



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

## UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

### Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

#HRC58 • 18 March 2025



#### PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT

##### Mr. Paulo Sérgio PINHEIRO, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Paulo Sérgio PINHEIRO, Chair, addresses the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) since the removal of the Government led by former President Assad in December 2024. This development marks a new beginning for the Syrian people, who have **suffered extreme violence and atrocities over the past 14 years**.

The members of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) extend their appreciation to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Syria, H.E. Mr. Asaad Hassan al-Shabani, for stating before the High-Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on February 26 that, following Syria's liberation, the new Government would authorize the UNHRC-mandated COI to visit Syria. Indeed, the caretaker Government has granted the COI prompt access to Syria, providing an invaluable opportunity to engage in preliminary discussions with the new authorities on a range of human rights issues. This decision, which lifts the restrictions previously in place under the former regime of Bashar Al-Assad, reflects a **renewed commitment to cooperation** with the UN and marks a significant development in Syria's relations with the Organization. The COI looks



forward to engaging further with the authorities to discuss cooperation and regular access to Syria for their work in the very near future.

Since December 2014, the COI has **visited former government detention facilities** in Damascus and rural Damascus, including Saydnaya Military Prison, Air Force Intelligence Base Airport Branch and the Military Intelligence Palestine Branch 235, where we had previously documented acts of torture and several executions. The COI met with victims, witnesses and civil society actors, vigorously promoting human rights, justice and peace. The COI also discussed measures to prevent future violations and the need to protect evidence, including possible mass grave sites, for future truth and accountability efforts with renewed Syrian authorities and actors. During these visits, the COI was **impressed the strength and the resilience of the Syrian people**, who are already hard at work to pave the way for more of their fellow citizens to be able to return home.

Thousands of **prisoners were released** in early December. They critically need physical and psychological rehabilitation, as well as support to address the legal effects of arbitrary measures taken against them and their families, including with respect to their property. What the COI saw during their on-site visits matched the COI's previous findings of detention-related violations by the former Government, most recently in their report 'Web of Agony', which provides the COI's most comprehensive analysis to date. Likewise, testimony from recently released detention survivors confirms that the **previous Government crushed dissent** in ways amounting to crimes against humanity.

In Syria, the COI also met with many families whose missing loved ones were not among the prisoners released in December. They now want the truth about their fate and they want justice. The clarification of the fates of the **tens of thousands who remain disappear** will require a large-scale effort led by the caretaker authorities along with technical support from human rights and humanitarian entities, including Syrian civil society, families' associations and the recently established Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria. The COI stands ready to assist those efforts, including by sharing the relevant data it has gathered since 2011.

The COI also met with **communities affected by years of gross violations** in rural Damascus, such as in Douma, Daraya, and Zabadani. The COI was impressed by their dignity and eagerness to tell the world about years of widespread arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, unlawful attacks on residential areas, starvation, and other cruel restrictions imposed during sieges and forcibly displacement and discrimination by the former Government. The **extent of destruction** of housing and civil infrastructure that occurred during and after hostilities is shocking, as detailed in the COI's December conference room paper, pillage and plunder, unlawful appropriation and destruction of properties of refugees and IDPs in Syria. Massive reconstruction will be needed, for which the COI emphasizes the crucial need for support by the international community.

Syrians the COI met consistently **call for justice and accountability** as crucial for healing the wounds of the conflict through a range of actions, not only criminal proceedings against high-level perpetrators essential, but also broader measures to ensure the right to truth, reparation, and no repetition of mass atrocities. Today's serious **economic and humanitarian situation remains catastrophic**, while humanitarian funding is dwindling. Nine percent of the population is under the line of poverty. Economic despair is known to fuel violence. The COI urgently calls for an end to sanctions and the removal of other barriers to recovery and reconstruction.



Ending ongoing violence will also require a complete nationwide ceasefire. The **disarming and reintegration of armed groups**, securing public order, and ending the presence of foreign militaries on Syrian territory. Syrians are calling for the speedy restoration of their civil documentation and equal access to basic services such as education and health care, freedom of expression and association, and the ability to challenge arbitrary restriction of decisions.

The COI takes note of the **Constitutional Declaration** approved by the Damascus authorities as the country's fundamental law for the upcoming five years. In addition to the reference of basic human rights and to general provisions of transitional justice, the Declaration states that all rights and freedoms set out international human rights treaties, covenants, and agreements that the Syrian Arab Republic has ratified will form an inseparable part of the Constitutional Declaration. Much will depend on how these provisions into the constitutional text are implemented and respected across the country.

It is worrying that **violence and hostilities continue** in several parts of the country, reaching a return to a more widespread conflict. Recent extreme violence triggered disturbing reports of hundreds of civilian deaths in villages, towns and areas in the coastal regions of Latakia and Tartus, following coordinated attacks on security personnel. Eyewitnesses of the recent violence in coastal areas described to us how they saw their family members and neighbours shot and killed in front of them in what appears to be **retaliatory attacks aimed at former Government officials and members of the Alawite community**. Such acts were also accompanied by looting and the crushing of property. The violence triggered displacement of civilians. It would never have been expected that the wounds inflicted over decades of dictatorship and rampant human rights violations and abuses, war crimes and crimes against humanity would heal quickly. Serious failure will be determined by how the authorities and the Syrian people deal with both past and recent violations.

The COI notes the urgent steps taken by the caretaker authorities, including the establishment of an independent inquiry into these recent events. The COI hopes to meet soon in Damascus with this commission, which will need to operate without interference, maintain its independence and integrity, and present its findings comprehensively to the Government and the Syrian public. The COI's own monitoring into these incidents is ongoing in accordance with its regular mandate, and the COI's findings will be shared with the caretaker Government and presented to the UNHRC in future reporting. While **verifying digital information**, including videos the COI has authenticated, the COI has established that some of the videos circulated online and purporting to show violations committed during these events, in fact, relate to events dating from years ago and that took place in other countries and conflicts. A large amount of **incendiary and hate speech** is circulating online in relation to the recent violence, which risks fuelling further tensions and violence.

As outlined in today's report, the **situation in South Syria remains volatile**, with increased attacks and incursions carried out by Israel since 9 December greatly destabilising the country as it attempts to heal. Israeli evacuation orders have displaced civilians in rural Quneitra, seemingly without any imperative military reason, and expanding well beyond the lines agreed to in the 1974 Disengagement Agreement. Furthermore, **ISIL is reportedly increasing activities** in central and eastern Syria, and thousands of people alleged affiliated with ISIL remain held in custody. The COI has taken note of last week's agreement between the caretaker authorities and the commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in which they agree not only to a national ceasefire, but also guarantee the rights of all Syrians in political representation and participation going forward.



For years, **northeast Syria has witnessed hostilities** between Syrian National Armed Forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces. The COI has been investigating several recent attacks in the area that reportedly led to civilian casualties and impacted electricity and water supplies to the region, as well as reports of arbitrary deportation. The caretaker Government and future Syrian authorities have an opportunity to chart a new path and ensure that the horrors of the past and last few weeks are never repeated. The Syrian people must decide what steps to take.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Noting that the majority of statements centred on how to reconstruct Syria, **Mr. Hanny MEGALLY, member of the COI**, states that during the COI's most recent address at the UNHRC in September, it appeared both unlikely, if not inconceivable, that, within the span of a few months, the COI would be able to enter the Syrian territory, engage in dialogue with the authorities; visit mass graves and places of detention; and talk to Syrian families, activists, and some and returning refugees, who have come back to try and help in this process of transition.

Syria has definitely changed. In reply to the challenging question is how to help and make this change a positive one. For this, it is necessary to understand the huge challenges that any authority sitting in Damascus today would be facing. There are **challenges in dealing with various armed groups** in different parts of the country that need to be united and demobilised and integrated so that there is a united Syria going forward.

