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ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Oral Update of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Syrian Arab Republic

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US GOVERNMENT SANCTIONS

Speaking on behalf of the Commission of Inquiry, Mr. Paulo Sérgio PINHEIRO, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, cannot ignore that one of their colleagues, **Ms. Francesca Albanese**, Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Occupied Territories, is facing serious reprisals for fulfilling the very same duty entrusted on the commissioners by the United Nations Human Rights Council. This task consists of informing the world about the situation of human rights. Mr. Paulo Sérgio PINHEIRO stresses that Special Procedures' collective endeavour exists precisely to promote more debate on human rights, not less debate on human rights.

ORAL UPDATE (PRESENTATION ONLY)

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

Nine months ago, a wave of renewed aspirations for peace and justice swept Syria. During the their country visit last week, the members of the COI observed that these hopes continue to be very much present for many, though **outbursts of violence** against civilians in parts of the country are sources of grave concern.



In Damascus, with interim government officials, the COI discussed the potential of the ongoing **political and institutional transformation** to enhance the respect and protection of human rights for all Syrians. The COI also voiced their concerns regarding renewed violence and challenges to the enjoyment of human rights that require concrete steps to address, as set out in the recommendations of the COI's latest report.

The **Minister of Justice** assured the COI that every effort was being made to guarantee that arrests taking place in Syria are happening with judicial oversight and that detainees have access to their families and lawyers. This is an assurance the COI was pleased to receive and on which the COI will follow up very closely. In this regard, the COI reiterates its longstanding recommendation for a moratorium on the implementation of the death penalty with a view towards full abolition.

The COI also met with the new **National Authority on Missing Persons** and members of the Transitional Justice Authority. The COI stressed the importance of ensuring that the families who have tirelessly searched for their loved ones are central to this process as active participants. Syria's future depends on integrating all its regions and communities in a unified, secure, rights-respecting state. This requires a political security environment sufficiently stable for the root causes of grievance and violations to be addressed to build robust, accountable and transparent governance and guarantee of non-repetition.

The human rights situation in Syria, while vastly different from the systematic violations of the Assad era, is nonetheless dire. In August 2025, the COI released a report documenting **attacks on the Alawite community** since January 2025, peaking with the widespread and systematic killing of more than 1,400 men, women and children in just a few days in March across Latakia, Tartus and Hama governorates, including by members of the interim government's security forces. Such acts, which may amount to war crimes, call for decisive protection, accountability and compensation for victims and affected communities by the state authorities. The COI noted that interim authorities encouraging settlements last week regarding holding accountable those responsible for the crimes committed in March 2025, and looks forward to additional transparent and visible action in that regard.

All individuals held in state custody for suspected violations of international human rights or domestic law must be treated in a dignified manner and promptly brought before impartial tribunals with **guarantees of fair trial**. The COI's report proposed several recommendations, which the Foreign Minister encouraged and indicated will serve as a roadmap for the government. Concerted efforts are needed to restore protection, ensure **well-trained law enforcement** and non-repetition. This is urgent.

The COI continues to receive reports of ongoing killings, arbitrary arrests and detention of members of the **Alawite community** as well as the confiscation and occupation of the property of those who fled the March violence. Other areas are also impacted. In August 2025, another group evicted many Alawite residents in the Damascus suburb of Al-Sumaria claiming they held eviction orders on behalf of the state, with reports of abductions, beatings and ill-treatment of civilians amid **sectarian insults**.



The COI calls on the interim authorities to urgently address the underlying causes of violence, prevent the recurrence of violations and work to restore trust between the state and impacted communities. The COI has seen how **hate speech** and incitement to violence contributed to the commission of severe violations. Such inflammatory statements are continuing to fuel fear, division and violence and have the potential to lead to further escalation, including in areas and communities that were spared during the recent spikes in violence.

Mid-July saw another round of violence in Suwayda Governorate, stemming from a local conflict between **Druze and Bedouin communities** that drew in other actors and displaced nearly 200,000 civilians. Hundreds of people, predominantly Druze but also Bedouins and others, were killed and injured, according to the COI's initial information. Following the intervention of the interim government forces, the COI stated they were there to restore order. Videos show Druze men being summarily executed and subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment, revealing a climate of extreme violence, marked also by looting and destruction of property. Bedouin communities also reported being subjected to serious violations at the hands of certain armed groups.

The conduct of interim government security forces during these operations raised serious concerns, and the interim President stated last week that mistakes were made by all parties. On 31 July 2025, the **Minister of Justice** appointed a Committee tasked with investigating the reported serious violations, including allegedly by forces who participated in atrocities committed in the coastal areas in March 2025. It announced earlier this month that members of interim government security forces have been arrested for committing violations, some on the basis of video evidence. When the COI met the committee last week, they underscored their independence and intention to impartially investigate violations against all communities.

The **COI's own investigation** into these events was initiated in July 2025. The COI had sought access to Suwayda by the time of their visit last week, during which the COI met both Druze and Bedouins who had fled Suwayda for Damascus. The COI welcomed the announcement last Tuesday by the Foreign Ministry on the roadmap on Suwayda that the COI in the very first item is invited to investigate these events. Accordingly, the COI is proposing new dates to initiate work in all affected areas shortly. These clashes also triggered the involvement of other actors, including tribal forces from other parts of the country, illustrating the **overall fragility of the current security environment** across Syria.

