SYRIA: CIVILIAN HARM AND ASSISTANCE

BRIEFING PAPER, SEPTEMBER 2013
"We live in constant fear of whether we will live or die. I want the rockets to stop. I want to go back to my home and live peacefully."

-Manal, whose home was destroyed in Hamah, and is living in an internally displaced persons camp in Syria, April 2013.
Executive Summary

The horror of the Syrian conflict is reflected in the accounts we heard from its people. Their harrowing stories of death, injuries, displacement, and destruction of property not only detail mass atrocities, but also fragmentation of Syria’s social fabric jeopardizing future generations. The consequences of the conflict—both short and long term—are devastating for Syrians trying to cope with the loss of breadwinners, loss of their homes, loss of livelihood, and disrupted access to education and healthcare. Now, Syrians have to radically change their assumptions about how they will live and provide for themselves and their families. They are and will be in desperate need of assistance to live their lives with dignity. Given the persisting conflict, with no end in sight, it is challenging to plan for assisting civilians who’ve been harmed. But it’s incumbent upon the international community to plan for both short and long-term help as Syria’s future very much depends on the strength of its people.
Over 100,000 people have been killed since peaceful protest against the rule of Bashar al-Assad began in March 2011. The bombardment of cities, indiscriminate artillery shelling, use of incendiary weapons and cluster munitions, and recently chemical weapons, to kill, maim, and terrorize civilians have affected Syrians across the board. Compounding the situation are acute shortages of food, water, medicine, fuel, and electricity in opposition-controlled areas. Over 2 million Syrians have become refugees in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey—over half are children. Humanitarian workers' access to more than 4.5 million internally displaced Syrians is severely hindered due to bureaucratic obstacles imposed by the Assad government.

We realize that discussing what assistance Syrians need for harm at this time seems like putting the cart before the horse. The Syrian conflict is in a stalemate. Neither side is poised for a decisive victory. Still, planning to assist Syrians needs to be considered now in order for it to be effective when the Syrian people are in a position to begin rebuilding their lives. This brief is intended to help policymakers, donor governments, and civil society begin to think through what they can do to help individual Syrians and their families post-harm. We also realize that post-harm does not necessarily mean post-conflict and that this conflict will continue for some time to come. There remains, however, an imperative to help civilians suffering losses even in the midst of ongoing hostilities.

In August 2013, Syrian civil society released the “Syrian Transition Roadmap”—endorsed by some members of the Syrian opposition— with plans for constitutional, judicial, political, and security sector reforms, as well as transitional justice goals. We hope this brief contributes to those plans by specifically recommending how to assist Syrians rebuild their war-torn lives and communities.

More than anything, Syrians want peace and the fighting to stop. But they also spoke of the types of help they would find useful in recognition of their many losses. Syrians of all backgrounds spoke with Center for Civilians in Conflict about the harm they have suffered during the conflict and what they needed to rebuild their lives. Syrians told us they want to return to their homes, schools, and communities. They want job training, financial assistance to cope with the loss of breadwinners and homes, rehabilitation and prosthetics for amputees, and medical and psychological assistance for injuries. They want training on how to protect themselves from cluster bombs and how to safely dispose of unexploded ordnance (UXO).

---

1 Anti-government protests broke out on March 18, 2001, in response to the arrest and torture of 15 school children by one of Syria’s intelligence agencies in the city of Daraa. Nonviolent demonstrations quickly spread to the rest of the country in sympathy with the Daraa protestors. Syrian government forces responded with violence and used force, often lethal, against largely peaceful demonstrators. The heavy-handedness towards the nonviolent protestors over time led to armed resistance and by July 2012 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) publicly concluded that the situation in Syria had amounted to a non-international armed conflict.

2 The Center does not take a position on military intervention in the Syrian conflict, our concerns on any policy action be it lethal aid to the armed opposition, air strikes, or creation of a no fly zone stem from the impact of these policies on civilians. Center for Civilians in Conflict and ASIL, Syria: Minimizing Civilian Harm During Military Intervention, Roundtable Brief, February 2013; Center for Civilians in Conflict, Opposition Aid in Syria: Recommendations on Civilian Security, March 2013; Sahr Muhammedally, A Check on Lethal Aid to Syria, Huffington Post, May 17, 2013.


