



What is the Syrian Association for Citizen's Dignity?

Mission

The Syrian Association for Citizen's Dignity (**SACD**) is a **civil-rights grassroots popular movement** established by citizens from different regions of Syria. The Association has no political affiliation. It works to promote, protect and secure the rights of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) wherever they are. The Association strives to present the vision, concerns and demands of the refugees and IDPs, and make sure that their voice is heard through advocacy, mobilization of necessary support, and influencing key policy and decision-makers.

The Association embodies the diversity of the citizens of Syria, regardless of their social, religious or gender background. The Association is fighting to ensure the right of a **voluntary, safe and dignified** return of all Syrian refugees and IDPs. We are against forced or premature return of refugees and IDPs. The Association believes that a popular movement for a dignified return, based on the recognition of the rights of refugees and IDPs as Syrian citizens, is central to any future solution in Syria.

Slogan

"It always seems impossible until it's done."¹

Logo

The swallow bird - symbol of return – landing on the map of Syria.

How was the Association formed?

The association was formed by the initiative of a group of displaced people from different provinces from Syria who currently reside in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and liberated areas in Syria. Their initial objective was to address the absence of the voice of displaced Syrians in any of the key decision-making forums, while they faced constant threats and expropriation and encroachment of their properties. Several meetings were held to discuss: 1)

¹ This sentence is a quote of Nelson Mandela, referring to the nature of the fight against Apartheid. The sentence reflects well the nature of the struggle facing the displaced Syrians. At the same time, this slogan serves to mobilize them and clarify how long and difficult this struggle is.



How to create a truly legitimate voice for the displaced people to decide their fate? 2) What is the best model to organize a movement of displaced Syrians so that it can be heard and influence decision and policy makers? 3) How to reach various areas where the displaced people from Syria are located inside and outside Syria and mobilize them into a movement that will genuinely fight for their rights?

After several meetings, the initial group expanded into consultations with a broader spectrum of influential community leaders. The initial ideas matured and developed into a vision of how the refugees/IDPs should be the constituency that will define a clear set of conditions for a voluntary, safe and dignified return, and how these conditions should form the cornerstone of any future political solution.

A “pilot project” was launched to test the implementation of the vision, starting from the Homs Province, where a series of consultations led to the formation of an “Assembly”, which in turn appointed a group of “trustees” as an executive body. Trustees are people from Homs with impeccable reputations and remarkable biographies who are living among the displaced are from Homs. They were entrusted with leading the movement, communicating with the people, building the movement’s legitimacy, and transmitting the message that the displaced Syrians must be represented in discussions about the conditions of their return and the human rights violations they face.

The preliminary efforts to form the Association were supported by European Institute of Peace, represented by international activists convinced that the voice of the Syrian displaced people and refugees should be at the heart of any real political solution. Once the “model” was implemented in Homs was beginning to give clear indication of success, the Association launched the same model/approach with the same vision and narrative in other provinces, including Damascus, Damascus Rural Area, Aleppo and most recently Deir Ezzor. The movement is growing rapidly and other provinces will join soon.

How will the Association represent displaced Syrians?

With the growth of the Association and mobilization of Syrian communities, this movement will strive to be a strong voice for the Syrian displaced in all influential circles where decisions are made regarding:

- Safe and dignified return of refugees/IDPs to their pre-war residences.
- Securing safe and dignified conditions in the current places of displacement.
- Preventing forced return without guarantees for security, dignity and rights.
- Protection of the rights of refugees/IDPs regarding ownership and property.
- Protection of human and civil rights of returnees to Syria.



- Rebuilding of Syria as a rights and justice-based state and society

The Association will work to reach and consult the displaced Syrian communities, and document all important issues related to displacement and return. The Association will use all available diplomatic and public channels to express clearly the demands of the displaced people to international decision-makers, and relevant governments. The Association will work against discriminatory policies and decisions targeting refugees/IDPs, regardless of their source. This will be done through direct communication, public advocacy and the mobilization of support in influential international circles.

The Board of Trustees of the Association includes leading social and activist figures, supported by Assemblies from different provinces that include several dozen leading and influential figures from the displaced Syrian communities. The Association has a presence in the main countries hosting refugees and inside Syria where IDPs now live. The Association disseminates information of relevance to the displaced Syrian communities through media, direct outreach, events and online.

What will the Association try to achieve?

