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## **Syria: Humanitarian access urged in Homs**

Humanitarian aid agencies must be allowed immediate and unhindered access to Homs and other affected areas, Amnesty International said today.

The Bab 'Amr district of the city has come under intensive shelling for more than 17 days, during which time Amnesty International has received the names of 465 people reported to have been killed in Homs.

"The accounts we are hearing from Homs are increasingly dire, with people lacking the most basic amenities," said Ann Harrison, interim Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme.

"The Syrian authorities must immediately cease this relentless bombardment and allow full, immediate and unhindered humanitarian access to affected areas.

Residents of Bab 'Amr have told Amnesty International that the shelling and exchanges of fire have destroyed the electricity and water networks, and there is little prospect of them being restored.

Because of the lack of electricity, residents are unable to refrigerate food, adding to already severe shortages of food, including babies' milk.

The area is also facing a critical shortage of medical supplies and medical personnel. Some of those who spoke to Amnesty International said that there was now only one doctor providing medical treatment in the makeshift clinic in Bab 'Amr.

### **"Friends of Syria" meeting**

Amnesty International called on the states attending today's "Friends of Syria" meeting in Tunis to put human rights at the centre of their discussions and to consider the full human rights implications of any proposals.

The organization also said that serious consideration should be given to the formation of a UN-led human rights monitoring mission to Syria, and called on UN member states to explore this possibility.

Following the Arab League monitors' withdrawal from Syria, violence has increased significantly.

Amnesty International said that as the situation in the country continued to deteriorate, Syria's neighbours had a responsibility to make it easier for Syrians to flee the violence, and remove any restrictions on their entry. Once there, they should ensure their protection, including that they are not in any way forced to return to Syria.

Many Syrians outside the country, including in neighbouring countries, have reported harassment from Syrian intelligence services.

Refugees in Jordan have also told Amnesty International researchers who visited the country last week that they generally receive only very limited treatment from Jordanian state medical facilities or from international medical organizations, despite often having serious injuries from bullets, shrapnel or torture.

“We look to all of Syria’s neighbours to provide an adequate standard of accommodation and medical care to the people who have been driven from their homes by the relentless violence,” said Ann Harrison.

“If it is needed, members of the international community should provide financial or material support to help these efforts.”

Amnesty International further called on all countries not to force any Syrian nationals to return to the country, given the significant deterioration in the political and human rights situation in recent months, and the continuing unpredictable nature of events on the ground.

### **Crimes against humanity**

Amnesty International has repeatedly called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court as well as for the imposition of a comprehensive arms embargo and an assets freeze on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and those close to him.

The UN Commission of Inquiry’s findings released on Wednesday, corroborates Amnesty International’s findings that widespread and systematic attacks on civilians amount to crimes against humanity and other gross human rights violations had taken place.

The findings showed that these violations had been carried out with the apparent knowledge and consent of commanding officers and senior members of the Syrian government.

Amnesty International said that the sealed list of names of those alleged to be responsible for crimes against humanity – which accompanied the findings – was a step in the direction of accountability and was yet more reason why the situation in Syria should be referred to the ICC.