Femena
Rights Peace Inclusion

Sweida 2023 Protests

Syrian Women's Demands to be Heard





The 2011 uprising in Syria, which devolved into a brutal conflict that has lasted over a decade, led to tremendous political and social upheaval in the country. While the conflict may have ebbed as the government has regained and consolidated its control in many regions of the country, a resurgence of activism and resistance in the southern province of Sweida, beginning in mid-August of this year, took many by surprise. The province, which is the heartland of Syria's Druze minority, has remained under regime control throughout the conflict.

The recent protests, initially spurred in response to the ending of fuel subsidies and other economic hardships, quickly evolved into calls for political change. Women have been front and center at these protests, not just demonstrating, but also planning and organizing them. Through their active presence in these protests, Syrian women are voicing a demand that they play a role in shaping the future of their country. They are challenging patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles, and advocating for their inclusion in decision-making processes. The women's demands are not limited to gender-related issues, but encompass a broad range of socio-political and economic justice issues that concern all members of Syrian society.

Some of the ways in which women have been contributing to these protests include:

Mobilization:

Women have played a crucial role in uniting and mobilizing the masses by forming grassroots initiatives, organizing protests, utilizing social media platforms to disseminate information, and galvanizing support to challenge the oppressive regime.

Women in Sweida, equipped with their knowledge, awareness and educational backgrounds, have been highlighting human rights abuses and exposing corruption within the political structures for years. By critically analyzing and articulating grievances, they have helped to awaken and mobilize others, enhancing the overall impact of the uprising.



Challenging Gender Norms:

The women of Sweida defied societal expectations by occupying public spaces and participating in decision-making processes previously dominated by men. This disruption of gender norms served as a powerful statement of empowerment, breaking down barriers and reshaping societal perceptions. By actively participating in all aspects of the uprising, they established their indispensable role as both leaders and catalysts for change. They hope that through these efforts, they can contribute to the recognition that gender equality is a crucial aspect of any democratic society.

Building Networks and Solidarity:

An essential aspect of women's involvement during the Sweida uprising has been the establishment of support networks and solidarity among themselves, both inside and outside Syria. Recognizing the importance of unity, women have formed alliances, shared resources, provided emotional support, and inspired each other to continue their struggle for justice. These networks foster resilience and perseverance, which are crucial to the impact and longevity of activism.





Women's Demands:

One of the primary demands of Syrian women in the Suwayda uprising is the achievement of full gender equality. They are calling for an end to discriminatory practices, including gender-based violence, and the creation of legal mechanisms to protect and enforce their rights. Women are also seeking equal access to education and job opportunities, as they recognize that economic empowerment is a vital part of equality. They are also protesting against limitations that have been placed on their social and economic participation, and they protest the limitations placed on their participation in decision-making processes.

Syrian women are also calling for peace and reconciliation. Women have suffered greatly during the prolonged conflict, losing loved ones and witnessing the destruction and tearing of their communities. Despite this suffering, Syrian women are exhibiting immense strength and forbearance in calling for peace, as they recognize the importance of dialogue, inclusivity and forgiveness on the path to national healing and stability.





Through participating in these protests, Syrian women are also voicing their demand for the right to political participation and representation. They are asking for increased representation of women in all levels of government and decision-making bodies, highlighting the need for diverse perspectives and comprehensive representation. By emphasizing the importance of women's leadership in post-conflict reconciliation and democratic processes, Syrian women seek to redefine power dynamics and challenge the existing male-dominated political landscape.

The Sweida uprising of 2023 marks a significant chapter in the Syrian uprising and the participation of women in these protests should not be overlooked or discounted.

Recognizing that their determination and participation sets a powerful precedent for future social and political movements in Syria, Femena honors the role of Syrian women and calls on the international community to support Syrian women in their efforts and aspirations for a better future by providing resources, funding, and advocating for their rights on international platforms. In this way we can collectively ensure that Syrian women continue to play an integral role in shaping a progressive and inclusive future for Syria.

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Femena supports Women Human Rights Defenders, their organizations and feminist movements in Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) through analysis of trends and policy, documentation, fostering the development of regional communities of practice and advocacy.

Femena's work is primarily focused on contexts of shrinking or closed civic space and contexts complicated by growing extremism and conflict.

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