

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 56th SESSION

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

03 July 2024

**Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic**, reported that the situation on the ground has grown more complex with a crumbling economy, a devastating humanitarian situation increasing reliance on drug manufacturing and trade, and the state unwilling and to a certain extent unable to safeguard its people's safety and security. Equally concerning was the deepening fragmentation of the country on all fronts, which had considerable repercussions in the long term, including on Syria's social fabric and unity.

He reported that incommunicado detention and enforced disappearances continue. Syrian refugees recently returning from Lebanon have reportedly been detained and their whereabouts are now unknown. Drug trafficking and smuggling have spread, with the involvement of pro and anti-government factions, causing further insecurity. The long-running conflict and its consequences have thus become further entrenched. Impunity and lawlessness have shaped a grim reality for all Syrians, with no end in sight.

He concluded by saying that in addition to continuing to support accountability efforts and the institution for the missing, Government's actions may be needed in three critical areas: the *first*, in the situation of those detained arbitrarily since 2019 in northeast Syria, Governments may support in assisting the authorities in the northeast to find a solution; the *second*, to remove unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) in Syria, that impacted negatively the country and the population *and finally*, in the Government's alarming lack of support for the humanitarian response plan for 2024.

**Syrian Arab Republic (concerned country)**, continuing to recognize the COI's mandate, affirmed that the methodology and conclusions of the COI contradict the standards of professional work and it is detached from reality. Claims of concern for human rights and the humanitarian situation cannot be consistent with the continued blatant exploitation of noble causes and using them irresponsibly to threaten the faiths of entire populations. The Syrian Arab Republic continued its efforts to liberate all its territory from terrorism and to restore security, stability, and the rule of law on our territory. It also continued its constructive cooperation with the United Nations and other partners in order to improve the humanitarian situation of all Syrians and ensure continued access to humanitarian aid to civilians in need, including in areas still under the control of terrorist groups in the northwest of the country.

It stressed that contributing to creating the appropriate environment to encourage the voluntary return of refugees can be achieved through cooperation with the Syrian government and supporting its efforts, through ending UCMs. The Syrian Arab Republic continued its efforts to strengthen, improve, and develop national legislative and institutional frameworks related to human rights in accordance with international obligations under international human rights law to protect, respect, and fulfill these rights for all its people without discrimination.

### Interactive dialogue

**38 delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue**, most of which reiterated their concern about the ongoing deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. Safe, full, unhindered, and sustained humanitarian access is imperative. **In particular, the EU, the USA, and Japan**, firmly condemned the violations and abuses of human rights including sexual and gender-based violence and all violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict, especially by the Syrian regime and its allies. In addition, **the UK** deplored the tens of thousands of

Syrians subjected to arbitrary and incommunicado detention. It condemned all deaths, torture, and abuse of detainees in detention facilities, particularly in Syrian government facilities. **France and Israel** reported some of the crimes committed by the Syrian authorities and allies, including widespread torture, mass detention and forced disappearance, and sexual and gender-based violence.

**Several countries, including Brazil, Malta, Albania, Türkiye, Greece, and Georgia**, pointed out that progress on accountability is vital for a viable peace through justice, social reconciliation, and sustainable settlement. **Egypt** retreated the need to address the Syrian crisis through a lens that takes into account all its drivers and the elements that would prolong the conflict including the proliferation of terrorist and armed groups, and foreign aggression against the Syrian territory. **Switzerland** called for a cease-fire respected by all parties on the entire Syrian territory.

**The DPRK, Belarus, and Venezuela** highlighted grave concern over the ongoing proliferation of unilateral specific mechanism that tries to carry out an impartial assessment of the human rights situation in selected states when in fact their true intent is to turn human rights into weapons against sovereign governments and national governments to among other purposes meddle in their domestic affairs. Additionally, the **Russian Federation** called for an immediate and unconditional lifting of the set of UCMs. It condemned all illegal activities against the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. **The Islamic Republic of Iran, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Nicaragua, and Sri Lanka** rejected the country-specific resolution and mandate without the consent of the country concerned which violates the fundamental principles of universality, objectivity, and non-selectivity that the Human Rights Council is required to uphold.

**NGOs** condemned the scale of human rights violations in the Syrian Arab Republic. Since the Turkish occupation in 2018, the local population suffered from endless scourges including extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, torture, and sexual violence. They also remained concerned about the well-being of vulnerable groups, including women, children, and religious and national minorities. The **Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies** stressed that the *principle of non-refinement* is a binding rule of international law that prohibits states from returning people to a place where they would be at risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations. Nevertheless, the past months have witnessed a systematic and consistent violation of this principle concerning Syrian refugees across neighboring countries in the region. The impunity that prevails in the region fuels cycles of violence, therefore, **NGOs** asked the Council to be firm and clear in the face of its responsibilities to provide responsibility for the human rights of Syria and to save it from the serious risks that have reached the great majority to the bottom line of poverty.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (38 country delegations):

*Iceland (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic Countries), Venezuela (on behalf of a group of friends defending the United Nations charter), United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (on behalf of 54 countries), Israel, Türkiye, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Japan, Georgia, Iran, USA, Greece, Luxembourg, Egypt, France, Switzerland, Netherlands, Iraq, Malta, China, Albania, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Belarus, Brazil, Cuba, Jordan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Belgium, Eritrea, Romania, Venezuela, LAO PDR, Sudan, Nicaragua, Ukraine, Lebanon, Russian Federation, Nigeria.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (10):

International Council Supporting Fair Trial And Human Rights, Gulf Centre For Human Rights Limited, Centre Zagros Pour Les Droits De L Homme, Next Century Foundation, Syrian Center For Media And Freedom Of Expression, The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, World Jewish Congress, Cairo Institute For Human Rights Studies, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Legal Action Worldwide

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