

# HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 47<sup>th</sup> SESSION

## INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC – 6 JULY 2021

**Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro** - Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

For over **ten years** the people of Syria have been ravaged by war. The **pandemic** and the current **economic crisis** have inflicted new dimensions of suffering on Syrians. **Five international armies**, their proxies and other non-State actors continue to fight in Syria. Civilians must navigate through all of these actors and their divergent agendas as they simply attempt to go about their lives.

In **Idlib governorate**, more than **2.7 million IDPs** remain stranded in increasingly desperate living conditions. Despite initial and encouraging reductions in violence following the March 2020 ceasefire, **violence has escalated** since January this year across **north-west Syria**. **Ground and air strikes by pro-Government forces** on medical facilities, markets, and schools have yet again damaged and rendered them inoperable.

To the **East**, in **Afrin** in **Aleppo Governorate** and Ras al-Ayn in Hasakah Governorate, unclaimed attacks using improvised explosive devices, are **killing civilians**. In the same areas, members of SNA brigades continued **arbitrarily detaining civilians**, including **women and children**.

In **Northeast Syria**, unpopular initiatives by the self-administration, economic hardship, and rising insecurity linked to the re-emergence of ISIL remnants, triggered **widespread demonstrations**. Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, at times have **responded violently**.

In **al-Hawl camp**, more than **60,000 women, men, and children** continue to languish in despair more than two years after the US-backed SDF took control of the last populated areas under ISIL control. Thousands of others are similarly held in **camps in the Northeast**. The populations of these camps are **90% women and children**, with an estimated **40,000 children present**, the majority of them are **foreign nationals**. While some Member States have proactively **repatriated their child citizens** with their mothers, in line with the best interests of the child, others continue to evade their obligations.

In **Government controlled areas**, conflict endures and has a significant impact on the **lives of civilians**. Tension over **detentions and arrests** remain and regularly erupt into **conflict** in **southern Governorates** and in **Rural Damascus**. **Government forces** have resorted to the encirclement of towns coupled with raids, evoking the **return of siege tactics**. Across the country, and acutely in Government controlled areas, **civilians face deprivation of housing**, land and property rights. Government security forces have **destroyed houses** in recently retaken areas for monetary gain.

In areas not subject to active hostilities, the **economic situation**, the **COVID-19 pandemic**, and **insecurity** continue to devastate the populace. The price of essential goods and transportation costs are increasingly outside of the grasp of many Syrians. According to the World Food Programme, **60 percent of the current population is food insecure**. In certain areas, the humanitarian situation is even more acute. In less than one week, the United Nations Security Council will vote on the **renewal of the lifesaving cross border mechanism** for aid-deliveries into Syria.

Despite the continued inadequate response at the Security Council in general, there now finally appears to be some momentum behind the **establishment of a mechanism on the missing**. This is something we have advocated for since 2016, in line with the calls by a number of Syrian Victims' and Family Members' associations. It is vitally important that the international community facilitate the **creation of an independent mechanism with an international mandate** in close consultation with survivors, families and the organisations that they have created to represent their views.



## Syria – Speaking as the country concerned

Syria **rejects meetings and resolutions** initiated by States that seek, through misinformation and lies, to justify the **interventionist policies** and the acts of military and economic **aggression against Syria**, which have caused enormous human suffering to the Syrian People. **Unilateral coercive measures** directly **violate the basic rights of the Syrian People** and hinder the work of humanitarian agencies.

Council's resolutions and reports continue to ignore the **crimes of the Turkish and American occupation forces** and their **mercenaries** that violate human rights.

Syria renews its call on **Western Governments to return their nationals of ISIS terrorists** and their families to their countries, in accordance with the rules of international law.

The **election of President Bashar al-Assad** for a new term as president, with a turnout that exceeded **78%** of the voters, confirmed that the Syrians are committed to the **sovereignty of their country**.

### INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

The majority of the speakers expressed concerns over the grave **violations committed by all parties to the conflict**, including **torture, sexual and gender-based violence, killings, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, death in custody**, use of **siege and starvation tactics**. It was also shared that conflict had a **disproportionate impact on women and girls**.

It was shared by a majority of delegations that **humanitarian access in all parts of the country** must be **restored** and that **humanitarian infrastructure** should not be targeted. States denounced the **bombing of civilian's infrastructures**, including on **medical facilities and schools**. States deplored the current **humanitarian crisis**, which has been **exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic**.

Several delegations expressed their **support for the UN Security Council Resolution 2254**, calling for a **nation-wide ceasefire** and a **political solution to the conflict**. The efforts made by the **UN Special Envoy**, Mr. Petersen have been praised by some delegations as well as the **work of the COI and the International Independent and Impartial Mechanism** for Syria.

States emphasized the importance of the **safe, dignified and voluntary return of the Syrian refugees**.

The **unilateral coercive sanctions** imposed on Syria were denounced by some states.

Some States deplored that the **Presidential election held this year** was **not fair, nor genuine** and did not meet **democratic criteria**.

#### Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (43 delegations)

Estonia (on behalf of Nordic Baltic countries), European Union, Croatia (on behalf of Core group on Casualty Recording), Kuwait, Qatar, Liechtenstein, Israel, Germany, Australia, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, UAE, Cuba, Brazil, Switzerland, Japan, Bahrain, DPRK, Iraq, Armenia, Malta, China, Netherlands, Italy, Iran, Venezuela, USA, Egypt, Jordan, Romania, Sri Lanka, Belarus, Ireland, Belgium, Georgia, United Kingdom, Turkey, Russia, Albania, Cyprus, Greece, Nicaragua.

#### 10 NGOs took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue:

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, International Council Supporting Fair Trials and Human Rights, International Commission of Jurists, International Human Rights Council, World Vision, Baptist World Alliance, Palestinian Return Centre, Jubilee Campaign, Advocate for Human Rights, Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

- **Arbitrary arrest of journalists** and need to release detainees in Syria. **Detention conditions**
- **Foreign interference in Syria** and disproportionate impact of **Unilateral Coercive measures**.
- **Crimes against humanity committed by government, allied forces as well as armed groups**.
- Suffering of **Syrian children: 55,000 children killed** and **attacks on education**
- Crucial importance of **impartial, transparent investigation** and **documentation** in Syria