4 In 2012, the Center made several trips to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to assess the armed opposition tactics and mind-set on civilian protection and the humanitarian crisis. See Center for Civilians in Conflict, Syria Situation Brief, October 2012.
Assisting Syrian civilians after they suffer conflict harm—and there are many people and many different kinds of harm to contend with in this situation—is necessary for Syrians to reknit their country. Any incoming or transitional government will have to address how to sustainably assist Syrians, along with related and urgent domestic challenges, including disarmament of militias, political and juridical reforms, security sector reforms, stemming the potential for retribution attacks and sectarian war, and holding persons accountable for war crimes and human rights violations.

Types of Civilian Harm and their Impact

Artillery shelling and aerial bombardment have occurred across the country. Ballistic missiles, incendiary weapons, and cluster munitions with wide-area effects are being used in civilian areas without distinction between civilians and combatants. Alleged chemical weapons attacks, including the recent one on August 21 in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta, have killed hundreds of people. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria has also documented torture, rapes, and enforced disappearances by the Syrian government and the Shabiah (militia affiliated with the government), as well as torture and summary executions by some armed opposition groups. The impact of the conflict can be seen in the Syrian people who describe the loss of life, limbs, homes, schools, and communities. Their individual and collective losses need to be considered in planning for comprehensive post-harm assistance.

Impact of Air Strikes, Artillery, Mortars
The Center spoke with survivors of air strikes, mortar attacks, and artillery shelling who described how they were injured and their homes destroyed. Nahla, 35, from Hama governate, a mother of thee children, was struck by shrapnel in her hip and legs in March 2013. “I


7 All interviews were conducted with help of Arabic-English interpreters. The Center did not rely on armed opposition groups for logistical assistance during field mission in Syria.
was on my street near my house with my friend when I heard the fighter jets. We ran. I heard an explosion, and the next thing I knew I was on the road and could not move. Someone picked me up and took me to a local field hospital. There was blood everywhere.”

Nahla was brought to Turkey for treatment. When the Center met with her, Nahla’s left leg had been amputated five days earlier. “I have not seen my children who are with their father. I pray to Allah they are safe. I want to be in my own country. I want safety for me and my family.”

Watfa from Kafromah, Idlib governorate was injured in a mortar attack in January 2013. Her house was destroyed and her leg was amputated from the injuries. “Every day we heard sounds of rockets and explosions. It was in the next village, but then the ‘visitors’—we have started calling rockets and mortars ‘visitors’ because you don’t know when they will show up, but then they came to my village. Mortars landed on my neighbor’s home and mine. My neighbor died, my home was destroyed, and I was injured. I have one leg now. Allah decided that today I live for my family, but I don’t know what will happen tomorrow.” Watfa asks, “Can anyone help end this war?”

Twenty-two-year-old Khadija, mother of two children, was hit by shrapnel in September 2012 and is paralyzed from below her waist. “There was random shelling in our village in Kafranbel [Idlib governorate]. One did not know when we would be hit next. There was a demonstration against Assad outside the mosque at 2:00 p.m. I then heard fighter jets so I grabbed my children and ran into the basement. I left my children with my mother and went to look for my husband, when shrapnel hit me.”

Khadija was taken to a local hospital and was brought to a rehabilitation center in Turkey in January 2013. She has not seen her children in seven months. “How will I take care of my children? I am paralyzed. I am useless to them,” said Khadija.

---

**Deliberate & Indiscriminate attacks**

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Human Rights Watch, and other international groups have documented both deliberate and indiscriminate attack on civilians by the Syrian military. The Syrian government has carried out a disproportionate number of attacks on civilians, but some armed opposition groups have also engaged in artillery shelling of predominantly Shia villages in Aleppo. Lawyers aligned with the opposition also told the Center that some armed opposition groups in Aleppo have shelled villages causing civilian casualties. Deliberate, indiscriminate, or disproportionate attacks against civilians and civilian objects are prohibited under international humanitarian law (IHL).