As a country destroyed after 14 years of conflict, Syria needs to be rebuilt. The new authorities are trying to build trust, confidence, legitimacy, as any new authority would be trying to do. The new authorities should be more inclusive – an aspect about which there has been criticism and on which the COI awaits to see future steps. The COI acknowledges the burden of dealing with past abuses. There are still tens of thousands, if not more than **100,000 missing and disappeared persons**, and 12 or 13 million displaced and refugees, the majority of whom are looking to find a way to come back if the country is safe enough for them to do that.

On how concretely to provide help, the COI stresses the importance for states to **coordinate their efforts**, because clearly on the ground, Syrians are struggling to cope with all the people coming to offer their help. Turning to sanctions, **sectoral sanctions need to be lifted**. Providing aid and assistance to the new Syria is more than urgent, in the hope that this will also help move things forward towards the reconstruction of a new, free and democratic Syria that recognises all Syrians as equal.

Furthermore, the COI is pushing on **transitional justice issues**, on which the Syrian authorities themselves have declared they want to be dealing with and moving forward. This is not just about criminal justice and accountability, but it also covers unveiling the truth about the missing and the disappeared persons, reparations for victims, reforms of institutions and legislation, among others. Other countries around the world have created their own transitional justice programmes which Syria could look at, studying and learning from. From the COI's perspectives, Syria it is probably unique and it could benefit from three international mechanisms that are primarily focused on Syria.

One is the **International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)**, focussed on criminal justice and accountability, which has been in existence now five or six years and could very much help in the processes related to criminal justice and accountability. As a much newer institution,





the [Independent Institution on Missing Persons \(IIMP\)](#), focussing on missing persons and the disappeared, can be of great assistance to Syria in dealing with the huge problem of over 100,000 missing and disappeared persons. The IIMP further focusses on providing assistance in the areas around mental health and psychosocial support.

The [UN-mandated COI](#) has two important roles to play, should its mandate be extended at the end of the month. First, the COI would continue to monitor the conduct of all parties on the ground who are involved in hostilities in Syria as its central mandate. This does not mean the COI will only monitor the conduct of the new authorities, but rather everyone's conduct. Syria is dealing with armed groups and foreign militaries on its grounds - all of them are involved in violations in one way or another. The COI will monitor everyone to ensure that it will report to the UNHRC on violations or abuses or good conduct in all cases. Second, the COI has created a vast database and body of research over these years extensively covering conduct and abuses. When the Syrians will be working on accountability, truth, justice, reparations, and reforms, they will need assistance in terms of what was the record in the past, data available, and necessary changes to ensure non-repetition in the future. The COI stands ready to support directly the Syrian authorities as well as the IIM and the IIMP.

Mr. Hanny MEGALLY is also glad to share that a few days after this session the [COI will be back in Damascus](#). The COI hopes to meet with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs; with the Committee investigating into recent events; and also with the Committee working on peace and reconciliation. The COI hopes to find ways to work together with all of them in terms of a future role for the COI to operate in a new way with regular access on the ground and cooperation with the new authorities. For instance, the COI shared its report with the new authorities before presenting it to the UNHRC, as it was doing in the past with the previous Government. The COI asked to the new authorities if they wanted to comment on it, provide any clarifications, point out mistakes, etc. The COI did not receive comments, but that is understandable given the enormous pressures the new authorities are under. As it moves forward, the COI is glad to be able to raise any concerns and work together with the authorities to ensure there is repetition of the past.

## INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

### [Views Expressed by the Country Concerned](#)

Breaking away from the Assad's past, the delegation of the [Syrian Arab Republic](#) states that a dark era ended in Syria in December 2024 - an era of intolerable tyranny at the hands of the bygone Assad regime which targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure by using barrel bombs and chemical weapons. Today, Syria is living a new phase. The will of the people was victorious, and the [light of humanity is returning to shine on Syria](#).

The delegation highly welcomes the efforts made by international mechanisms to document the atrocities of the Assad regime and to hold the perpetrators accountable. The regime boycotted these mechanisms, did not allow them to enter Syria, including the Commission of Inquiry. The new Syrian Government is adopting a different approach, welcoming positive and open interaction. Syria is determined to achieve justice, to fight impunity, and will hence create [transitional justice committee](#), which is a difficult and complicated matter. But in Syria, it is all the more complicated due to the nature of violations, perpetrated, and complicated repercussions.



After the end of the Assad regime, Syria faced several destabilization attempts to lead the country to back to chaos and civil war - all have seen the tragic events on the coastal areas. The delegation of Syria reaffirms that the new authorities **will not be lenient with the Assad loyalists** who have perpetrated crimes against the army, against the State, who have spread chaos. Syria will **hold accountable all those who have civilian blood on their hands** and who trespassed the competencies of the State. Nobody is above the law. To this end, the new authorities have established a fact-finding committee and a higher committee to preserve civil peace.

Against this critical backdrop, a Constitutional Declaration was adopted for the transitional phase. It reaffirms that all the rights and freedoms enshrined in the international human rights treaties ratified by Syria are an integral part of this Declaration. The State upholds all rights and freedoms, including freedom of opinion, expression, media, the right to political participation, and the rights of women, in addition to the prevention of enforced disappearance and torture. Syria is still suffering from the repercussions of the Assad regime, and efforts must be made to **support Syria in reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, and early recovery**. The new Government reaffirms that sanctions cannot remain an obstacle before the development of Syria. The legal basis for these sanctions was the oppression of the Assad regime. There is **no reason for these sanctions** to continue.

Benefitting from the transitional phase in Syria, **Israel is continuing attacks, incursions, and strikes**, thereby undermining civilian peace and cohesion, which also qualifies as a serious violation of international law and of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. The new Government reaffirms that firm measures must be taken to force Israel to stop its attacks and to abide by the disengagement agreement.

In conclusion, the violations of the Assad regime ended, but the deep wounds remain. As the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs declared at the UNHRC High-Level Segment, Syria today is facing many challenges at many levels. Looking forward to the future, we shoulder a noble responsibility, which is the non-repetition of the atrocities of the Assad regime. The Syrian people deserve a nation where its rights are preserved, where its voice is heard, where its dignity is preserved. The new Government looks forward to your full support in order **for Syria to rise from the ashes** of a barbaric war.

### **Views Expressed by State Delegations**

Taking the floor on behalf of the **Nordic-Baltic countries, H.E. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia** acknowledges the historic opportunity presented by the fall of the Assad regime for the Syrian people, who have endured decades of systematic violence perpetrated by the former regime, with the support of Russia. These abuses include arbitrary detentions, torture, sexual violence, the use of chemical weapons, and numerous other human rights violations. Several essential measures must be implemented for Syria's reconstruction. The first pertains to the international framework and involves the gradual lifting of sanctions imposed on the country. However, this lifting must be conditioned upon an internal requirement, namely the respect for fundamental rights by the new Syrian administration, particularly regarding the rule of law and women's rights. In this regard, Latvia encourages the new authorities to fully cooperate with human rights protection bodies by granting them unrestricted access to the country. Thus, Latvia reaffirms its full support to the COI and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. Those responsible must be held accountable.



On behalf of the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**, **Kuwait** reaffirms the GCC's position supporting the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Syria and refusing any foreign interventions. The security of Syria and its stability is a pillar for the stability of the region and for fighting extremism, incitement, and respecting diversity. The GCC supports all efforts aimed at a complete political transition that achieves peace, security, and prosperity. The GCC welcomes the holding of the Syrian National Dialogue, hoping it will achieve the aspirations of the Syrian people. The GCC calls on all parties to give priority to the national interests and reconciliation, to preserve the security of civilians and the state institutions, as well as merging armed groups under the umbrella of the Ministry of Defence. In conclusion, the GCC calls to lift sanctions from Syria and provide all support needed in addition to humanitarian assistance.

