

Policy Note – 09 February 2026

Urgent post-truce actions to build trust in Northern Syria



Introduction

This policy note answers three questions:

1. What are the (a) needs for building trust following the January 30th truce, and (b) the immediate practical trust-building opportunities, which are also essential for laying the foundation for longer-term peace and justice?
2. What (a) actions has CCSD, and its Syrian partners and networks, undertaken to mediate conflict issues during the military campaign and since the truce, and (b) has enabled this response?
3. What do we propose practically for urgent short-term actions by (a) the EU and EU member states and (b) CCSD and its Syrian partners and networks?

1. Needs and opportunities for trust-building

The Syrian Transitional Government and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) entered into a ‘permanent truce’ on 30th January 2026, after a month of military operations and escalating Arab-Kurd tensions. While the truce is a positive development that could ease the suffering of civilians, rapid steps are needed to build trust at two levels: 1) Between Kurdish and Arab communal groups; and 2) in national institutions and responses.

Trust between the Kurdish and Arab communal groups

The military campaign was both enabled by, and encouraged, hate speech between Kurds and Arabs. While official communications from the Transitional Government stated that the military operation targeted the SDF and not the Kurdish people, informally, the Transitional Government encouraged hatred between Arab and Kurdish Syrians. For example, government-managed telegraph and WhatsApp groups, of 40,000-200,000 members, explicitly stoked hatred towards Kurds to engender Arab support for the military actions. Similar patterns of anti-Arab, and anti-Transitional Government rhetoric has also circulated among Kurdish communities, often instigated by senior Kurdish figures (again in contrast to formal statements). The result is that tensions and communal attacks between Arabs and Kurds flared during the military campaign and have continued since the truce. As such, it is essential to support trust-building between Kurdish and Arab communal groups as they recover from the impacts of the violence and as a prerequisite for long-term social cohesion and national stability.

Trust in national institutions and responses

How national and local Syrian institutions act in the aftermath of the conflict and truce will influence how legitimate they are viewed by Kurds and other minority groups in the future and will also help determine the level of rights afforded to all groups in the country. There are significant questions over the legitimate authority of the Transitional Government to have launched military operations against Alawites, Druze, and Kurds in less than a year, and a perception among some Syrian groups that these operations were inspired by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) ideology, as much as by a desire to enforce Syrian territorial integrity. The Transitional Government might have achieved its short-term goal of bringing some of the areas of northern Syria under its authority, but it has reinforced fears that the country's minorities will be attacked and marginalized in the future. This fear of violation and marginalization by the Syrian state, combined with the creation of a new round of grievances at the human abuses suffered, means that Kurds and other minority groups will continue to view national and local institutions and their actions as illegitimate. At present, the initiatives taken by national and local institutions to respond to the civilian impacts of the conflict, and to transition to new governance and security arrangements, are not proving effective at responding to local needs, are not understood and trusted locally, and are hence unlikely to build confidence.

The main immediate opportunities for trust building are in:

1. *Temporary processes to manage the impacts of conflict*, including:
 - Handling of dead bodies
 - Information on, and release of, detainees, and missing people related to the recent military action
 - Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) Rights
 - The safe return of both Kurds and Arabs displaced from their homes.

2. *Facilitation of small-scale humanitarian needs*, including:
 - For civilian areas still under siege, such as Kobani
 - In areas with significant military presence and ongoing limitations on civilian movement
 - For women and their specific humanitarian needs
 - Dialogue on military and security actions that are more effective in reducing civilian harm (e.g., early warning processes in advance of military operations)

3. *Establishing the building blocks of local inclusive governance*, including:
 - Registration and lustration processes for individuals (especially civilians) associated with the SDF and the former self-administration
 - Monitoring and mitigating the impact on civilians, especially women, related to changes in local security arrangements, as SDF groups are replaced by forces of the transitional government.

While opportunities exist for trust-building in these three areas, there is also a risk that they will become 'politicized' and folded into long-term negotiations between SDF and the Transitional Government, rather than being addressed as separate humanitarian and civilian issues. Hence, it is essential that these issues are managed separately from SDF-Government negotiations and through Syrian civil society and community groups.

Rapid actions to build trust between communal groups and start the process of building strong relations with local and national institutions should also contribute towards longer-term peace and justice by encouraging dialogue-based and civilian solutions, rather than coercive and military ones. This means that even as actions are taken to build trust in the short term, in parallel, there is a need to strengthen civilian governance arrangements and the rights of minority groups. See CCSD's position paper on the Kurdish issue for more information on this longer-term perspective (<https://www.ccsd.ngo/toward-a-just-solution-that-embraces-syrias-diversity-as-the-foundation-for-sustainable-peace/>).

2. Actions and resources

CCSD, and its Syrian partners and networks, has mobilized to mediate individual conflict issues before and after the truce. Their actions include:

Opportunity 1: Temporary processes to manage the impacts of conflict

- Securing information on detained fighters, e.g., in Der Hafr (Aleppo countryside), and creating opportunities for communication with their families.
- Increasing awareness of the justice issues associated with detainees and advocating to the local and national institutions for a more conflict-sensitive approach. This pressure contributed to the decision to allow detainees to send voice messages to their families.
- Supporting families of the missing to contact relevant institutions, such as Disaster Management and Emergency teams (former Syrian Civil Defense) and local governance bodies.
- Creating safe third-party communication channels between people who have had their properties seized and local authorities, to start the process of return. For example, small businesses and homesteads that have been seized by military groups in Raqqa.