---

1. UN COI Syria Report June 2013; see also Human Rights Watch, Death by the Skies, April 2013.
2. Id. The report identified the groups as Liwa Al-Tawhid, Ghraba Al-Sham and Jabhat Al-Nusra.
3. Center interviews with opposition lawyers, Turkey, April 2013.
4. See generally, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), adopted June 8, 1977, 1125 U.N.T.S. 609, entered into force December 7, 1978, art. 52(1), http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1. Attacks are indiscriminate under international humanitarian law when they are not directed at a specific military objective, or employ a method or means of warfare which cannot be directed at a military objective or whose effects cannot be limited. A disproportionate attack is one in which the expected incidental loss of civilian life and damage to civilian objects would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated. IHL also obligates warring parties to take constant care to spare the civilian population and civilian objects from the effects of hostilities. Parties are required to take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and damage to civilian objects. See Protocol I, arts. 51, 52, 57.
Aminah, 60, from Kafromah, Idlib governorate, was harvesting olives when a mortar landed in the field hitting a tree, which fell on her. She is paralyzed. “There was fighting in the area between the regime and the FSA [Free Syrian Army]. We are caught in the middle and have nowhere to go. My house was burned and we have lost everything. I want a better future. I want to able to go out of my house and not fear that I will be killed.”

Abdul Reza, 12, from Kernaz, Idlib governorate described how he ran from his home when he heard fighter jets. “I was playing with my sister. I heard the fighter jets. I grabbed my sister’s hand and ran out. I was scared. My sister was crying. I was in a hurry that I did not wear shoes. As I ran on the street, my feet were bleeding. My uncle and cousin died. Our house was destroyed.”

Wasim, a Syrian doctor, told the Center, “The government is shelling its own people. Civilians are paying the price for letting opposition groups operate in their villages. Assad’s army is killing people and destroying the infrastructure, leaving nothing for civilians.” According to UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, government artillery shelling in civilian areas is predominantly in northern and eastern Syria, which is either controlled or infiltrated by armed opposition groups.

Impact from Cluster Munitions

The Center visited villages under opposition control in Idlib governorate in April 2013. Adnan from Hazano told the Center that people are trying to rebuild their lives after their homes and shops were burnt by government forces and the Shabiah in April 2012. Three days before the Center visited Hazano, fighter jets released rockets with cluster munitions in Hazano. One of the rockets landed in a tree-lined field where children were playing; it killed 15-year-old Batool and injured six children.

The Center visited the field in Hazano village where the rockets landed and examined the unexploded bomblets. The cluster bomb observed by the Center contained ShOAB0.5 bomblets made in the former Soviet Union. Human Rights Watch found similar cluster munition and two other types in different locations in Syria.

---

13 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Aminah, Turkey, April 2013.
14 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Abdul Reza, Turkey, April 2013.
15 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Wasim, Turkey, April 2013.
According to witnesses and a Center site visit, there was no FSA military base or weapons depot in the immediate vicinity to support a military attack. A FSA brigade member, wearing a flak jacket, had been asked by the village to clear the field when the Center visited. But he was a barber until two years ago. “I don’t have any formal training on disposing cluster bombs. When we can we collect them and shoot at them. But this is dangerous as my friend was injured while shooting at the bombs,” said Marwan.18 The field where the munitions landed would remain unsafe. “We don’t have the training nor the equipment to clear this field completely,” he explained.19

Unexploded cluster munitions remain buried under the mud in the field posing grave danger to civilians. Locals don’t have the material resources to put up signs warning of unexploded ordnance in the field. Ahmed, the village head, told the Center, “This mined field is very dangerous for the children, but we don’t have the resources to warn everyone of the dangers. If the children come to play here they will die.”20

Amidst the chaos of war, civilians often find themselves in the crossfire. The use of cluster munitions, banned by many nations due to their indiscriminate nature, leaves behind a landscape of destruction that can take years to clear. The field in Hazano, Idlib, a prime example of this, continues to pose a threat to the local community, with unexploded ordnance remaining a constant danger.

Cluster Munitions

Cluster munitions explode in the air, sending hundreds of submunitions or bomblets over a wide area, causing indiscriminate damage. A majority of nations have banned the use of cluster bombs through the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which came into force in 2010. The convention requires nations to destroy stockpiles, clear areas contaminated with unexploded submunitions, and provide assistance to victims.

The photo shows a cluster munition found in Hazano, Idlib. The munition appears to be a Soviet-era ShOAB 0.5 munition. Photo by Sahr Muhammadally.

18 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Marwan, Syria, April 2013.
19 Id.
20 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ahmed, Syria, April 2013.
Assistance for Civilian Harm

All Syrians have suffered irrespective of their loyalties. Recognition of civilian losses needs to be an inclusive process addressing losses by all sects in Syria in order to reduce sectarian tensions and to rebuild the country. Easing the suffering of civilians should be a key priority in any post-harm plans.

