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Arab League findings on Syria build pressure for UN action

Evidence of human rights violations documented by the Arab League's observer mission to Syria reinforces calls for the international community to address the worsening human rights and security situation in the country, Amnesty International said today.

The mission's observers have submitted a field report to the Arab League on the first four weeks of their work, in which they are reported to have cited clear evidence of human rights violations by the Syrian government that is consistent with Amnesty International's own findings. The full report has not been made public.

"The Arab League mission's report has bolstered the case that the international community must take strong action to end the grave human rights violations committed in Syria since last March," said Ann Harrison, Amnesty International's interim Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director.

"The arguments of countries that have blocked action on Syria at the UN Security Council sound increasingly hollow – the Security Council must now respond effectively by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court."

Among the ongoing human rights concerns cited by the Arab League observers were the Syrian security forces' excessive use of force against protesters, as well as continuing reports of torture of those in detention.

In a speech responding to the findings, Arab League Secretary General Nabil El Araby said the human rights violations by President Bashar al-Assad's government had led some members of the opposition to take up arms, leading to fears of a possible civil war.

The report cited some progress in granting limited media access and mentioned the release of some prisoners held in relation to widespread protests that began in March 2011.

The Arab League has reportedly obtained lists of those who were detained or disappeared, and is urging the government to release those still being held and clarify the status of those who have gone missing.

Amnesty International is calling on the Arab League to pass the full field report and lists of those detained and disappeared, along with any other documentation of human rights violations, to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which is due to report to the UN Human Rights Council in March.

"The true measure of the observer mission's success will be whether its findings can successfully spur the international community to address the serious ongoing human rights concerns in Syria," said Ann Harrison.

The Arab League also called on the Syrian authorities and the opposition to begin serious political

dialogue within two weeks on issues including the formation of a national unity government, restoring security and reorganising the police.

It also called for any such national unity government to establish an independent commission of inquiry to investigate violations against the Syrian people and ensure justice.

The Syrian authorities have rejected this proposal.

“Any political plan to end the violence in Syria must have clear mechanisms in place for accountability,” said Ann Harrison.