Israel further deepened its military involvement and continued its frequent airstrikes on Syria, including in Damascus near key government buildings, causing significant destruction and reportedly resulting in civilian casualties, and recently in the vicinity of Homs, Latakia and Palmyra cities. In the **south**, Israel continued to violate Syria's sovereignty, further occupying lands beyond the 1974 separation line, forcibly displacing civilians residing there and reportedly arbitrarily detaining Syrian nationals. These actions further destabilise highly secure regions and must end immediately. In **northeast Syria**, tensions are also high as efforts to implement the 10-March Agreement between the interim authorities and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) appear to have stalled. Recent clashes accompanied by violent rhetoric have triggered concerns that a further eruption of violence may undermine the status quo in this part of the country, where thousands of alleged ISIL members remain detained and the threat of ISIL persists.



In this context, it is essential to **intensify efforts towards de-escalation** and dialogue. All in all, more than 220,000 people are estimated to have been newly internally displaced from areas seeing hostilities and violence, in addition to many missing or abducted. Among the latter, women have been particularly exposed. The COI received reports of **gender-based violence** and the **abduction of Druze women** following the clashes in Suwayda. The COI also received reports of primarily Alawite women abducted in broad daylight in city centres by unknown armed doctors. Initial information indicates that some were sexually assaulted before their release, while others were subjected to forced marriage. It is highly disturbing that in many cases where women went missing, families report that local police authorities have not yet investigated such acts. The COI calls on the interim authorities to immediately take action on this case.

More encouragingly, nearly one million **Syrian refugees** and two million IDPs have returned to their homes since 8 December. The COI welcomes the **easing of sanctions** by the US, the EU and the UK, which opens up potential for vital reconstruction that could reduce humanitarian needs. For the moment, however, these needs are more acute than ever for 16 million people, and yet eight agencies have so far received only just 18 per cent of the humanitarian appeal for 2025, which the COI's Chair qualifies as a **shame**.

In closing, Mr. Paulo Sérgio PINHEIRO emphasizes that the Syrian people continue to call for justice that restores their dignity after dictatorship and war, for a future built on rights, accountability and inclusion, rather than fear, oppression and violence. The COI calls on all states within the UNHRC to support their legitimate aspirations and to assist the interim Syrian authorities in building towards the future.

VIEWS EXPRESSED BY THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC AS CONCERNED COUNTRY

The delegation of the **Syrian Arab Republic** thanks the COI for its oral update and appreciate its balanced approach and efforts. The overthrow of the former regime constituted a historic milestone long awaited and struggled for by the Syrians. However, the government is fully aware that this does not mark the end of the journey, but rather the beginning of a demanding chapter, one replete with challenges, setbacks and even mistakes. Yet it is equally a chapter imbued with hope and a firm resolve to build, heal the scars of the past and move toward a brighter future.

While transitional phases inherently carry profound challenges and deeply rooted complexities in the case of Syria, they are more acute due to the **deep wounds and heavy legacy** left behind by the former regime. This is not to mention the many pressing and fundamental issues that cannot be postponed, chief among them transitional justice, the search of the missing, the return of refugees and IDPs, the restructuring of the security and military sectors and the lifting of sanctions. Therefore, any objective and balanced approach to the situation in Syria, including the painful and unacceptable events in the coastal region and in Suwayda, which should never have occurred, must take all the challenges and considerations into account.

This does not imply that the Syrian government is shirking its responsibilities. Quite the contrary, it has taken **immediate and serious measures** to investigate those events, hold those involved accountable and consolidate national reconciliation. Syria has taken an extraordinary step, not only by granting the COI unprecedented access, but also by providing it with full support and facilitation to investigate the events in the coastal area without any restrictions. The letter



addressed from Minister Asaad al-Shibani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, to the chair of the COI clearly outlined Syria's position on the COI's report. The government will continue to pursue its measures in this regard to ensure justice and address all the consequences of these events.

As part of the government's efforts to address the **tragic events in Suwayda**, a roadmap was developed with the support of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the United States of America. It is based on overcoming these events within the national framework and on the basis of respecting Syria's sovereignty and preserving the unity of its people and territory. The roadmap includes a series of practical steps, including that the government calls upon the COI to conduct an investigation into the events in Suwayda, and the government is committed to holding all perpetrators of violations accountable in accordance with Syrian law. As stated by Syria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, this initiative does not serve the interests of one party over another, but rather it is in the interest of all of Syria and for the good of all Syrians without exception.

Furthermore, **Syria condemns Israel's** blatant interference in its internal affairs under flimsy pretexts, as well as its violation of Syrian sovereignty and the disengagement agreement. Those who committed genocide against innocent civilians in Gaza, those who violate the sovereignty of countries in the region and occupy the lands of others, cannot intervene to protect anyone but only to sow and fuel division, chaos, and strife among its people of the same homeland. Israeli aggression did not begin with the events in Suwayda, nor were they a response to them but began decades ago and increased immediately after the fall of the former regime.

The Syrian government is continuing its **efforts to address the legacies** of the past, promote national reconciliation and civil space, and build a state founded on the rule of law and equal citizenship for all Syrians without exclusion or discrimination on any subnational basis. Building on previous measures, **parliamentary elections** will be held in the near future, followed by work on drafting a new constitution, thereby consolidating an inclusive approach and establishing a solid constitutional and legislative foundation. The Syrian government will continue its positive engagement with international human rights mechanisms, contributing to supporting national efforts and mechanisms.

Syria will insist on its full sovereignty and unity, and it categorically rejects any attempts for partition or federalisation. Syria seeks to be a source of stability, peace, and rapprochement, and to establish genuine and balanced economic and political partnership with all its countries based on common interests, mutual respect, and equal sovereignty. It hopes that all countries will support it in achieving all these goals and aspirations.