

Press release: 5 September 2019

The Safe Return of Syrian Refugees Workshop

The Bahrain Center for Strategic, International, and Energy Studies "Derasat" organized on September 5 2019, a workshop to discuss the issue of the safe return of Syrian refugees. The workshop aimed at presenting the situation of the refugees in host countries as well the conditions inside Syria and whether those conditions permit a sustainable return. More importantly, the workshop presented a platform for Western countries to clarify their position on the return of the refugees.

The half day workshop gathered experts and senior officials from the UN ESCWA, UN Habitat, World Bank, research centers, non-governmental organizations as well as government officials. On the choice of speakers and attendees Dr. Sh. Abdulla Al Khalifa, Chairman of the Board of Derasat said: "We invited individuals who can speak objectively about the situation and although these discussions are not negotiations nor peace talks, we would like to see positive outcomes resulting from it."

The workshop commenced with keynote remarks from Derasat's Chairman, which focused on the importance of holding meetings such as this to give the opportunity for those with different outlooks to confer and present their positions, on that note he commented, "We are handling a very specific issue and we want the message and the discussion to be focused around it, which is to examine the policies available and how they can be implemented to maximize the help offered to the refugees."

The envoys helped clarify the western position on the issue of return. The UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) states the need to build conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees, however, there is no clear policy on how this will be implemented.

The workshop discussed the diverse perspectives on the issue of return as well as determining the Western position in this regard. On this, Mr. Joel Rayburn, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Special Envoy to Syria commented: "We are here to dispel myths about U.S. policy and to reiterate that the U.S. wants Syrian refugees ultimately to return to their homes in Syria. However, their return to Syria must be safe, voluntary, and dignified, and must meet with the necessary conditions in order for returns to be sustainable."

The workshop presented research conducted by several organizations on the issue of return. On this Ms. Riwa Nasreddine the Manager of the National Agenda for the Future of Syria program under the UN ESCWA said: "In our program we research the different elements needed to build a better future for the Syrians once there is a political settlement. In this platform we presented our research on elements of an inclusive and sustainable peace and reconciliation. Regardless what kind of political solution is brought forward, a real inclusive and sustainable peace cannot be found unless residents of the same city, the same town and the same neighbourhood from different backgrounds and with different political views learn to live together again. An important part of our research tackles this very important issue."

The workshop was concluded by Dr. Sh. Abdulla Al Khalifa who reiterated Derasat's position as a platform for dialogue to put forth important policy recommendations for the region towards promoting peace and stability.