Given the ongoing conflict, Syrian views on what should be done in response to the destruction of their country, death, violence, and injuries can be found in one word: peace. Syrians from all sects interviewed by the Center wanted the fighting to stop. “We live in constant fear of whether we will live or die,” said Manal, a mother of two, from Hamah. “I want the rockets to stop. I want to go back to my home and live peacefully.”21 Seven-year-old Hashim showed the Center a picture he drew of the Syrian revolution flag, with trees and birds flying. “This is the Syria I want,” he said.22

Ilyad, a 30-year-old painter from Aleppo, was in front of his house when artillery shelling landed near him. The shrapnel hit his face, requiring surgery on his nose and face. “Look at me. There are thousands of us who will be forever maimed. Our limbs amputated. We will be a constant reminder of the horrors of this war. But I have been given a chance to live and if the fighting does stop I want my life back. It will never be the same, but I want to work and help my community.”23

Loss of Property

Syrians who had been displaced because of airstrikes in their villages and towns and whose homes had been destroyed or looted told the Center they wanted financial assistance to rebuild their homes. Loss of a home includes loss of family possessions, livestock, and vehicles, leaving families destitute and vulnerable to malnutrition and other suffering. Hameeda’s house was burnt and looted by the Shabiah in Hazano village in 2012. She told the Center, “They took everything and then burnt my home. Why did they burn my home when they had taken what they wanted? I need my home back. I need to be able to live under my own roof.”24 Ramziya from Hamah told the Center, “The first time the fighter jets flew over my house they dropped bombs and flattened my house. I am now homeless and have lost everything. I want my house rebuilt.”25 In April 2013, the United Nations estimated that 1.2 million homes, or “one third of the total housing stock in Syria” had been damaged or destroyed.26

Job Training and Financial Assistance

Many Syrians talked about the need for job training to help them earn a decent living. Some permanently disabled Syrians asked that they not be neglected, but be given the opportunity to earn a living. Ahmed whose leg had been amputated from shrapnel injuries told the Center, “I don’t want to rely on government support forever in a new Syria. Show me what kind of work I can do with only one leg and I will do it.”27

21 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Manal, Syria, April 2013.
22 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Hashim, Turkey, April 2013.
23 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ilyad, Turkey, April 2013.
24 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Hameeda, Syria, April 2013.
25 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ramziya, Turkey, April 2013.
27 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ali, Turkey, April 2013.
Some women who had little employment experience before the war expressed interest in skills training programs so they could provide for their families now that they are widows. Ayesha told the Center, "It's hard for me to imagine the future. I have lost so much—my husband, my house, my son, but I have two daughters who need to be cared for. In a new Syria I want to learn a trade so I can earn an income to help my family with dignity."28

Some Syrians wanted financial assistance for the losses they have suffered. Fatima lost her leg when a rocket hit her house in Kernaz, Idlib governorate in December 2012. "I will never forget that day. It was 10:00 a.m., I heard fighter jets in the sky. I rushed to get my one-year-old son and was holding him when the roof started crumbling. A rocket had hit my house. I fainted. A rescue worker pulled my son and me out. My son has lost his hearing. My house is gone, I can no longer use my leg, but we survived. It was a miracle."29 When asked what kind of assistance she wanted she replied, "We have suffered a lot. If we can get some compensation for our losses so we have a home and get a chance to live with dignity then it will help us."30 Khadija, who is paralyzed from the waist down, due to shrapnel injuries to her back, stated, "We need financial help. It won’t be enough for all that we have suffered, but we are in great need."31

Fidah used to live in Sheikh Maqsood—a Kurdish area in Aleppo—but left in April 2013 due to intense fighting. Fidah’s husband—a shoemaker who was without work for two years due to the war—had his leg amputated in April because of shrapnel injuries from rockets.32 Her home was destroyed. "We have lost everything. My husband is crippled. How will I feed my five children? Where will we live? We need financial assistance," she asked.33

Others wanted financial assistance to re-establish their businesses. "I had a small shop in the village but it was destroyed with the rocket attacks. If I ever go back I will need money to re-open my shop," said Assad. "I need help to provide food for my family."34

Loss of Land
Farmers from Idlib and Aleppo governorates told the Center they needed fields cleared of unexploded ordnance and financial assistance to start harvesting. "We are farmers but had to leave our village because of the fighting. I want to return to my family home and land, but don’t know whether I can harvest crops if bombs are in the field," said Abbas.35 Another farmer, Ali, said, "I grow olives but I have lost everything: my house, my farm, my savings and now am living in a tent. If a new government comes then they need to help us reclaim our lands and assist us so we can start farming and earning for our families again."36