**Saudi Arabia** states its full support to the Syrian Arab Republic and its brotherly people in overcoming the current situation. It commends the measures taken by the Syrian authorities to safeguard civil peace and efforts to resume reconstruction of the state institutions in such a way to achieve stability and security and fulfil the aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people. Saudi Arabia further welcomes the agreement calling for the integration of all civil and military institutions in northeast Syria into the state institutions, and reiterates the importance of lifting international sanctions on Syria. Keeping these sanctions will hamper reconstruction efforts and the return of refugees. Recalling the importance of providing humanitarian and economic support to achieve stability in Syria, Saudi Arabia has organised an air corridor and a land corridor to transport humanitarian and relief assistance to Syria to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. It reiterates its full support to Syria's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, thereby reaffirming Saudi Arabia's commitment to support efforts aiming at achieving security, stability, and prosperity for the brotherly Syrian people.

**Liechtenstein** thanks the COI for its report and its continued crucial work. The Syrian Arab Republic has undergone significant changes on a scale nobody could not have thought possible the last time the COI had addressed the UNHRC. While stressing the importance of providing technical and humanitarian assistance in support of the Syrian interim authorities and the people, Liechtenstein also emphasises that human rights and accountability must be an integral part of the transition. Liechtenstein welcomes the positive signals given by the interim authorities to cooperate with OHCHR, the COI, the IIM, as well as the International Criminal Court and the commitment expressed at the high-level segments to combat impunity and work towards transitional justice. Liechtenstein is deeply concerned over ongoing human rights violations and abuses in the Syrian Arab Republic lately, which are not only a reminder of how fragile the situation remains, but also bear the risk of further escalation. Transitional justice is indispensable to break the cycle and perpetuation of violence. Syrian civil society organisations have been doing a tremendous work over the years in advocating for human rights and documenting their violations. Their contribution to the transition is crucial in ensuring that the process is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned.

**Switzerland** is deeply concerned by the escalating violence along the Syrian coast, which has claimed hundreds of lives, including many civilian victims. Switzerland condemns the serious acts of violence against civilians. These must be the subject of independent investigations in order to prosecute the perpetrators. Switzerland commends, therefore, the creation of a commission of investigation by the transitional Government, and it is essential that the UN be associated with its work. Switzerland also calls on all parties to respect international law and to work towards de-escalation through dialogue. These recent tragic events are a reminder of the fact that only an inclusive political solution will allow Syrians to live in peace, security and dignity.



It is essential that the political process include all segments of civilian society and ensures the protection of all ethnic and religious minorities. It is equally essential that a process for dealing with the past be established by the interim authorities. Finally, Switzerland reiterates its support for the COI and for the IIM.

**Kuwait** reaffirms its full support for the efforts to promote and safeguard human rights in Syria. Kuwait welcomes the positive steps taken by the Syrian authorities, namely the convening of the national dialogue as a step towards strengthening internal consensus. Kuwait aspires for the Syrian people to achieve its ambitions and build a stable future based on security and justice. Kuwait calls for the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Syria given the negative impact on the Syrian people and their fundamental rights. At the same time, Kuwait continues supporting the brotherly Syrian people and supporting early recovery. Kuwait also denounces the attacks by the Occupying Power as well as the violations committed by outlawed groups which target the state security forces, undermining efforts to achieve stability. Welcoming the agreement to integrate all civil and military institutions in northeast Syria into the administration of the state as a step towards consolidating the country's unity, Kuwait emphasises the need to respect Syria's unity, security, independence, and territorial integrity.

**Luxembourg** thanks the COI for its report. Following the fall of the Assad regime and after 14 years of war, Syria is at the start of a political transition towards democracy. It is vital that this transition be inclusive and based on national reconciliation and full respect for the human rights of all, in particular women and children and minorities. Deeply concerned by recent violence in the coastal areas and by the killing of hundreds of civilians, Luxembourg calls on the transitional authorities to take effective measures in order to protect the population and to carry out transparent and impartial investigations into all violations that were committed. The path towards lasting peace also involves a process for establishing truth and accountability. Luxembourg fully supports the role of the COI and the IIM in this regard. Luxembourg also supports the important mandate of the IIMP in Syria and commends the commitment of the Syrian authorities and their cooperation with these institutions. Luxembourg further encourages the authorities to closely cooperate with these institutions and ensure them unhindered access. Luxembourg seizes the opportunity to ask how could states best support the role of civil society organisations in Syria and family associations in their efforts towards justice and accountability.

Thanking the COI for its tireless work over the last years, **Germany** is convinced that the COI, alongside the other human rights mechanisms, can play a key role supporting Syrians in the current fragile political transition. Germany strongly welcomes the transitional Government's constructive engagement with the COI. Close cooperation and coordination between the mechanisms will be essential. Germany stands ready to support a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political transitional process with the goal of a stable, peaceful and democratic Syria. The future of the country must lie in the hands of all Syrians, regardless of their ethnic background, religion or gender. Recent days, however, have shown how difficult this process will be. The reports of widespread violence in the coastal areas are shocking and are a grim reminder of how fragile the situation is. The transitional Government has a responsibility to prevent further attacks, investigate the incidents and hold those responsible accountable. The establishment of a national investigation commission is a hopeful sign. Awaiting results and further action, Germany welcomes the Constitutional Declaration and its guarantees for freedom of expression and the prohibition of discrimination based on race, gender or religion. At the same time, this Declaration significantly increases the powers of the President. It will be crucial to implement these provisions responsibly.





**Canada** commends the COI's continuous investigative work into all allegations of human rights violations and abuses in Syria. Canada is deeply convinced that lasting peace and reconciliation in Syria can only be achieved by ensuring accountability and justice for all human rights violations, both past and present. Canada condemns the recent atrocities committed along the Syrian coast and we call on the interim authorities to take all necessary measures in order to end this violence. The establishment of a national committee tasked with investigating the recent escalation is a positive step forward. All perpetrators of such acts must be held to account regardless of their beliefs and affiliations. On 12 March 2025, Canada announced a new funding of \$18 million for Syria as well as a general licence that temporarily loosens the sanctions imposed on Syria. Canada urges all states to respect sovereignty, national unity, and the territorial integrity of Syria.

**Türkiye** states that after 14 years of conflict that inflicted unbearable suffering in Syria, Syrian people have hope for peace in their country. At this critical moment, international community must stand behind the will of Syrian people and support Syrian-led and Syrian-owned transition in the country. Inclusiveness is key for the success of transition. The Syrian administration has made a commitment to this end. National Dialogue Conference and Constitutional Declaration have been significant steps in this regard. Segments of Syrian people do not want them to be called as minorities. They want to rebuild their country as equal partners. The international community should respect that. Recent provocations in coastal areas are not surprising. Reckless propaganda to represent these events as sectarian strife should not be given credit. The territorial integrity and unity of Syria must be preserved. Growing Israeli threat in this regard is a source of grave concern. We appreciate the determination of the Syrian administration to fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We approach the agreement between the Syrian administration and the so-called SDF with cautious optimism. Türkiye would like to see complete implementation of the agreement with concrete immediate steps respecting territorial unity and integrity of Syria. Türkiye shares the dream of the Syrian people to guarantee a stable, united, secure and prosperous Syria as its good neighbour.

