events involving citizens and targeting youth in priority, in different Euromed countries between November 2013 and April 2014, to raise awareness and address the issue of dialogue in Syria. The ALF Secretariat is welcoming proposals of collaboration to be co-financed depending on the proposal and budget presented. The ALF Secretariat will co-finance from 2.500 euros to 10.000 euros.
- Collaborations and promotion of activities aiming to involve Syrian communities.
- Exchange in the Euromed region of Civil society actors and Syrian journalists (Journalist Award 2012 & 2013).

- **Young Arab Voices:** The debates in Arab countries will include young people from Syrian refugees' communities.
- **ALF-Granted projects:** The selection of the new granted projects for 2013-2014 will include projects addressing issues related to Syria.
- **Farah el Bahr:** Contribution of Syrian artists to the event.
- **Network Meetings** and Annual Heads of Network's Meeting.
- **The Journalist and Euromed Award** 2013 and 2014 will be open to nominations of Syrian civil society organisations and representatives.

2) Initiative for Syria

- ~~September 2013.~~ Consultative Meeting with about 20 participants ~~in the last week of September 2013~~ (dates and location to be determined later). It will gather Syrians still living in Syria or abroad with representatives of Heads of Network institutions (including those of countries directly concerned by high number of refugees) and relevant CSOs or actors involved in Syria issues. The meeting will explore what ALF could develop specifically besides others institutions' initiatives and define the framework of the main event foreseen in April 2014.
- **1st Semester 2014.** Conference to provide a space for dialogue and reflection with about 60 participants (dates and location to be determined later). The conference will focus on the role of Syrian Civil society in the context of the Citizens for Dialogue programme and workshops. The main fields targeted will be: Civil Society reconstruction, Education and Citizenship, Arts for Change and Youth participation.
- **2013-2014.** Syria Platform for Dialogue to be developed. Citizens for Syria will have a space in the website and different tools to maintain regular flow of news about all the activities developed, exchange of information and expertise, invitation to activities and events, collaborations, space for projects ideas.

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