Psychological Rehabilitation
Displacement and threats to physical safety are having a psychological impact on adults and children. Ilfat described how she and her family had left her village in Kernaz, Idlib governorate in 2012 when fighting started, and went to her in-laws only to leave that village as fighter jets began bombing there as well. "The fighting follows us everywhere. My children

28 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ayesha, Turkey, April 2013.
29 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Fatima, Turkey, April 2013.
30 Id.
31 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Khadija, Turkey, April 13, 2013.
32 Fidah’s husband was with her at the time of the Center interview, but unable to speak as he was recuperating following amputation surgery
33 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Fidah, Syria, April 2013.
34 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Assad, Turkey, April 2013.
35 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Abbas, Syria, April 2013.
36 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ahmed, Syria, April 2013.
are having nightmares and wake up screaming at night. My 10-year-old is wetting his bed. I cry myself. I need the fighting to stop,” said Ilfat.37

Zubaida from Aleppo city told the Center that she would prepare her children every night to leave their home as she did not know what would happen, “We wore layers of clothes and shoes at night. We had to be prepared to run away if the fighter jets came.”38 In 2012, the fighter jets did come and Zubaida and her family ran out of her house before the rockets hit a street behind theirs. Zubaida and another family took refuge in an apartment building, but two days later the shabiahs came. “We were sleeping when a flashlight was shined on my face. A masked man yelled, ‘where is the FSA?’ My daughter started screaming. Neighbors came, shots were fired, he was killed.”39 Zubaida’s daughter continues to have nightmares and has difficulty going to the bathroom.

Parents lamented the impact of war on their children. A mother of five in an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Idlib told the Center, “Our future is lost. We worry about our children. They used to go to school and now they see war around them.”40 Some children in IDP camps echoed what they heard from their parents about the state of the conflict and what they themselves see. “We need rockets so we can attack Bashar,” said seven-year-old Hassan.41 Another mother in the same camp said, “Hatred of Alawites is not what I want my children to learn. But the longer the war continues I will not be able to control what my children will do. They will pick up a gun and fight.”42

Amin, from Homs, living in Tripoli, Lebanon described how Syrian refugee children are traumatized and need psychiatric help, “My children see the Lebanese army on the streets and it reminds them of the Syrian army and they are afraid. Children are saying they don’t want to die like Hamza Al Khateeb [13-year-old boy from Daraa who was detained and allegedly tortured in Syrian army custody in 2011].43 We don’t want our future generation growing up afraid. We want them to experience their childhood.”44

The impact of the war is evident in Amina, 10, in an IDP camp in Idlib governorate who told the Center that she enjoyed going to school, but her home and school were destroyed. She explained how she listened to the different sounds that artillery makes versus sniper firing, “When the sniper fires, it’s a single swoosh. When there are jet fighters there is a screeching sound. A mortar sound is like a whistle... Listening for such sounds is like [being in] school... I am learning to protect myself.”45

Syrians will need assistance for physical and psychological harm along with short and long-term medical care. Arwa told the Center how her daughter Misar, 12, developed speech problems after her father was shot in 2012. Misar herself had been shot by sniper fire and is paralyzed from the waist down in 2013.46 Dr. Mahmoud, a Syrian doctor, explained, “The physical and psychological scars of this war will haunt Syrians for decades. A lot of assistance will be needed to mend the limbs, provide rehabilitation and psychological counseling so that Syria can be a functional society again.”47

37 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ilfat, Turkey, April 2013.
38 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Zubaida, Turkey, April 2013.
39 Id.
40 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Nasreen, Syria, April 2013.
41 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Hassan, Syria, April 2013.
42 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Fareeda, Syria, April 2013.
44 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Amin, Lebanon, June 2012.
45 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Amina, Turkey, April 2013.
46 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Arwa, Turkey, April 2013.
47 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Dr. Mahmoud, Turkey, April 2013.
Schools
Children told the Center that they want to return to school. “I want to go back to school. We were not allowed to play outside because we were afraid of jetfighters. We left our village and came here, but there is no school,” said 10-year-old Qasim who was in an IDP camp in Bab-al-Hawa, Idlib governorate. Ramziya from Hamah told the Center, “The school my children attended was destroyed to rubble. Nine children from my neighborhood died from rocket attacks. They are attacking our schools and our children.” According to UNICEF and Save the Children, more than one-fifth of Syria’s schools have been destroyed or made unusable in Aleppo, Idlib, and Daraa, affecting the education of 2.5 million children since the war started.