**Jordan** reiterates the importance of joint efforts in order to support Syria in its reconstruction and rebuilding of a new Syria based on the principles that preserve Syria's unity, independence, territorial integrity and preserve the security of the Syrian people. The security and stability of Syria is essential to the stability of the region. Jordan condemns any attempt to destabilise Syria. It is also important to increase assistance to early recovery programmes in Syria, to lift sanctions, which is a necessity to support economic recovery and to promote Syria's potential to rebuild its state institutions and to lift all obstacles. Jordan calls upon providing the adequate security situation and economic situation for a safe, sustainable and dignified return of Syrian refugees according to international law, and it also reiterates that the international community must shoulder its responsibility vis-à-vis the refugees in the host countries until their return to Syria.

**Slovenia** expresses its appreciation to the COI for its work, which it strongly supports. Slovenia encourages the Syrian caretaker authorities to cooperate with the COI and other human rights mechanisms. Slovenia strongly condemns the latest violence in Syria's coastal region just over a week ago. Syrian caretaker authorities must ensure safety of all persons in Syria without distinction and allow the COI to independently investigate these events. International humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights law must be respected by all parties. Violations of the IHL and human rights violations and abuses must be investigated impartially and all those responsible have to account. All civilians must be protected, including persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities and those most vulnerable, including women. The latter, as well



as the importance of inclusive transitional process, which should be Syrian-led, Syrian-owned process, were the main messages of the Slovenian Foreign Minister during her recent visit to Syria.

**Iraq** takes note of the COI's report on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and commends the COI's efforts in drafting today's report. Iraq condemns in the strongest terms the continuous violations by the Occupying Power, including unlawful incursions in the Syrian territories, which constitute a blatant violation of international law. Iraq reiterates its steadfast position supporting the rights of the Syrian Arab Republic and its full sovereignty on all its territory and we invite the international community to condemn such violations, to respect Syria's unity and territorial integrity in order to achieve security and stability and for the withdrawal of the Occupying Power from all Syrian territories. The Iraqi government pursues its efforts for the return of its citizens from al-Hol camp northeast of Syria. So far, Iraq secured the return of 3,062 families, that is 11,841 individuals, and it has a strategic approach for the reintegration and a safe and durable return to their homelands. Finally, Iraq considers that the continuation of the situation in al-Hol camp is a serious threat to the security and stability to the region in general and Iraq in particular. Accordingly, Iraq calls upon all countries to shoulder their legal and moral responsibilities and to ensure the return of their citizens.

Thanking the COI for its comprehensive report, **Spain** states that for years, the delegation of the former Syrian regime in the UNHRC's room frequently invoked arguments such as respect for sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs as measures with which to avoid scrutiny. Today, we all agree that sovereignty is no excuse for gassing or torturing one's own population as the former regime did. Spain supports an inclusive, peaceful political transition with participation of all citizens in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254. The participation of women as protagonists in decision-making will be both the means for and the guarantee of a successful transition. The work of the COI should continue and its cooperation with other mechanisms is vital. Spain condemns the recent violence in the east of the country and these actions need to be investigated and must not go unpunished. It is essential to ensure cooperation with neighbouring countries as well to guarantee the transition. Spain will contribute to alleviating the situation and supports the gradual removal of sanctions.

**Mexico** states that the historic moment the world has been witnessing in Syria is a delicate transition phase during which the UNHRC's support to the interim authorities, civil society, victims and their families is essential to leverage national efforts around transitional justice and accountability. These must be headed up and managed by the Syrians themselves. Mexico deplores the crimes documented by the COI and calls for the latter to continue its investigation work, benefiting from the access and openness demonstrated by the Syrian interim authorities to date. Mexico voices concern over the indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population during this transition stage. Mexico wishes a warm welcome to the initiatives undertaken to pursue a political solution and achieve the full attainment of human rights for all Syrians. As stressed by the COI, refugees and IDPs in Syria have the right to return voluntarily in a safe and dignified way to their homes and lands. Reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, Mexico urges the interim authorities to maintain their positive commitment to OHCHR, the COI, the IIIM, the IIMP and other relevant Special Procedures.

Reiterating its strong support for the COI's mandate at this critical time, **Australia** recalls that under the Assad regime, Syrian civilians were subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and other human rights abuses to quash dissent and erode opposition. Closely



monitoring the words and actions of Syria's interim authorities, Australia condemns the horrific violence in Syria in recent weeks, including reports of the summary execution of civilians from ethnic and religious minority groups. Australia expects the interim authorities to hold accountable all those involved in the bloodshed, as they have pledged to do. All minorities must be protected, including Alawite, Christian, Druze, and Kurdish communities. The fall of the Assad regime must also mean the end of the persistent conflict, oppression, and displacement of Syria's population. Australia calls on Syria's interim authorities to ensure an inclusive political transition that protects the rights of all Syrians, consistent with UN Security Council resolution 2254. At this time of transition, Australia remains committed to its longstanding support for Syria's immense humanitarian needs. Since 2011, we have provided over half a billion dollars in response to the Syrian crisis. Only lasting political change and inclusive governance can achieve sustainable improvements for Syrians.

Expressing its appreciation for the COI's work, the **Netherlands** has witnessed with great relief the fall of the Assad regime, marking the end of a regime that ruled with an iron fist for years and was responsible for grave and systematic human rights violations against the Syrian people. The change of power does not mean that crimes committed in Syria should or shall not be forgotten. The Netherlands, together with our partners in the international community, remains steadfast in its commitment to justice and a sustainable transitional justice process as a prerequisite for political peace and stability. The Netherlands emphasises the importance of continuing national and international efforts to ensure accountability for crimes committed by the Assad regime. In this regard, the Netherlands welcomes the work of the COI, in particular in its recent report on detention. Today, the COI's work is as crucial as ever in ensuring that these crimes do not go unpunished and the human rights situation in Syria is adequately monitored until the full return of stability. In that context, the Netherlands is deeply concerned about reports of violence in the coastal regions of Syria. These must be investigated and perpetrators be held accountable. The Netherlands commends the interim Government for its positive engagement with the COI n so far, as well as with OHCHR, the OPCW, the UN-mandated mechanism such as the IIM and IIMP, and wishes for this cooperation to be strengthened and further materialised in the access that they require in order to fulfil their crucial mandates.

**Egypt** reaffirms its unwavering solidarity with Syria and its people in this important historical phase. Egypt supports all efforts to rebuild the state in Syria through a comprehensive political process led and owned by Syria, and includes all the line forces within Syria in order to formulate a new horizon for the future and rebuild institutions and ensure that all citizens enjoy their rights and freedoms without discrimination. Fully in line with its long-standing position in defence of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Syria, Egypt believes that the approach needs to be comprehensive in order to put an end to the prolongation of the conflict and ensuring that the armed terrorist groups are defeated, reaching eventually a peaceful solution. Egypt supports the brotherly people of Syria in reaching a comprehensive political solution within the spirit and principles of UN Security Council resolution 2254 in a way that respects their basic rights and freedoms. Calling for an intensification of efforts to find the way out of the current humanitarian crisis in the country, Egypt reiterates the importance of the UNHRC in pushing forward national efforts towards promoting and protecting human rights and to bolstering the national institutions in Syria based on their priorities and needs in a way that fulfils the aspirations of the Syrian people for a better future.

**Albania** supports the work and mandate of the COI and its role in holding accountable the perpetrators who have caused so much suffering to the Syrian people. Albania is concerned



about the current situation in the country, which remains warring and dangerous. Reports that hundreds of civilians, including women and children, have been killed in recent days in western Syria bring us once again to the brutality of the past. Albania strongly condemns these crimes and calls on all authorities, both state and non-state, to immediately end these attacks and hold the perpetrators accountable. According to the relevant reports, including that of the COI, crimes against humanity and war crimes may have been committed in Syria during 14 years of conflict. It is high time to end impunity and held the perpetrators accountable. In closing, Albania supports the interior authorities in their efforts towards a representative, inclusive and comprehensive political transition for Syria, based on human rights, freedom and justice.

