

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 51st SESSION

Interactive dialogue with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

22 September 2022

Mr. Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, reported the daily dangers civilians are facing in government-controlled areas, as **targeted killings continue with impunity**. The war is not over despite a general reduction in fighting. Hostilities are intensifying on several fronts. Attacks keep claiming civilian lives and damaging key civilian infrastructure, including food and water resources, amid a drought. Armed conflict is only one aspect of the hardships that Syrian civilians are facing. In government-controlled areas, **torture, sexual violence, ill-treatment in detention and enforced disappearances remain systematic**. Fundamental freedoms, including movement, expression, association and peaceful assembly remain **heavily restricted** throughout. Activists, journalists and others expressing opposing views have been subjected to intimidation, threats or arrest, depending on which party controlled the area in which they reside. Mr. Pinheiro believes the international community has a shared responsibility for the situation. The need for repatriations is more urgent than ever, even as momentum is finally growing. A body focusing primarily on victims and survivors as well as their families, must be established as soon as possible. It must focus on clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and provide adequate support to victims, survivors and the families of the missing. This body must also address the **gendered impact of disappearances**, notably female relatives of the missing, and especially those who are particularly vulnerable.

Syrian Arab Republic (Country concerned) reaffirmed its commitment to protect and promote human rights in accordance with its national laws and international contractual obligations. Syria **rejects the accusations** contained in the Commission's report, which is a sign of lack of professionalism and legitimacy in the Commission's work. Syria rejects the non-consensual resolution S-17/1 establishing the Commission of Inquiry and the subsequent resolutions extending its mandate, including its politicized and biased reports. Syria affirmed that the Council's resolutions and reports targeting individual states continue to be governed by **double standards** and **Western interventionist agendas** contradicting the principles and purposes of the UN Charter. In conformity with subjective and politicised positions, some members of the Committee do not hesitate to provide in media statements pretexts to justify the Israeli occupation regimes attacks on civilian facilities and ports in Syria, instead of condemning them as war crimes for which the perpetrators must be held accountable.

Interactive dialogue

The majority of the 42 country delegations that took the floor during the interactive dialogue, including **Ecuador, Qatar, EU, Burundi, Malawi, Sri Lanka** and **Albania**, expressed deep concern about the continuing violence, violations and abuses of human rights in Syria, including arbitrary arrest, torture, ill-treatment, disappearance and extortion, indiscriminate attacks, the killing of civilians and children and the deliberate targeting of civilian facilities, and deteriorating humanitarian conditions. The speakers called on the international community to take further action to ensure the protection of the Syrian people and end impunity, hold accountable all those responsible for the violations and crimes committed in Syria and bring them to international criminal justice. Some countries rejected the COI's report and its mandate. **Nicaragua** and **Venezuela** rejected the mechanisms and the politicized mandate against Syria, which violates the founding principles of this Council and of the UN Charter. They stated that the report was a manifestation of the manipulation of human rights and the politicized use of the Council in favor of interventionist agendas and demanded respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. **Belarus** and **the Russian Federation** affirmed that the report on Syria is part of a series of destructive actions by the West against the country. **Iran**, rejecting any attempts to attribute attacks against civil targets in Syria to their country, stressed that the Council's functioning

should be guided by constructive dialogue and cooperation based on the principles of universality, objectivity and non-selectivity and non-politicization. **China** considered the Western countries and the **U.S.** responsible for the serious human rights violations and crimes against the Syrian population.

The majority of **NGOs** shared the Commission's concerns and reported patterns of arbitrary arrests, torture, and sexual and gender-based violation, perpetrated by the Syrian Government and armed groups. Government forces have forcibly disappeared tens of thousands of individuals. Turkish and American forces continue to control many critical areas in which Syria's oil fields and food production is located, according to the **International Council Supporting Fair Trial and Human Rights**. NGOs urged the Commission and the Council to work to ensure all UN member states abide by the prohibition of forced return and for all parties to the conflict to respect IHL and cease all attacks on civilians. **ICJ** called on Member States to create an independent mechanism with an international mandate to coordinate and consolidate claims regarding missing persons. This includes persons subjected to enforced disappearances.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (42 country delegations):

Lithuania (on behalf of Nordic Baltic countries), EU, Qatar, Liechtenstein, Kuwait, Switzerland, Israel, Cyprus, DPRK, France, Ecuador, Germany, Egypt, Ireland, Iraq, Australia, Luxembourg, Cuba, United Arab Emirates, Malta, Venezuela, Jordan, Russia Federation, China, Netherlands, Chile, U.S., Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, Romania, Belarus, Italy, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Burundi, Greece, Georgia, Malawi, Albania, Türkiye, Iran, Nicaragua, Japan.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor (10):

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, International Commission of Jurists, International Bar Association, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), International Council Supporting Fair Trial and Human Rights, International Service for Human Rights, Physicians for Human Rights, Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, World Jewish Congress.

International organizations: (0)

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