



Women's political participation in the Syrian actions of opposition



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Index

Introduction.....	2
First: Participation in the civil and Human rights' action.....	3
Second: participation in the political entities	4
Motives of women's political participation:.....	5
impediments of the Syrian women's political participation: ...	5
Future of women's participation:.....	6



Introduction

Women have participated extensively in the civil opposition movement in Syria since 2011. They had a role in the popular demonstrations, coordinators, media action, health services and other supported services.

But this participation was not clear in the external political opposition framework, participation of women was limited to the symbolic and restricted framework, it remained within the limits which is less than the participation in other opposition action's fields.

This report attempts to review the women's participation since the beginning of forming the political opposition entities, in all its forms, to compare it with the other platforms, and to analysis the dimensions, forms and impediments encountered this participation.

First: Participation in the civil and Human rights' action

women have participated in the civil and human rights at three levels:

The opponent's human rights and civil action against the regime inside Syria has a notable participation for many women in leadership oppositions, while large numbers of them participated the executive roles.

Most of women who participated the opposition movement in 2011 ,joined **two main groups**: the human rights activists and former famous politicians and the artists.

The first group included figures such as Razan Zaietounah who was an activist in human rights for years before 2011, and Souhair Attasi who was known in political forums that took place in Damascus 2011.

The second group included female artists such as: Yara Sabri , Asala Nasri , Maiy Skaf , Samr Koukash, Laila Awadh , Kinda Alloush and Fadwa Souliman.

The first group has joined the list of direct effectiveness in public work, while the other groups' roles are focused on providing supporters attitudes for the opposition movement.

Number of women participating the opposition movement lived bad results for their attitudes, such as the artists Samar Koukash and Laila Awadh who were detained for years, while the other artists forced to leave the country or stay abroad.

Of course, active women in human rights and field action have been subjected to prosecution like men, which obliged them to leave the country or move to the areas controlled by the opposition.

An armed group break into the local development's office and the center of violations' documenting on 9/12/2013, in Douma- Damascus countryside which controlled by the faction of Al-Islam Army. they kidnapped Razan Zaietounah and some colleagues. Their fate is still unknown until today

Second: participation in the political entities

The Syrian National council, which is the first political entity, included a limited number of women, where their rates in the establishment's phase was about 7.1%, then in later phases, the rates of them turned into 12%.

The national coalition which was founded on 11/11/2012 started with a women participation is less than women in the national council after the last enlarge which was about 4.5%.

The political committee of the national coalition has decided to provide feminist share(quotas) to be about 15% of the total number of members. women in the national coalition have got an advanced leadership positions, two women became vice of coalition's president (Noura Al-Jizawy and Samera Al-Masalma), while Souhair Attasi was head of coordination of support.

in the interim government, representation of women was restricted to one place in the first government headed by Ahmed Touma, which is the minister of culture (Taghreed Al-Hajli then Samah Hadaya).

representation of women is absent in the government of Dr. Jawad Abu Hatab.

As the members of the government, the representation of women in councils of the provinces is almost non-existent.

the rate of women representation in all councils is 0% except the council of Qunaitera province with the rate 3%, and in council of Damascus and its countryside which was about 13%.

women represent 9% from members of the supreme commission for negotiation, which is less than the rate within the national coalition currently.

in the national coordinating committee, the rate of women's representation decreased to 8% of the executive office members, while the rate in the Kurdish national council is about 14%.

It is not different in the political parties and formations, most of components that formed the coalition, national council, the coordinating committee ...etc., have limited numbers of women, it is about 0% in some groups, while most of them have between 3-5%.

ironically, the literature of all political opposition forces agree on promoting the role of women in society.

the constituent statements for the national coalition and the national council had phrases such as these entities reject all forms of oppression, exclusion, suppression and discrimination based on gender, and to ensure all rights of women including the political participation and all other domains.

But these forces are unable to turn this literature to an organizational reality within its entities, or in the coalition groups which were formed in cooperation with other forces.

Motives of women's political participation:

Motives of women's participation in the political opposition action vary according to several considerations, these motives can be divided into:

Personal motives:

a lot of women were activists actually before 2011, or participated effectively after 2011. these women did not need the women's quotas or pressures by any parties to help them participate.

The most prominent are: Basma Qadhmani, Samera Al-Masalma and Souhair Al-Attasi.

The external motives:

Interesting of international diplomates, and NGOs in rates of women's representation in the political opposition institutions was a forced motive for restructure the national coalition and the national council to include women within their ranks and try to raise rates of women representation.

impediments of the Syrian women's political participation:

Impediments which prevent the effective participation of women in the political opposition action can be summarized as following:

1- The rate of women's participation in the public action is low in the middle east generally, the situation in Syria is not different from the other places in the region.

2-Women before 2011 were far from the public action, especially the political due to the social pressures which reject the participation.

in addition to the great security risks which put on the participants if he/she was an opponent which obliged the opposition members of families to prevent their female's participation and activity fearing of the results.

3- The absence of women from the public action, the political in particular, historically led to the low number of women who want to participate political or service action, or those they have qualifications.

the culture of women's participation was not adopted by all Syrian political opposition components, thus when they formed the joint entities (national council and coalition), they have an opposed situation. when external considerations obliged them to add the feminist component, they could not provide candidate names because these names were not existing originally. after decision of the political commission in the coalition to add women members to the general committee in 2016, all clusters faced the problem of providing candidates, where all clusters were keen to add candidates from their supporters to increase their share in the coalition.

The same thing happened with the candidates of interim government's places.

4- The political entities are still dealing with women's participation as an improving form, to satisfy the international partners, which prevents many qualified women to involve in the public action if they were not sure that their participation will be active.

Future of women's participation:

The last rates indicate the severe weakness of women's participation, which can reach to non-existence sometimes in all domains of Syrian opposition in terms of political or administrative.

Despite the development in performance of the Syrian opposition which represented by (the national council - the national coalition and the national coordinating committee) regarding involvement of women in the political action, that can be seen in creating a new special women committee within the supreme commission of negotiation, the supreme commission of negotiation represents the guarantee for these political forces, but the general reality does not show any good effect for it for many causes such

as: weakness of political action's culture among Syrian women, Syrian opposition did not get rid of the policy of quotas, clustering and internal exclusion So the standards that have been used to choose women members of the advisory committee were not clear¹.

The other opposition platforms (Cairo and Moscow) are not better than the previous forces regarding to involving women in the political action.

Regarding to women's participation in the service and administration part, it is would seem almost non-existent, according to the representative rates in provinces' councils, or in the Syrian interim government's places.

To repair imbalance, the conviction of the importance of women's participation within the society of men should be reach, for considerations related to activating the role of society, not for considerations to satisfy the external partners.

so, civil society organizations must provide programs and projects which will target the factors in the political action, in order to raise awareness of the women's participation, and the added value to the work by their participation.

¹ Dr. Samera Moubayedh writes on: the experience of the women advisory committee for the opposed negotiator delegation, Madar AL-Yawoum,

4/12/2016. <https://goo.gl/zI6Ow7>



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