**Belgium** commends the COI for its tireless efforts to report on serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria these past 14 years. In doing so, the COI has compiled a vast database documenting human rights abuses, which will prove a valuable resource accompanying the Syrian people on their quest for truth, justice and accountability. At this critical juncture in Syria's history, the COI and other UN mechanisms can play a crucial role in supporting future Syrian-led processes of transitional justice. Belgium encourages the transitional authorities to grant full access to these mechanisms and to cooperate with them. The recent upsurge in violence demonstrates that transition after more than a decade of civil war remains fragile. Swift, transparent and impartial investigation of human rights violations remains essential to permanently break the cycle of violence, to end impunity and, most importantly, to provide answers to survivors and families of victims and missing persons.

**Ghana** takes note of the briefing provided by the COI on Syria regarding the latest developments in human rights. Embracing national reconciliation and healing are crucial at this pivotal time, considering the immense suffering experienced by the Syrian people over the years, including the civil war, recurring sectarian violence, mass displacement and human rights abuses. Recent events in the country therefore present a unique opportunity to the Syrian people to reflect, reform and reset. Ghana acknowledges the new authorities' openness to engage constructively with the international community. Ghana hopes that this engagement will be accompanied by confidence-building measures that could help foster an environment conducive to inclusive national dialogue, constitutional reforms and credible elections to ensure a stable future and safeguard human rights. Furthermore, Ghana calls for full compliance with international human rights and international humanitarian law, especially in protecting the civilian population, and underscores the urgent need to ensure that justice remains central to Syria's transition. In closing, Ghana reiterates the need for continued humanitarian support for the Syrian civilian population, and calls on the international community to show solidarity with the Syrian people and demonstrate respect for their sovereignty and aspiration for lasting peace.

**Brazil** warmly welcomes the COI and expresses its appreciation for its latest report, which documents a decisive period in Syria's history. Commending the COI for its dedication over the past 14 years, shedding light on the conflict in Syria, Brazil acknowledges the participation of representatives from the Syrian interim Government and calls for greater engagement with the UNHRC and its mechanisms. Brazil is monitoring the situation in Syria and emphasise the need for a peaceful, inclusive and Syrian-led political transition that reflects the aspirations of all components of Syrian society. This includes all Syrian refugees who must be granted the right to a voluntary and safe return. Voicing concern over the violent events in yellow-white majority regions, Brazil urges the interim authorities to ensure the protection of all minorities, safeguarding their rights and security. Brazil urges that those responsible be held accountable and takes positive note of the transitional authorities' decision to grant access to the COI, hoping





that visits will continue to take place with full independence and can lead to steps towards transitional justice and accountability. In closing, Brazil reiterates its concern with the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the human rights of Syrians and reaffirms its commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

Following the significant events of December 2024, the **Russian Federation** welcomes all efforts to establish inter-Syrian dialogue, end the bloodshed, combat terrorism and bring stability and peace to the country. Russia maintains its position about the need for impartial, unbiased, unpoliticised approaches to assessing the human rights situation in Syria. Russia emphasises the importance of protecting the rights of all Syrians, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliations. Alleged human rights violations must be analysed on the basis of reliable, verified facts and not arbitrary or politically modified conclusions. Dual standards, double standards and opportunistic stances must be avoided. Russia maintains its position of principle in supporting the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. All states that have an influence on the situation must make efforts to normalise the situation in Syria. It is particularly important to support the inter-Syrian inclusive political process, including the representatives of all population groups, in keeping with UN Security Council resolution 2254. Only this can provide a genuine, reliable protection to the rights of all citizens of Syria.

**China** follows closely the situation in Syria and respects Syrian people's choice, supports advancing the Syrian-led and own political process. Voicing concern over heavy casualties caused by recent armed clashes, China calls on relevant parties to immediately stop the armed clashes and hostilities, effectively protect civilians' safety, respect and uphold the principle of inclusiveness and, through dialogue, find a national reconstruction plan in line with people's aspirations. Terrorism is humanity's common enemy, a grave threat to international peace and security, socio-economic development and the enjoyment of human rights. Syria must not be a safe haven for terrorist groups. This is the bottom line to stick to. China urges the new authority to take concrete measures, implement anti-terrorism obligations, fight all terrorist organisations listed by the UN Security Council, actively respond to the concerns of the international community, including China, to counter terrorism so as to prevent terrorist organisations from threatening other countries' safety and people's human rights.

**Greece** is gravely concerned at the alarming escalation of violence in the coastal areas of Syria recently and condemns the horrific crimes against innocent civilians, including Christian and Alawites, including summary killings, many of which have been allegedly perpetrated by armed groups supporting the security forces of their interim authorities. Greece welcomes the commitments made by the transitional authorities and in particular the establishment of an investigative committee in order to ensure accountability in line with international law, norms and standards. Greece firmly supports the notion that transitional justice is essential for accountability and ultimately for reconciliation, and urges Syria to allow the COI to investigate all related violations. Greece appreciates the authorities' recent engagement with UN mechanisms and encourage them to grant full and unrestricted access to them. It is critical to work towards creating the conditions that would constitute voluntary and dignified returns of Syrian refugees to their homes. Greece strongly supports an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process in the spirit of UN Security Council resolution 2254, with strong and representative institutions which would integrate all Syrians and ensure that the legitimate fundamental rights of all ethnic and religious communities, including Christians, Alawites, Jews and Kurds, are fully protected



**Poland** thanks the COI for its report and remains deeply committed to support the activities of the Commission aimed at investigating all alleged violations of international human rights law in the Syrian Arab Republic. Poland supports the policy of gradual sanctions lifting and constructive relations with Syria's new authorities. The stability of Syria is the highest priority for now, which means preventing a revival of terrorist groups and avoid another civil war by ending any further violence and ensuring the protection of civilians, especially women and children. Poland shares conclusions of the report that it is now time to prioritise the needs of Syrians and set the country on the course towards a stable, prosperous and just future, one that ensures the human rights and dignity that have long been denied to its people.

**Cyprus** welcomes today's interactive dialogue with the COI and stresses that the post-Assad seismic shift provides an opportunity to build a new Syria. A truly Syrian-led and Syrian-owned transition, inclusive of all Syrians, can only be achieved through an orderly, transparent, participatory and peaceful process that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms. Cyprus welcomes the cooperation with various UN mechanisms and urge the transitional Government to cooperate with the COI, the IIIM and the IIMP. Cyprus believes that it is imperative for accountability and justice to prevail. Such cooperation also will assist in ensuring that the horrific attacks on civilians in Syria's coastal areas will not be repeated. The transitional Government bears responsibility to protect all Syrian citizens – women, children, older persons, Christians, Alawites, Druze, Yazidis and Kurds. Full compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law is non-negotiable. Ensuring accountability and cooperation with international organisations, including with Syria's Inquiry Committee, which needs to be credible and impartial to earn the trust of the Syrian people and the international community, will help in this respect.

**Austria** expresses its full support express for the important work of the COI and welcomes the recent engagement of the Syrian transitional authorities with the COI and other UN mechanisms, such as the IIIM and IIMP, as well as with OHCHR, and encourage them to strengthen this cooperation and to grant full access. More than three months since the fall of the Assad regime, Syria now stands at a pivotal moment. Transitional justice, accountability and respect for human rights will be key to achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation through a fully inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process with the full political participation of Syrian women in the institutions of transition. Austria is deeply concerned about the widespread violence in the coastal region of Syria earlier this month, which has caused a high number of casualties, including many civilians. All violations must be the subject of credible investigations, and the transitional authorities shall fully cooperate with the UN in this regard.

