



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

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#### ORAL UPDATE (PRESENTATION ONLY)

**Mr. Paulo Sérgio PINHEIRO, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Syrian Arab Republic**

Since its report to the UNHRC in March 2025, the COI has continued its dialogue and cooperation with the interim government of the Syrian Arab Republic, which has granted its team of investigators access to different parts of the country.

In recent weeks, important steps to deal with past violations have been taken, particularly the establishment in May of the **National Transitional Justice Authority** and the **National Authority for Missing Persons**. They will be expected to help reveal the fate of the **more than 100,000 Syrians** estimated to have been forcibly disappeared or gone missing, to expose the truth about systematic violations like arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment and about widespread attacks which killed hundreds of thousands of civilians and maimed millions during hostilities.

The **security vacuum** left after the dismissal of the Armed Forces Security Service, coupled with a lack of clarity on the new framework for justice, contributed to an atmosphere where victims of past crimes and violations attempted to take the law into their own hands and settle scores.



The **retaliatory attacks** witnessed in the coast in March and seen on a smaller scale in other parts of the country are in part a response to five decades of systematic crimes perpetrated by security forces with impunity which affected all Syrians. More recently, sectarian frontlines have also been fuelled by widespread **hate speech and incitement against Alawites**, often online, including posts with false information reportedly often originating from abroad. The COI has documented revenge attacks across several governorates, including killings in villages in Hama and Homs that occurred in late January.

Men who had reportedly handed over their weapons to the settlement disarmament process were treated and in certain cases executed. Six weeks after these events and over the course of four days, **hundreds of Alawite civilians** were killed by armed men present in more than 40 different locations in the coastal regions of Latakia and Tartus, as well as in Hama and Homs governorates. These killings followed large-scale planned simultaneous attacks by remnants of the former government forces on the entering government forces besieging several locations along the coast, which resulted in killings.

During its latest visit to Syria last week, the COI appreciated the unfettered access granted by the government to the coast, including to several locations where killings and looting had occurred. The COI met with a number of civil and security authorities in the area, eyewitnesses, and victims' families. **First-hand accounts by survivors** of these events from Tartus, Latakia, and Hama governorates revealed in detail how residential areas were raided by large groups of armed men, many of them members of factions now affiliated with the state. They told us how the assailants detained, treated, and executed Alawites.

The COI acknowledged the establishment by the interim government of a national enquiry to investigate these violations and an additional High-Level Committee to maintain civil peace. The interim government has also informed that dozens of alleged perpetrators of those crimes have been arrested. **Protection of civilians** is essential to prevent further violations and crimes. The COI welcomes President al-Sharaa's commitment to hold those responsible accountable to restore confidence for state institutions among the affected communities. Tens of thousands of Alawites have already been displaced from their hometowns and villages in Latakia, Tartus, Homs, and Hama, and among them, over 40,000 reportedly crossed into Lebanon.

The COI has also documented **abductions** by unknown individuals of at least six Alawite women this spring in several Syrian governorates. The whereabouts of at least two of these women remain unknown. While the COI has received credible reports of more abductions, investigations in some of those incidents were opened by the interim authorities.

In late April, residential areas of Jaramana and Sahnaya near Damascus were attacked by armed men who raided buildings and detained residents. These attacks appear to have followed the dissemination of an inflammatory audio recording of unknown origin. Subsequent clashes that erupted between General Security and Druze militias reportedly led to dozens of casualties, including several **executions of unarmed civilians** and looting and burning of homes and vehicles.

Violence then expanded to Sweida, jeopardising the fragile status quo between the interim authorities and local armed factions, as well as among the Druze militias there. This has amplified



fears of further violence targeting other communities, which further deepened last week when an **attacker first opened fire in a Greek Orthodox church** in Damascus during a service on Sunday evening and then detonated an explosive vest, killing 25 worshippers and injuring 60 others. The Syrian entering authorities attributed this heinous attack to the terrorist group ISIL, also known as Daesh. **Attacks on places of worship** are outrageous and unacceptable. The authorities must ensure the protection of places of worship and threatened communities and ensure that perpetrators and enablers are held accountable.

The Syrian conflict has no shortage of internal challenges and grievances, many of which were made worse by foreign interventions. Over the last weeks, **Israel conducted a wave of airstrikes** in and around Damascus, including near the Presidential Palace, and targeted military bases and weapons depots in Daraa, Hamas, Tartus and Latakia as part of its sustained military campaign in Syria. The strikes killed a number of civilians and severely undermined Syria's military capacity. Israeli strikes in Daraa on 18 March reportedly killed three civilians and injured at least 19 others in an attack that Israel said was aimed at destroying military capacities and threatening it.

