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August 4, 2011

Dear Excellencies,

Priorities for IBSA delegation to Syria: Human Rights Protection

We welcome your governments' decision to send a joint delegation to Syria. This is an important initiative of the IBSA countries with the potential to help end the human rights violations against civilians in Syria. Our organizations and more than 412,000 members of Avaaz, the on-line campaign network, who signed a petition on Syria, are looking to IBSA to send a human rights delegation to Syria immediately to press for an end to the mounting toll of human rights abuses, including deaths, disappearances, torture and unlawful detention. We hope this delegation will fulfill the hopes of these citizens across the world.

The delegation comes at a critical time. Over 130 people are reported to have been killed across Syria since last Friday, 29 July 2011, bringing the total number of reported fatalities since mass protests began in mid-March to over 1,600 people. Many of them are reported to be protesters and local residents shot by live ammunition from the security forces and the army.

Thousands of others have been arrested in the wake of protests, with many being held incommunicado at unknown locations in conditions that amount to enforced disappearances and many reported to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated in custody, in some cases resulting in death. There is growing

evidence that crimes committed amount to crimes against humanity as they appear to be part of a widespread, as well as systematic, attack against the civilian population.

We believe it is essential, now the Security Council has finally spoken, that the delegation amplifies the message of the Council's Presidential Statement of August 3. Following on that statement, your discussions should of course center on urging the Syrian authorities to uphold their responsibility to protect and immediately cease the use of systematic violence against civilians. In particular, you should call on Syria to end the use of lethal violence and other excessive force against peaceful protesters, and respect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

We also ask that you prioritize access to Syria by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) mission. The Security Council statement explicitly called on Syria to "cooperate fully with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights." An independent investigation by OHCHR, as mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council, would constitute a crucial step in deterring crimes against humanity and establishing accountability for the violations committed by all parties in Syria. The government of Syria, however, has undermined the investigation by refusing the mission access to the country. We hope that you will urge the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully with the OHCHR mission and provide it immediate and unfettered access, especially to places of detention. It is also vital that you stress the importance of access for humanitarian missions, foreign journalists and independent human rights groups.

In addition, we hope that you will give high priority during your mission to seeking the release of political prisoners. Ending attacks on peaceful protesters and the release of political prisoners are necessary conditions for Syria's protesters to regain trust and enable a real dialogue in Syria between the authorities and protesters. Syrian authorities should be asked to immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons, and cease any reprisals, intimidation, persecution and arbitrary arrests of individuals, including lawyers, human rights defenders and journalists.

The achievement of expanded access to Syria, particularly for the OHCHR investigation, would be an important tangible success of the IBSA delegation. We very much hope that the IBSA mechanism will help end the atrocities in Syria, thereby contributing to establishing the effectiveness of efforts by your countries to uphold international peace and security.

If we can provide you with any more detailed information ahead of the delegation please let us know.

Sincerely

- Avaaz
- Amnesty International
- Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
- Human Rights Watch

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