At this crucial moment in its history following the fall of the Assad regime, **Ireland** calls on the Syrian transitional authorities to uphold the human rights of all Syrians; ensure that crimes committed under Assad are never repeated; and that all Syrian people, regardless of gender, faith or ethnic grouping, are included in the transition. Those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, either during the Assad regime or after, must be held accountable and the process of transitional justice commenced. Ireland expresses deep concern regarding the recent violence and killing of civilians in western Syria. Ireland will continue to support the COI's important work to ensure accountability and transparency. There can be no impunity. Ireland will continue to support the IIIM and its call for crimes committed under the Assad regime to be referred to the International Criminal Court. Ireland will also continue to support the work of IIMP, and encourages the transitional authorities to work with all international mechanisms and grant them the necessary access.



The **United Kingdom** thanks the Commissioners for providing reflections from their recent historic visits to Syria. The UK welcomes the access that you have been granted by the interim authorities and the promising steps they have taken to pursue evidence-gathering and preservation efforts. The UK further acknowledges the important sentiments heard from the Permanent Representative of Syria this morning. Reports to date have left the international community with no illusions - Assad oversaw a reign of terror and tyranny that systematically oppressed the Syrian people with complete impunity. As part of the transition, Syrians must, finally, see accountability and justice. The UK therefore supports the continuation of the COI's work, which provides a clear evidence base for the Syrian people in their pursuit of this. In a realistic vein, it must be acknowledged that national reconciliation and processes to address violations and abuses will take time. The journey towards truth, reconciliation and healing will require vigilance. Recent reports that large numbers of civilians have been killed in the coastal areas of Syria are horrific. The answer to these horrors cannot be further retribution. It must lie in the interim authorities' commitment to the protection of all Syrians, in word and deed.

**Ukraine** welcomes the ongoing political transition in Syria and commands the Syrian people's determination to build a future rooted in democracy, justice and human rights. The fall of the former regime in December 2024 marked its historic turning point, yet significant challenges persist. Ensuring accountability for past human rights violations, arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearances is crucial for sustainable peace. Ukraine fully supports the work of the Independent International Commission on Enquiry and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons to deliver justice for victims and their families. At the same time, the international community must not lose sight of the urgent humanitarian needs in Syria, where millions of people face food insecurity. Despite unprecedented challenges caused by devastating Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine remains steadfast in its commitment to global food security. Through our expanded Grain from Ukraine Initiative, now evolving into the broader Food from Ukraine Programme, Ukraine is successfully delivering essential supplies to Syrian people. By standing for justice and humanitarian solidarity, Ukraine reaffirms its shared commitment to a peaceful and democratic Syria.

Commending the tireless efforts of the COI and seeing the fall of the Assad regime as a significant transformation, **Georgia** views this development as opening new avenues for potential peace and reconstruction, while also introducing new challenges that demand the Council's immediate attention, as the recent tragic events in Tartus and Latakia attest. Humanitarian needs in Syria remain immense. While some measures have been taken, urgent international efforts are needed to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access and support community resilience. Georgia recalls the importance of the visits by UN human rights mechanisms, notably the COI. Georgia concurs with the view of the COI regarding the importance of not repeating the past mistakes and taking steps towards achieving justice and accountability. Georgia acknowledges efforts of the interim authorities to foster national unity and inclusive governance. As a socio-economic recovery of Syria is vital, Georgia welcomes the 9th EU International Conference in Support of Syria, held on 17 March in Brussels. To conclude, Georgia expresses hope that the cautious optimism of the international community will live up to its expectations of a sustainable, peaceful, and inclusive future for Syrian people.

**Qatar** welcomes the COI's report and its visits to Syria along with those carried out by OHCHR and other UN mechanisms. In light of former regime's rejection of these visits, Qatar hopes that these efforts will lead to a new Syria and calls for further support to ensure stability in the country, respect for human rights, and hold perpetrators. Qatar welcomes the Constitutional Declaration



enshrining the separation of powers as well as the formation of Committee for Drafting the Permanent Constitution, hoping that this will be a first step towards a Syrian-led and owned political process to build institutions and consolidate social peace. For these efforts to succeed, Qatar calls upon parties in Syria to refrain from any acts that might fuel tensions and destabilise Syria and compromise the political transition. Welcoming the agreement on the integration of institutions in northeast Syria in state institutions, Qatar further calls upon the international community to continue provision of humanitarian and development aid, lift sanctions, and stop Israeli aggressions and its occupation of Syrian territories.

**Venezuela** continues to follow with great attention the events unfolding in Syria and expresses its firm desire to see its brotherly Syrian people find a path towards peaceful resolution and dispute settlement without external interference and without use of violence as a mechanism to tackle political and internal conflict. Venezuela reiterates its commitment to preserving the territorial integrity of Syria as well as the defence of its independence and sovereignty and the full respect for the values enshrined in the UN Charter, with particular focus on the preservation of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights with no distinction, including this, the protection and peaceful cohabitation of diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic practises which enrich the country.

**France** expresses its gratitude to the COI for its report and reiterates its support to the COI's mandate. Depicting human rights and fundamental freedoms as a precondition for a fair and lasting peace in Syria, the work of the COI, the IIM and the IIMP are part and parcel of the work to combat impunity and will be a tool in building the rule of law. The fall of the Assad regime is a historic opportunity to rebuild a Syria which meets the aspirations of the Syrian people. France recalls its commitment to implementing a peaceful political transition and representing all components of Syrian society to build a Syria that is free, united, stable, peaceful, sovereign, and fully integrated into the regional environment and the international community in the spirit of UN Security Council resolution 2254. France voices concern at the severe violence in Syria in recent days in Tartus, Latakia and Homs districts. It condemns the exactions against civilians based on religion and against prisoners. It calls on the authorities of Syria to ensure that independent investigations shed light on these crimes and perpetrators are brought to justice.

**Montenegro** stresses that this month marks the 14th anniversary of the Syrian people's peaceful uprising for their rights and freedoms, which was met with brutal oppression, turning it into one of the deadliest conflicts of the century, with massive displacement and unspeakable human suffering, hardship and cost. The fall of Assad's criminal regime in December 2024 sparked widespread hope inside and outside Syria that the conflict was drawing to a close. It opened the window of historic opportunity to set the country on a course towards a stable and just future that ensures that every Syrian citizen, regardless of ethnicity, religion or any other affiliation, can freely exercise their human rights and live in peace, safety and dignity. Yet, the recent escalation of violence in the coastal area warned that the path to peace remains fragile. This requires all actors to immediately break the cycle of violence, ensure the protection of all Syrians and respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law. By welcoming the transitional authorities' repeatedly reiterated commitment to protecting the human rights of all Syrians, Montenegro emphasises the importance of effectively pursuing transitional justice that ensures accountability for violation of human rights and international law, fosters national dialogue, healing and reconciliation and lays the foundation for Syria's long-term recovery and stability. To this end, Montenegro supports an inclusive and credible political transition towards a safe, prosperous and just future for all Syrians.





**Italy** thanks the COI for its report which confirms the fragility of the human rights situation in Syria. Italy steadily supports the political transition, offering the opportunity for Syria to move beyond the atrocities of the past and to embark on a path towards justice and peace. Encouraging a Syrian-led, Syrian-ordered process and the full realisation of human rights for all Syrians, Italy emphasises the need for an inclusive transition, regardless of gender, religion or ethnic background. Reconciliation remains essential to fulfilling the aspirations of the Syrian people, including through a constitution that guarantees equal rights and freedoms. Italy takes note of the progress made with the Constitutional Declaration and encourages the transitional authorities to move forward on this positive direction, upholding the respect of IHRL and IHL and protecting civilians. Investigating recent violence in Western Syria in synergy with relevant UN mechanisms, while ensuring accountability for abuses and sectarian violence, are crucial steps toward lasting stability. Italy will continue to stand by the Syrian people along this arduous path by considering how to ease sanctions and by continuing to provide humanitarian assistance.