Assistance for Amputees
Amputees are in need of prosthetics and rehabilitation. Eight-year-old Amani from Firdaus, Aleppo governorate had her right arm amputated after it was shorn off by a mortar attack in April 2013. “I want to back to school. I like to write,” she told the Center. Amani’s father Azhar explained, “We were in line to buy food when mortar landed a few feet away. The shrapnel injuries to Amani were so severe that the doctor had to remove her arm. My child loves school. She needs a prosthetic, which is very expensive. Because of the war I have lost my job. As a father I have failed my child. I could not protect her.” Watfa from Kafromah, Idlib governorate was injured from a mortar attack in January 2013 had her leg amputated. She asked, “A prosthetic would help me. I have small children who need their mother.”

Justice and Accountability
Demands for justice and accountability for crimes were expressed by a majority of Syrians. A father whose 12-year-old daughter was killed by a cluster bomb in Hazan, Idlib in April 2013 said, “We need justice, people who are killing our children need to be held accountable.” Reza, a lawyer told the Center, “For Syria to heal we need the rule of law. We have to ensure that all those who committed crimes, even those who oppose Assad, need to be tried and punished if found guilty.” Reza told the Center that some armed opposition groups have committed human rights violations. “Some in the opposition have been involved in murder, kidnapping, and looting. They need to be tried in court. We cannot ignore crimes committed by the opposition.”

Many Syrians however, expressed concern about what justice would look like. Ali from Idlib told the Center, “It’s hard for me to think about justice when so much blood has been shed. I fear revenge killings by whichever side wins. If Assad wins we will all be executed, there will be no rebuilding in opposition areas. We will be collectively punished for siding with the opposition or even living in opposition areas.”

48 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Qasim, Syria, April 2013.
49 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ramziya, Turkey, April 2013.
51 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Amani, Turkey, April 2013.
52 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Azhar, Turkey, April 2013.
53 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Watfa, Turkey, April 2013.
54 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ahmed, Syria, April 2013.
55 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Reza, Turkey, April 2013.
56 Id.
57 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ali, Turkey, April 2013.
Apologies for civilian suffering were difficult for some Syrians to accept. “It’s hard for me to imagine Assad apologizing to us for the suffering he has caused. If he is sorry then he should stop killing us,” said Idris, whose two sons were killed by the Shabiah in 2013.58

Concerns About the Future

Many Syrians expressed concern about the growing sectarian tensions the longer the conflict continues. Abdullah, a lawyer with the opposition said, “The killings are causing hatred amongst the Shias and Sunnis. This did not exist in Syria before. Unless the right people win who can treat all Syrians equally there will be a blood bath and reprisal killings.”59 Samir, a Druze, similarly noted, “We lived together before and we can live together again if the right people are in charge.”60

But as the war continues, the polarization between Sunnis and Alawites increases as each side holds the other collectively responsible for violations. The regime characterizes the rebels as foreign Sunni Islamists bent on imposing Sharia law and attacking religious minorities, while the opposition associates crimes of the regime with all Alawites.

Many Syrians expressed concern about who from the opposition will “win”, or take on the task of governing the country should Assad fall. Ahmed lamented on the early years of the uprising where the goal was common, but now is being infiltrated by outside groups and ideologies. “The foreign fighters are bringing their own agenda to our fight. This is not what we want. That is not why we protested against Assad. Jabhat al-Nusra should not partner with al-Qaeda,” he said.61

Saleem, a fighter with the FSA, told the Center, “We are fighting against oppression. If another oppressor rules us we will fight against them as well.”62 A fighter with the Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham told the Center, “Our goal is to remove Assad. The people then have to decide what kind of government they want.”63

Rania, a mother of three who lost her husband and her home, told the Center, “A new Syria for me is where I can live with my children in dignity and freedom. I will support the person who can give us our dignity back.”64 This is an important sentiment for international partners and donors to consider post-conflict, highlighting the need for protection, assistance, and recognition of losses in order for any new government to be seen as legitimate.