The objectives of the Association can be summed up in one sentence: rights, security, and dignity for all displaced people of Syria, wherever they may be. We want a safe and dignified return for the displaced people and complete material and moral rights which are guaranteed by international law to all those who want to return. We want human and dignified living conditions for displaced people living inside or outside Syria, the right to vote and to be elected, including the displaced people. We want to put an end to all discriminatory and exceptional laws and procedures targeting the people of Syria. In the end, we want the Association to be an influential and leading element in the decision-making related to our cause.

To which political group does the Association belong?

The Association does not follow any political party or group. Our political orientation is clear: protecting the civic and human rights of refugees and IDPs as Syrian citizens. This is our covenant and the only political platform.

Supporting the Association and its cause does not imply belonging to any political group, cannot be construed as work or activity in favor of any political group and cannot be used to discriminate against supporters of the Association.



How is the Association funded?

The Association is a grassroots popular movement of the displaced people of Syria, for the people of Syria. The persons chosen to lead this movement in its early stages do not charge any salaries for their work. With the development and growth of the Association, it will become "self-sufficient", where the Association's activities will be funded through donations and support from the Association's friends and supporters, including organizations such as the European Institute of Peace and others. Trustees do not get paid, and they use their private time to do their work. With the growth of the Association and the development of its activities, the Association will need a larger number of people to perform various duties to keep the movement effective and delivering on its mission, and some of this work will need to be remunerated.

Is the Association supported by any government?

The Association does not work for any government and is not in the service of any state agenda. The Association will communicate with all governments who influence the situation of the displaced people, including the return, security and dignity of refugees/IDPs. In the course of its advocacy, the Association will represent and work for the benefit of only one category: the people of Syria. While the Association is not supported by any government, it will seek to influence decisions of international governments, agencies and organizations to facilitate decisions and policies in favor of security and dignity of the displaced people from Syria.

Does the association deal with property claims?

The Association will provide appropriate legal advice but will not deal directly with private property claims.

Will the association have any impact on the current living conditions of the displaced people?

The Association is not a humanitarian organization that provides direct assistance but will work to have a presence in all areas where the displaced Syrian communities are present to be their voice with the authorities and international organizations in order to solve the problems caused by their displacement. The Association will strive to ensure that those who have the capacity and resources will properly address the issue of internally displaced persons as well as refugees outside Syria. This effort will mainly include work to bring security and dignity to the displaced people in their places of residence, as well as other matters related to their legal status, discrimination or forced return. The Association will open channels of communication with relevant authorities to explain and advocate for the needs of displaced Syrians, their legal status and their rights in displacement.



Are there international examples similar to this movement?

We share this struggle with popular movements from various places around the world, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, who struggled to return to their homes after being expelled during the 1992-1995 war. There, more than a million people returned to their homes after a massive campaign of violence led by Bosnian Serbian authorities, followed by a set of discriminatory laws that stripped the displaced people from the right of property and return, all with the aim of making the demographic engineering and displacement permanent. It took the displaced people of Bosnia years to overcome these laws and achieve a dignified and secure return to their homes, but in the end they won. The key factor in their success was their organization and determination to face violence, discrimination and sometimes the indifference and collusion of international organizations to secure their rights. A similar the displaced people in Guatemala who were targeted by a military cleansing campaign (Junta), or the millions of Colombians displaced people because of the conflict opposing the army and right-wing non-government forces to left-wing militias.

At the same time, we draw inspiration from other rights movements, including the movements that resisted the repressive discrimination of governments such as the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa or the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. We were stripped of our rights as Syrian citizens by force and repression, but this will not deter us from regaining these rights and establishing them for every citizen of Syria.

How can I join the Association, and what is my role?

Communication with the Association is done through the Association's representatives in the communities in your place of residence, and through virtual channels on the Internet. Ask for information and express your opinion on the issues and problems that you think need to be discussed and addressed in order to achieve a safe and dignified return for the displaced people, as well as solutions to the problems and necessary information that may benefit to the current displaced people.

Provide yourself with information about the association and its mission and spread it around you. If you believe that you have the skills to help the Association work and achieve its objectives and are ready to help, you can communicate with representatives of the Association in communities or directly through the Internet.

You can, of course, criticize the Association's work and make observations when needed. But you can also help raise awareness about the association's work and defend the issues of the displaced people. Help organize popular action/movement to be able to achieve the impact and change we want. You are the movement.