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**UN Human Rights Council  
Thirty-Eighth session, 18 June – 6 July 2018**

**Item 4:  
Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry  
on the Syrian Arab Republic**

**US-led Coalition’s “War of Annihilation” in Raqqa: Time for Transparency and  
Accountability**

Mr. President,

Amnesty International welcomes the Commission of Inquiry’s update and shares its grave concerns regarding the ongoing human rights crisis in Syria.

Shortly before the start of the Global Coalition’s military operation to oust the armed group calling itself Islamic State (IS) from Raqqa in 2017, the US Defence Secretary called for a “War of Annihilation” against IS. Earlier this year, Amnesty International went to Raqqa to investigate the impact on civilians. It interviewed over 100 residents, and inspected 42 sites of Coalition strikes, before confirming findings with military experts and analysis of satellite imagery. The latest research built upon previous field research in north-eastern Syria conducted during the conflict last year.<sup>1</sup>

Amnesty International published its findings and recommendations in a recent report,<sup>2</sup> detailing the plight of four families trapped in the city during the military campaign. Each family lost multiple members – mainly women and children – to Coalition air strikes. In each case, Coalition planes struck buildings full of civilians – where no presence of IS fighters was reported (and where adequate surveillance should have revealed civilian presence). In four cases alone, Coalition strikes killed

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, Syria - “I Won’t Forget this Carnage’: Civilians Trapped in the Battle for Raqqa” MDE2469452917ENGLISH, 24 August 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/6945/2017/en/>.

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, “The War of Annihilation: Devastation Toll on Civilians, Raqqa - Syria” MDE2483672018ENGLISH, 5 June 2018 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/syria-raqqa-in-ruins-and-civilians-devastated-after-us-led-war-of-annihilation/>

70 civilians. Virtually every street in Raqqa suffered similar strikes. Hundreds of civilians were killed and thousands injured by Coalition strikes in Raqqa, in addition to those killed by IS mines and snipers.

Mr. President,

The Coalition continues to refuse to engage seriously on these issues. It claims to have killed 23 civilians during the entire Raqqa operation – while we documented one family alone that lost 39 members to a series of Coalition strikes. Underlying the disconnect is the Coalition’s flawed investigation procedures and lack of transparency. The Coalition dismisses almost all civilian casualty reports as “non-credible” but fails to publish relevant details. At no stage have Coalition personnel inspected strike sites or interviewed witnesses and survivors.

There is prima facie evidence that some Coalition strikes violated international humanitarian law. Instead of hiding behind vague language and flawed investigations, the Coalition must carry out proper investigations, publish relevant information and provide adequate reparation to victims. Having already suffered serious abuses and hardship under IS, this is the least that Raqqa’s civilian victims deserve.

Thank you, Mr. President.