Syrians continue to suffer from the extremely violent conflict, which has torn to shreds the social, political and economic fabric of the country. Since early 2012 the Syrian crisis morphed into an open armed conflict which more and more led to one of the bigger humanitarian disasters since WWII and the involvement, direct and indirect, of regional and global external actors.

The conflict has fractured Syria along sectarian lines, divided the country into an unstable patchwork of competing military zones, and threatens the peace and stability of the MENA region. Regional and international actors who support the various parties of the conflict seem to have more and more gained ground both in reducing the capacity of Syrian actors to determine the future of their country and in pursuing their strategic interests at the expenses of a political solution for the Syrian conflict. The growing complexity of the Syrian conflict has repercussions on the negotiations to find an end to the conflict, both at the international and local levels.

Over the course of the last 8 years, while the international community has attempted - with no concrete results so far - to find a political solution to put an end to the war in Syria, local communities, civic and community-based groups, sometimes in coordination with local administrative councils and local CSOs/NGOs, have attempted to negotiate with armed forces present in their territories. The nature and scope of these negotiations varies both in terms of the armed actors involved, their sustainability, objectives and geographical scope. In the few successful cases of local truces, the participation of local leaders, the establishment of widely representative local councils and the willingness to make compromises have been successful to diminish the violence and to guarantee a minimum of humanitarian access. However, these successful ceasefires are temporary and fragile because of the absence of implementation mechanisms and the lack of international and regional monitoring and support. Moreover, these agreements lacked any reference to IHL, IHRL and International Conventions on armed conflicts, which led to situations where civilians simply passed from being hostages of the violence of one party to the violence of another party.

Against this backdrop and in the framework of its Syria Program, No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) is organising a workshop on Negotiations, which will take place in Gaziantep, Turkey, on 19-23 July 2018. The purpose of the training is to engage Syrian organisations and civil society activists and provide them the skills and tools to understand the negotiation lifecycle and its stages; appreciate the different types of negotiations and the pros and cons of each as well as analyse various negotiations technique and understand principled negotiation principles. Moreover, the fractured and multifaceted nature of the conflict has determined a situation in which it is very difficult to build coordination mechanisms and processes of information-sharing among Syrian civil society and local NGO groups. Indeed, Syrian CSOs have used, and continue to use, a variety of methodologies to influence negotiations at the local and the international level, but cross-fertilisation is still not happening, even though it might be beneficial to facilitate the development of common negotiating practices and methodologies, with possible multiplier effects both geographically and thematically.