Taking note of the COI's report, **Sudan** reiterates its respect for the choices of Syrian people in choosing their future and their mode of governance. Syrians, following the political change in the country, proved their ability to overcome division and to work jointly for a better future for Syria and Syrian people and to use the history of political transformations for their interest. Syria suffered from war and its ramifications, which led to humanitarian, economic and political crises. Sudan calls upon the international community to respond to the humanitarian needs of Syrians and ensure a safe return of Syrians to their people and lift sanctions. It further calls upon OHCHR to provide technical support needed in Syria according to its national needs. In line with the UN Charter, the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria must be fully respected.

**Yemen** welcomes the COI's report on Syria and reaffirms its support for the efforts deployed by the new Government of Syria in order to achieve stability and ensure human rights and move forward with institutional legislative reforms in order to ensure justice and accountability. Yemen acknowledges the report's emphasis on finding a safe environment for return of displaced persons, and support the search for missing persons and economic recovery. Yemen calls upon the international community to provide humanitarian support and lift sanctions in order to facilitate reconstruction. In closing, Yemen supports the right of Syrians to enjoy a future based on freedom, justice, equality and sustainable development.

**Japan** appreciates the COI's efforts and its continued commitment to ensuring accountability for all parties involved in the Syrian conflict. Japan has been closely monitoring development in Syria, including positive steps towards reconciliation amongst various factions after 14 years of conflict and the recent violence in the coastal area. While welcoming the COI's successful conclusion of its first visit to Syria, Japan is concerned about the deterioration of human rights situation resulting in many civilian casualties. Japan strongly urges all parties concerned to immediately cease the violence and comply with international law including international humanitarian law. Furthermore, Japan is alarmed by the COI's report on widespread sexual and gender-based violence as a tool of war, including in detention. Therefore, it urges the international community to ensure accountability for these crimes and support survivors. Japan further stresses the need for a gender transformative approach such as ensuring the meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping in line with the peace agenda. Japan calls for all concerned parties to play a constructive role in promoting political settlement and national reconciliation through dialogue amongst Syrians. Civil society can and must play a central role in achieving peace, stability, and protecting and promoting human rights.



**Malta** thanks all members of the COI for their relentless work in the pursuit of justice and accountability. The COI's accumulated body of work over the years presents a grim picture of severe human rights violations perpetrated under the former Assad government. All these violations need to be fully investigated and those responsible held accountable through a credible judicial process. To this end, Malta welcomes the commitments made by the transitional authorities regarding the establishment of an investigative commission. The swift collapse of the Assad Government in December 2024 has presented a unique opportunity for Syria and all Syrians. At this turning point in Syria's history, the Syrian people deserve closure and accountability after decades of oppressive rule. Malta urges Syria to cooperate with the various mechanisms already in place within the UN system through its transition to an inclusive and stable society. Underlining the importance of this process being Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, Malta is convinced that accountability, justice and application of international human rights standards are essential to provide all Syrians with the stable and inclusive society they truly deserve.

### Views Expressed by intergovernmental Organizations

Thanking the COI for this comprehensive report, the **European Union** reaffirms its strongly support for its work as well as the IIM and IIMP. It welcomes the recent engagement of the Syrian authorities with the COI and encourages them to continue to grant full access to the latter. Stressing that transitional justice and respect for human rights, including those of women and children, will be key for peace and reconciliation, the EU stands ready to support a fully inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process. Beyond positive developments, the EU remains gravely alarmed by the widespread violence in Syria's coastal region in early March, and strongly condemns the horrific crimes committed against civilians. All parties responsible for violations of IHL during or following the Assad era must be held accountable and all acts investigated in accordance with international law. The EU calls on all actors to uphold international law. Civilians must be protected without discrimination based on religious and ethnic backgrounds. The COI established nationally is a welcome commitment that needs to be translated into concrete action. Calling on the transitional authorities to allow the UN-mandated COI to investigate into all violations, the EU would appreciate some Commissioners' insights on recent developments beyond the period covered in the written report.

The **Sovereign Order of Malta** welcomes the COI's report on its first-ever access to Syria and its engagement with the new authorities. The Sovereign Order of Malta remains steadfast in its humanitarian commitment to the Syrian people, providing essential medical care, emergency relief, and social support to those affected by conflict. Since 2012, through its network of medical facilities and partnerships, it ensures access to health care, particularly for the most vulnerable, including displaced persons, the injured, and those lacking basic services. In this critical period of transition, the Sovereign Order of Malta supports the COI's recommendations to assist the new authorities in reforms that include all components of Syrian society, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or political affiliation, to ensure a just and lasting peace. The Sovereign Order of Malta is ready, alongside the UN and other humanitarian entities, to participate in this process. Furthermore, it has been asked by the Lebanese authorities to expand the Sovereign Order's assistance to Syrian refugees. Last month, a high-level meeting between representatives of Syria and the Order of Malta took place at UN headquarters. This followed a visit to Damascus in January by officials of Malteser International, aimed at enhancing cooperation. Through its impartial and dedicated action, the Sovereign Order of Malta helps to safeguard fundamental



human rights, especially the right to freedom of religion or belief, promote peaceful coexistence, and support pathways towards recovery situation and long-term stability.

### Views Expressed by Non-Governmental Organizations

**The World Council of Arameans** wishes to recall that certain sectarian slogans, such as ‘Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the grave’ heard for over a decade, are tragically becoming a reality. During the month of Ramadan, more than 2,000 Alawite civilians were killed, and several members of the Aramaean Christian community were also targeted. While the Constitutional Declaration recently issued by the transitional authorities has been welcomed by some, Syrian representatives see in it a dual infringement on the rights of the Aramaean community. Historically, the text fails to acknowledge the longstanding presence of Aramaeans in Syria, documented for over 3,000 years. Politically, it does not provide for their inclusion in the national dialogue, to which no Aramaean representative has been invited. Furthermore, the reference to Sharia law as a foundational source contributes to a climate of daily fear among minorities, particularly the Aramaeans, many of whom have already sought refuge in Lebanon or elsewhere. The World Council of Arameans therefore calls on the transitional authorities to recognize, first, the historical presence of the Aramaean people in Syria, and second, their fundamental rights. Finally, the Council asks the COI whether the Aramaeans, like their Kurdish and Druze counterparts, must resort to taking up arms in order to have their rights respected and guaranteed by the central authorities.

The **International Council Supporting Fair Trial and Human Rights** explains that the previous regime did not want to implement UN Security Council resolution 2254, leaving behind a country that was torn apart, in the midst of the massacre. So, the people decided to decide their fate after the regime left. The people of Syria call for political stability, and foreign presence must leave Syria. The International Council calls on the COI, the UNHRC and UN institutions to provide support to the new *de facto* authorities, in order to overcome the tragedies of the past, to protect the Syrian businessmen, and to prosecute those who violate the right to property, as this would reassure investors.