Opportunity 2: Facilitation of small-scale humanitarian needs

- Mediating the evacuation of Kurdish families from Raqaa during the military campaign.
- Creating communication channels and joint responses on small scale humanitarian needs, such as medical relief into Kobani.
- Coordinating Syrian-donated support for civilians affected by the military operation.
- Supporting the conflict sensitivity of Syrian volunteer teams, and civil society organizations that are in support of rebuilding and are already active in the post-truce environment.

Opportunity 3: Establishing the building blocks of local inclusive governance

- Facilitating information to individuals affiliated with the SDF and former self-administration on government initiatives, including the reconciliation/settlement centers. This encompasses both Kurdish and Arab individuals who have been working with the SDF/self-administration.
- Undertaking efforts to reduce inter-communal tensions in Hasakah, Raqaa, and Deir ez-Zur, and strengthening the relationships across communal divides that are an essential resource for future social cohesion.
- Monitoring the civilian impacts of the military operation and communicating these impacts to local, national, and international parties. This information flow has been an essential contribution to pressure on the Transitional Government and SDF to agree to ceasefires and the truce.

These actions to mitigate the conflict's civilian impacts and maintain social cohesion are based on significant Syrian resources for peace and justice across northern Syria that have been built over the last 14 years. These resources include:

- A range of partnerships with local organizations, and youth groups, across all the areas where the military campaign was conducted.
- Significant experience in mediating local governance agreements between Arab and Kurdish groups, as well as between other social groups.
- Individuals and networks with a long-term history of success in securing the release of civilian detainees, including women detainees.
- Networks of trained mediators and peacebuilders, e.g., Women Peace Circles and Aman Network.
- The ability to conduct targeted information campaigns and raise awareness on sensitive topics associated with conflict and conflict-related trauma.
- Access to expertise in professional psychological and trauma support for frontline activists.
- Internal expertise in conflict sensitivity, gender sensitivity, peacebuilding, and inclusive democratic processes.

3. Practical proposals for the EU and member states, and CCSD and its partners

There are a range of Syrian initiatives, whether by individuals or organizations, that are being managed through personal relationships, and in an *ad hoc* manner. These initiatives are more likely to contribute to trust-building (between the Arab and Kurdish communities, and in the local and national institutions) if they are scaled up to be more structured, visible, and accessible. To this end, CCSD recommends that the EU and member states:

1. Finances a rapid trust-building effort, led by Syrians (rather than international organizations), in the north of the country. It is important to support and empower Syrian mediation and peacebuilders as they are better suited to respond to immediate issues in the aftermath of the truce and will also be critical for mediating genuinely inclusive approaches by local and national institutions in the medium to long-term.
2. Supports mechanisms to translate individual mediation actions into more sustainable and visible mechanisms that are seen to build trust between communities. This entails rapid development of coordination mechanisms on the three trust-building opportunities (temporary processes, humanitarian needs, building blocks of inclusive local governance).
3. Uses diplomatic channels, and behind-doors influence, to encourage a longer-term shift by the Transitional Government away from coercive strategies to project its authority, towards the use of dialogue. This means encouraging a commitment to a meaningful dialogue of future governance arrangements that goes beyond the official negotiations with the SDF, towards inclusive Kurdish-Arab civilian dialogues. The foundations for such a dialogue can be built through immediate trust-building actions.
4. Uses diplomatic and technical channels to encourage adoption of a new strategy for national dialogue and transitional justice (TJ) that goes beyond the Kurdish issue. National dialogue requires a concerted effort of engagement with Syria's myriad communities, accompanied by a commitment to adopting the outcomes of discussions. Similarly, TJ requires a wider approach that also accounts for abuses by all actors, including those most recently committed during the January 2026 offensive.
5. Increase support for adherence of the security forces of the Transitional Government to Protection of Civilian (PoC) standards and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), through its existing contracts with implementing partners. This support should use technical standards as an entry point to engage with armed groups, monitor their actions towards civilians, and hold them to account for future abuses.

CCSD can make the following direct contributions to trust-building in the short term and create the foundations for longer-term peace and justice.

Overall

1. Conduct a rapid mapping of individuals and organizations that are undertaking mediation and peacebuilding actions within the three opportunity areas.
2. Use this mapping as the basis for establishing short-term coordination forums, which could expand into longer-term forums for mediating critical issues (a) between Arab and Kurdish groups and (b) with local and national institutions.

Opportunity 1: Temporary processes to manage the impacts of conflict

3. Establish formalized channels between Kurdish civilians and relevant authorities on the return of bodies, detainee issues, and the missing. These formalized channels would be supported by networks of local mediators who can support individual cases.
4. Formalize safe third-party communication channels between people who have had their properties seized and local authorities on HLP.
5. Support networks of local mediators on the return of Kurdish and Arab families.

Opportunity 2: Facilitation of small-scale humanitarian needs

6. In parallel to the mapping of local peacebuilders (activity 1) map out urgent needs related to service delivery in areas recovering from the military conflict, and how these could be supported by donors in a manner that builds communal trust.
7. Establish a clearing house for small-scale humanitarian responses in areas under siege or with a continued high military and security presence, in order to provide expertise to Syrian organizations and individuals looking to support rebuilding.

Opportunity 3: Establishing the building blocks of local inclusive governance

8. Establish a dialogue forum with communities and local and national institutions regarding the processes for registering individuals affiliated with the SDF and former temporary administrations. This dialogue forum should encourage the adoption of conflict sensitive approaches to ensure rights are maintained and trust is built.
9. Organize short-term dialogue channels between communities and national and local institutions on governance in Kurdish areas, to ensure the new arrangements being established are responsive to local needs, including the specific needs of women. These dialogue channels would be able to transition into sustainable joint Arab-Kurd consultation platforms as trust is built.
10. Undertake monitoring of the impact of changes to security governance on women, with results communicated to local and national decision-makers.