**Civilian casualties** were also reported in the context of IDF operations in the UNDOF monitor buffer zone in Quneitra and southwards in Daraa. Israeli artillery fire was used in confrontations with local armed men. The IDF has allegedly issued displacement orders and prevented local communities from assessing their homes and lands, depriving them of their livelihoods. These actions raise serious concerns of violations of international human rights and military law, as UNSG Guterres further stated recently.

Meanwhile, over 32 men, women and children continue to be deprived of their liberty in overcrowded **prisons and camps in northern Syria** in appalling conditions. While more than 5,000 Iraqis have been repatriated from the camp this year, progress in repatriating or releasing the foreigners or Syrians from camps is extremely slow. More than **20,000 children** are still held there waiting for the end of their ordeal. Recent reports signal a re-emergence of Daesh-ISIL cells in Deir ez-Zor, Raqqqa and al-Hasakah, with attacks plotted against a variety of targets.

The Chair of the COI further explains it has been heartening to see more than 2 million Syrians returning home since December, including 600,000 from neighbouring countries and just under 1.5 million IDPs. For many of the over **7 million Syrians who remain displaced**, massive property-related challenges will need to be tackled in the wake of industrial-scale destruction, pillage and confiscation of homes and lands. The broken judicial and record-keeping system inherited from successive governments makes reclaiming homes from secondary occupants very difficult, sometimes leading to **violence and community tensions**.

Despite recent encouraging steps towards lifting sectoral sanctions and opening the country to new investments, nearly **16.5 million Syrians** remain in need of humanitarian assistance, including nearly 3 million people facing severe food insecurity. The interim authorities' repeated commitments to protect the rights of everyone and all communities in Syria without discrimination of any kind are extremely encouraging. They should be met with the necessary support from the international community. In closing, the Chair of the COI makes a plea to all states to strengthen their engagement for the protection of human rights in Syria.



## VIEWS EXPRESSED BY THE CONCERNED COUNTRY

The delegation of the **Syrian Arab Republic** states that seven months only have passed since the fall of the barbarous Assad regime, which raged for 45 years. However, during that period, Syria has been able to take some measures in terms of recovery, promoting stability, civilian peace, safeguarding institutions, state reforms, and this despite a painful heritage accompanied by multiple complex challenges. This was left over by the former regime.

The new government was formed reflecting diversity and competence. The Constitutional Declaration guaranteeing rights and freedoms was adopted. The High Electoral Committee has been integrated by Parliament, which has enshrined the representative global approach to independent organs, which has been created for **transitional justice and for missing persons**. This is a guarantee for exercising justice and the rights of victims.

The Syrian government welcomes its relationship with the COI and has had positive interaction with this Commission, has given unprecedented **access to the Syrian territory**, and during the Commission's visit, Syria did not just stop at providing access to the territory, but it also provided all necessary facilities or cooperation to that Commission for it to be able to conduct its role in full independence without obstacles, including during the visit to the coastal region. Through that positive approach, Syria hopes to establish constructive relations with the Commission - relations based on objectivity and respect for national sovereignty.

On the report presented by the COI regarding the **events in the coastal regions**, the government hopes it will take into account the context, the scope of the challenges, the difficult situation on the ground, and the major efforts made. This will enhance the action of the relevant National Commission for investigating those events in order to achieve Syria's common goal, which is to **establish justice and ensure accountability** since this commission is in the course of concluding its work. Despite the positive developments, the Syrian government is well aware that there is still a long way to go, but the essentials are there.

There is a firm willingness on the part of the Syrian people and leaders to move forward in the right direction and to take serious, urgent steps based on national capacities for overcoming all obstacles. Syria has suffered attempts by the former regime to sow chaos. There is also the threat lurking of the leftovers of Daesh. Just a few days ago, very sadly, a **criminal attack targeted the Mar Elias Church** in Damascus. This was a coward attack targeting all Syrians and their national unity. Syria will never give up its struggle against terrorism, extremism, nor its prosecution of the perpetrators and masterminds of that attack to bring them to justice. Meanwhile, **Israel pursues its aggression** against Syria in flagrant violation of international law, of Syria's sovereignty, its territorial integrity, as well as the disengagement agreement.

In addition to attempts to undermine the Syrian state and compromise its unity, Syria still suffers from a **difficult socioeconomic situation**, with destroyed infrastructure. Syria is seeking to be a state of citizenship, of freedom of law for all Syrians, men and women, without distinction or exclusion. Syria hopes to be a source of **stability, peace, and rapprochement** in the region. The delegation vocally calls for support to face these challenges and achieve its goals, namely moving from just humanitarian support, Syria is seeking full and sustainable socioeconomic partnerships that would help ensure a better future of security and prosperity for all.