The **Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)** states that fall of the Syrian authorities in December has further exposed the widespread and horrific violations of human rights that have been committed over the decades of Assad rule. The new interim authorities have signalled a willingness to undertake a process of accountability and have engaged with civil society and international actors. However, as the events of the last week involving the deaths of hundreds of civilians have shown, the situation is fragile. The announcement of a commission of inquiry by the Syrian authorities is a good first step. However, it will also be a test of the willingness to hold all perpetrators accountable. The GCHR urges the UNHRC to renew the mandate of the COI at this critical stage. This is the first real opportunity to hold those responsible for the violations accountable in Syria, in a Syrian-led process, with the full and meaningful participation of victims and civil society. The evidence and information the COI gathers is irreplaceable and will be a credible and vital tool in accountability. The interim authorities need support from the international community but also need to meet their human rights obligations and in particular to protect the lives of all Syrian citizens without any discrimination. The GCHR believes this could be framed in a resolution under item 4 as a situation that requires the Council’s attention.

**Human Rights Watch (HRW)** states that the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad’s Government in December 2024 has created a momentous opportunity for Syria to break with decades of repression and forge a better future. A better future rooted in respect for human rights for all



requires addressing and ensuring meaningful, inclusive and comprehensive accountability for decades of grave human rights violations by the al-Assad Government as well as international crimes committed by all parties to the conflict. The transitional authorities should ensure the urgent collection and safeguarding of evidence and fully coordinate and cooperate with UN mechanisms and institutions in this regard including the COI and the IIIM. They should ensure accountability not only for the egregious crimes committed against the Syrian people by the former Government, but also for those committed by other armed groups and forces including recent violence and killings in the coastal region and in Homs and Hama governorates. While further investigations are required into these recent incidents evidence has emerged of extrajudicial executions, looting and indiscriminate shooting into homes and villages and widespread mistreatment and outrageous unpersonal dignity including sectarian rhetoric. Ensuring expansion of civic space in Syria is critical to efforts to rebuild. In this regard, HRW appeals to the authorities to scrap onerous registration and operational requirements and facilitate humanitarian access across the country.

**Physicians for Human Rights** considers the departure of Bashar al-Assad as a critical opportunity for justice, accountability and healing after years of grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. These violations include the unlawful targeting of healthcare facilities and medical personnel as well as the denial of the fundamental right to health of Syrians. As Syrians rebuild their country, justice and accountability must be part of the foundation of their future. Since 2011, Physicians for Human Rights has documented more than 400 attacks on medical facilities and the detention, torture and killing of healthcare workers. Accountability for these violations should be prioritised and the needs of these survivors should be supported by any transitional justice process. Further, as tortured detainees, including healthcare workers, have been recently released there is an urgent need to collaborate with national institutions and Syrian civil society to develop a survivor-centred approach for documentation. The Physicians ask the Commissioners how could the international community help strengthen national capacity for documentation and accountability, especially for crimes against healthcare workers.

Welcoming the COI's efforts to document violations particularly under the report entitled 'A Web of Agony, the **Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression** reiterates its call for a renewal of the COI's mandate to address the atrocities, including very recent killings. Many members of the security forces have recently been killed by those who support the former regime and this is in no way justified. Massacres of civilians have taken place. The Centre has documented over a thousand victims arbitrarily killed for reasons of religion, ethnic origin, as well as intimidation and torture and religious hate speech. The Government has established a National Independent Commission of Inquiry, and the Centre hopes that this will carry out its role in professional manner. The recent events, however, point to the need for an immediate start to transitional justice to ensure accountability for all perpetrators, particularly following the Constitutional Declaration.

The **World Jewish Congress (WJC)** acknowledges the COI's efforts in documenting serious ongoing challenges. The 2024 political transition was heralded by some as a moment of hope, a chance for stability and progress. Yet, the events of the past weeks have shattered that vision. Syria remains on the brink, gripped by unrelenting violence, economic collapse, and a dire humanitarian crisis. The world has witnessed unspeakable atrocities committed against Alawites and Christians, disturbing footage of men, women, and children executed by extremist groups. Lapsed by elements within the Syrian government chills us to the core. The international





community cannot turn a blind eye to these systematic campaigns of terror driven by a murderous jihadist ideology. Jihadism, extremism do not discriminate. The WJC remains extremely concerned at the situation of minority groups living under threat in Syria, including the Jews and Kurdish communities, and the women and girls who too often bear an additional burden facing the barbarism of sexual violence. The WJC reaffirms its solidarity with all peace-seeking Syrians and calls upon the international community and the COI to act decisively, protect these minorities, and shield innocent lives from barbarity. The world must not stand idle while innocent lives are extinguished.

**Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)** commends the COI's 'A Web of Agony' report, which exposes the atrocities committed by the Assad regime over more than five decades, revealing systematic gender-based violence in Syrian detention centres as a tool of political repression. These acts inflict deep and long-lasting harm on survivors. The COI's conference room paper titled 'Pillage and Plunder' highlights how discriminatory inheritance laws have prevented many women, particularly widows and the wives of forcibly disappeared men, from asserting property rights. This puts displaced women at risk of permanent dispossession due to legal and social barriers. Addressing these and other pre-existing inequalities is essential for building peace and a just future in Syria. In recent days, violence has escalated between the interim Government security forces supported by associated militias and armed factions loyal to the former Assad regime in areas on the Syrian coast. This has resulted in the deaths of over 800 civilians. Reports indicate mass executions, targeted attacks on civilian homes and properties and the use of sectarian rhetoric to justify the violence. WILPF calls on all states to urge all parties to the hostilities to protect civilians, press for an independent and impartial investigation into the events on the Syrian coast and support a gender-responsive, survivor-centred approach addressing past and ongoing war crimes and pre-existing inequalities, including discriminatory laws.

The **Palestinian Return Centre** speaks on behalf thousands of Syrian and Palestinian families torn apart by the agony of loss, families who have been waiting for decades to learn the pain of their loved ones forcibly disappeared in the prisons of the former Syrian regime. The issue of missing persons in Syrian prisons is not merely a statistic and a forgotten cause. It is a deep wound in the conscience of humanity. There are fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, victims of injustice and oppression, leaving behind families trapped in an endless cycle of grief and uncertainty. Reports from human rights organisations indicate that the number of missing persons in Syria exceeds 100,000. Among them are more than 6,000 Palestinian refugees, including 49 children, according to the Action Group for Palestinians of Syria. Until December 2024, detainees in Syrian prisons have endured brutal torture and gross human rights violations, as documented by credible testimonies recorded by the Action Group. Stressing the profoundly humanitarian character of this cause, one that transcends borders and affiliations, the Palestinian Return Centre urges the UNHRC to internationalise the issue of missing persons in Syrian prisons; hold those responsible for enforced disappearances accountable; and support the families of the missing.

The **Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies** expresses its continued support and appreciation for the critical work of the COI on Syria. A peaceful, stable Syria is in everyone's interest. Yet, ongoing human rights violations, extrajudicial killings of civilians and illegal military interventions by Israel, Türkiye and others pose an immediate threat to this goal. Now is not the time to abandon international accountability and other efforts to protect civilians. Any sustained institutional progress on the national level and in the areas of the rule of law, accountability and



inclusive governance will depend in large part on national civil society actors and their capacity to engage in the transition. However, two days ago the Syrian Government appears to have issued a notice concerning an executive order made last month which imposes severe restrictions on civil society actors concerning their relations with international organisations and UN agencies. Such restrictions are reminiscent of Assad-era policies and constitute a blatant violation of freedom of expression and association. In effect, these restrictions provide the Government with the capacity to decide if and when the CSOs would be allowed to communicate and interact with the UN in any way. Such laws have been used time and time again by authoritarian governments to curtail the basic rights of CSO actors and cut civil society off from the world. In this regard, the Cairo Institute asks to the COI how might such regulations negatively impact the capacity of the COI to carry out its work.

### FACTS & FIGURES ON ID PARTICIPATION

#### 42 State Delegations

- Including 1 high-level delegation

#### 2 Inter-Governmental Organizations

#### 10 Non-Governmental Organizations