The Way Forward: Effectively Responding to Civilian Harm

Syrians are undergoing the severest test imaginable—the destruction of their country, a war that is breaking up communities, exacerbating sectarian divides, and threatening to destroy the Syrian state. Thousands have been killed, millions displaced, and there are no immediate signs that the violence and fighting will end soon. Civilians across Syria continue to endure the greatest suffering in opposition-controlled areas. Any plans by Syrians and the international community for a negotiated political settlement must prioritize the rehabilitation

58 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Idris, Syria, April 2013.
59 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Abdullah, Turkey, April 2013.
60 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Samir, Syria, April 2013.
61 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ahmed, Turkey, April 2013.
62 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Saleem, Syria, April 2013.
63 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Ahrar al-Sham fighter, Syria, April 2013.
64 Center for Civilians in Conflict interview with Rania, Turkey, April 2013.
of civilians who have suffered, and investigate and hold persons accountable for unlawful harm in order to end impunity and recognize right of victims to redress for harm.

In August 2013, Syrian civil society presented the Syrian Transition Roadmap, which included plans for transitional justice programs such as prosecutions and reparations.\textsuperscript{65} For reparations for unlawful harm, the roadmap recommends physical and moral compensation for damage or loss of opportunity. Specifically, the report recommends that physical compensation include money or material goods, as well as healthcare, education, and housing, and moral compensation should include a formal apology, dedicating a public space or declaring a national day of remembrance.

Reparations and accountability for crimes committed by all sides during the Syrian conflict are essential to ending impunity, to guaranteeing the right to redress of the Syrian people, and recognizing the suffering of victims. The Center supports plans for accountability and reparations and recommends additional ways to assist Syrians post-harm and help them rebuild their lives.

Specifically we recommend the following to the political opposition, any incoming government, and the international community:

**Plan and Create a Victims Assistance Fund for Syria**

- Planning and funding to help war victims post-harm must begin now. A comprehensive Victims Assistance Fund for Syria is needed to help Syrians affected by the conflict rebuild their lives. All Syrian conflict victims should be recognized and their needs and wants for assistance post-harm should be reflected in the assistance. Beneficiaries of the assistance program should include those suffering personal losses due to the conflict.
- The fund should include assistance for: medical and psychosocial services for all victims of the conflict—including those who have been tortured and raped—rebuilding of homes destroyed during the conflict, job or vocational training for a sustainable livelihood—including to widows and the disabled—material or financial assistance to restart businesses and farming, and educational scholarships for orphan children or those who have lost breadwinners in their families.
- Given the scale of devastation and losses, short-term financial assistance should be provided to the next of kin of the dead, the disappeared, internally displaced persons, and returning refugees to get them started on rebuilding their lives with dignity.
- Those who have become disabled because of the conflict need special attention and long-term assistance. Assistance should include prosthetics for amputees and job training for the disabled.
- A separate community infrastructure program should focus on rebuilding schools, hospitals, and roads.

**Protection from Unexploded Ordnance**

- As part of non-lethal assistance packages, donor countries should train the armed opposition on safe disposition and securing of UXOs and stockpiles now.
- Donor governments and the United Nations Mine Awareness (UNMAS) could identify and fund local partners to undertake mine awareness alerts that reach both cites and villages, where communication is poor. Villagers told us that they did not have warning signs to post in areas where UXO remains nor were they fully aware of the dangers of

\textsuperscript{65} Syria Transition Roadmap, pp. 145-47.
UXO.
• After the fighting has stopped, donor nations should fund comprehensive demining programs to clear areas of ordnance.

**Chemical Weapons Rehabilitation**
• Plan and allocate resources and medical expertise to care for victims with immediate and lasting injuries, including those who may experience the after-effects of chemical weapons.
• Commit to long-term financial assistance to develop the medical infrastructure in Syria including hospitals, diagnostic equipment, drugs for treatment, and palliative care for those with lasting injuries.

**Support Transitional Justice Efforts and Accountability**
• Crimes committed by all sides should be investigated and prosecuted.
• Efforts for apologies, memorializing, and truth-seeking should be supported financially and institutionally.
About Center for Civilians in Conflict
Center for Civilians in Conflict works to make warring parties more responsible to civilians before, during, and after armed conflict. We are advocates who believe no civilian caught in conflict should be ignored, and advisors who provide practical solutions to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

The organization was founded as Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC) in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a courageous humanitarian killed by a suicide bomber in 2005 while advocating for Iraqi families.

www.civiliansinconflict.org

Acknowledgements
The Center would like to thank Connect.US for supporting our work in Syria. The Center also extends special thanks to the Syrian victims who shared their stories with us and the Syrians who helped us with our research.