

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 54th SESSION

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

22 September 2023

Mr Paolo Sergio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, affirmed that despite diplomatic efforts to stabilize the situation in Syria, including through its re-admission to the League of Arab States, Syrians were suffering from escalating unrest and fighting along multiple frontlines, a near collapse of the economy, and persistent human rights violations and abuses. The parties to this conflict continued to perpetrate war crimes and violate basic human rights. Syrians continued to be killed, disappeared, tortured, arbitrarily detained, displaced, and dispossessed, by the State and three other main actors controlling a third of its territory, including the United Nations-designated terrorist group, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham; the opposition, Syrian National Army; and the Syrian Democratic Forces in northeast Syria.

The report documents attacks and civilian casualties involving Syrian forces and five foreign armies still operating in the country. The Syrian Army and the Russian Air Force had launched many attacks on the earthquake-affected northwest, resulting in civilian casualties. Mr. Pinheiro said that recently civilians have been killed and injured in attacks occurring between Kurdish-led forces and Türkiye and Turkish-backed militias along frontlines in the northeast.

He reported that across the country, State and non-state actors continued to intimidate and harass activists and journalists. These protests coincided with growing criticism of public policies across Government areas. As the economic catastrophe in Syria deepened, States imposing unilateral coercive measures needed to review the impact of these on the lives of Syrian citizens and humanitarian actors.

As conclusive remarks, Mr Pinheiro and other members of the COI stressed the importance of respecting principles of international human rights and international humanitarian laws. Syrian civil society must be supported. States must facilitate the safe return of refugees.

Syrian Arab Republic (Country concerned) affirmed that in each Council session, certain countries imposed politicized, selective, and non-objective meetings and mandates, targeting certain countries without any link or outcome to the protection and promotion of human rights. The Commission is continuing its biased approach to the situation in Syria, which faced again a litany of contradictions in facts, false information, and other biased conclusions, which was shameful from a professional perspective.

It stated that the Commission is a mere tool of incitement against the Syrian Government. It continues to evaluate issues outside its mandate, and ignores matters linked to human rights law that are relevant to the economic and living conditions in the country, such as the imposition of illegal unilateral coercive measures, acts of aggression perpetrated against it, and the plundering of agricultural crops, violating the enjoyment of the Syrian people of their own natural resources. The Syrian Arab Republic reiterated its firm commitment to continuing to enhance access to aid to those within its country and granted access to certain United Nations bodies to the country to deliver such aid. The Syrian Arab Republic highlighted that this aid is prevented by terrorist organizations. The humanitarian situation could never be consistent with the continued blatant exploitation of these events.

The withdrawal of the occupying American and Turkish forces is the only way to improve the situation, allowing the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and the lifting of all illegally imposed unilateral coercive measures on the country.

Interactive dialogue

42 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries** expressed serious concern about the lack of protection of the right to life, and the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation, including that of internally displaced women and girls who live in camps. They remained deeply determined to fight all forms of impunity. Now is the time to call for more accountability. They affirmed their support and commitment to stand by the Syrian people to alleviate the humanitarian conditions. **Estonia** was deeply concerned about the continued patterns of alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the Syrian regime. **EU** stated that among many important findings, the report documents numerous serious violations of international law, including international human rights law, by first and foremost the Syrian authorities. Conditions for a voluntary, safe, secure, and dignified return of Syrian refugees, as defined by UNHCR, are currently not in place. **Qatar** reiterated that safe, full, unhindered, and sustained access for humanitarian organizations, including to places of confinement or detention, is imperative as well as cross-border and cross-line support, in line with humanitarian principles.

Israel reiterated its call to the Commission to investigate the illicit export of Captagon and the impact it has on human rights both in Syria and abroad. **Brazil and the Russian Federation** urged renewed multilateral efforts in order to find a political solution to this long-lasting crisis and called for transparent, impartial, and non-politicized humanitarian assistance in Syria. They also focused on the negative impact of the coercive measures imposed on the civilian population and the need to immediately lift the restrictions imposed on Damascus.

Cuba rejected the imposition of punitive mechanisms against countries, with interventionist purposes and obvious geopolitical motivations. The case of Syria has been an example of the inefficiency, duplicity, and uselessness of disparate punitive mandates against a country, which demands large resources from the Office's increasingly scarce funding. It further rejected any direct or indirect armed intervention without the agreement of the authorities of that country, which constitutes flagrant violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity, International Law, and the UN Charter.

NGOs remained deeply concerning the human rights situation in Syria, with a particular focus on the dire conditions prevailing in territories under government control. They were alarmed by reports of arbitrary detentions, torture, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial executions, combined with the pertaining lack of transparency and accountability in the government-controlled areas exacerbating the suffering of the Syrian people and the well-being of vulnerable groups, women, children, and religious and national minorities. They stressed that the disproportionate number of displaced Syrians is aggravating the already problematic situation and economic, political, and social state. They urged states to support the institution politically and financially and to ensure the mechanism to conduct its work to attain its objectives, pursuing accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

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

EU, Estonia (on behalf of a group of countries), Switzerland, Malta, Iraq, Belgium, Ireland, Georgia, Cyprus, China, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Australia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Albania, Belarus, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Greece, Sudan, Nicaragua, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (on behalf of a group of countries (53), United Arab Emirates, Liechtenstein, Qatar, Italy, Ecuador, Luxembourg, Jordan, Costa Rica, Israel, United States of America, Türkiye, Egypt, Netherlands, France, Germany.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Meezaan Center for Human Rights, The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, World Jewish Congress, Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration, Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, International Service for Human Rights, World Lebanese Cultural Union, Inc., Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, Non c'è pace senza giustizia.

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).