



United Nations Human Rights Council: 24th Session

Item 4: ID COI Syria: Oral Intervention

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

17 September, 2013

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Thank you, Mr. President

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and the five undersigned Syrian human rights organizations welcome the report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Republic.

The release of the report comes shortly after an unprecedented chemical assault was conducted on 21 August in the eastern outskirts of Damascus in “Al Ghouta”, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, including dozens of women and children. Evidence gathered by Syrian human rights organizations indicates that the Syrian government bears responsibility for this attack. Such a large-scale use of chemical lethal agents against a civilian-populated area undoubtedly constitutes a crime against humanity of the highest order.

However, the highly restricted focus of international debates on the use of chemical weapons in Syria risks obscuring the reality on the ground. This reality continues to be one of daily and almost unimaginable suffering for millions of Syrians, due primarily to a government that has resorted to waging war against its own citizens and an international community unwilling or unable to ensure a credible process of accountability for crimes against humanity, including indiscriminate shelling, summary executions, widespread torture, arbitrary detention, rape and enforced disappearances - all of which continue and must once again be brought to the center of this Council’s attention.

Tens of thousands of political prisoners, including human rights activists and lawyers, aid workers, journalists, and peaceful citizens are still routinely subjected to ill-treatment and torture in governmental detention facilities, such as the central prisons in Homs and Aleppo and all secret detention centers throughout Syria. The widespread use of sexual violence as a weapon of war to terrorize and punish women and their communities is one of the reasons millions have fled the country and sought refuge in exile or find themselves internally displaced.

Our organizations note that the report confirms the direct involvement of third parties supportive of the Syrian government as well as of foreign fighters such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant –ISIL – in crimes committed against the civilian population in Syria. All actors must be held accountable.

As renewed talks over a peace process in Syria approach, our organizations stress that achieving peace at the expense of justice would lead to further instability and violations in the region.

We repeat our call to this Council to lead efforts to overcome the deeply rooted impunity of perpetrators of international crimes in Syria by clearly and firmly calling upon the Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Thank you, Mr. President

Oral intervention submitted on 17 June to the HRC on behalf of:

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)

Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies (DCHRS)

Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)

Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)

Syrian Organization for Human Rights, “Sawasyah”

Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC)