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ORAL STATEMENT
ITEM 1: Urgent Debate on 25 March 2026

UN Human Rights Council
61st session
23 February - 31 March 2026

Mr. President,

As regional hostilities have escalated rapidly across the Middle East and threaten to escalate further, we reiterate our urgent call for all parties to protect civilians and adhere to international law. This includes ending unlawful attacks, such as deliberate, indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks that harm civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on parties to refrain from attacking critical civilian infrastructure, like desalination plants, that would have catastrophic cascading impacts.

Across the MENA region, civilians have been bearing the brunt of recurrent conflicts, mass violations of human rights and crimes under international law, all which are enabled by an endemic climate of impunity.

Civilians in Gulf countries, as well as those in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, should not be treated as pawns in political power plays. All parties must ensure civilians are protected at all times, and the Human Rights Council should ensure that it provides due attention to grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict and wherever they occur, and further calls for accountability and redress.

In the context of these conflicts, states must also respect other rights and freedoms: including freedom of expression and access to the internet, which enable both information sharing between people affected, for example where and when an attack occurred and whether you need to check in on loved ones, and facilitates the documentation of violations.

States should not use the ongoing armed conflict to intensify their crackdown on peaceful dissent, deepen discrimination, and commit patterns of crimes under international law. In Iran, prisoners including the thousands of arbitrarily detained protesters and other dissidents, are endangered by strikes by the USA and Israel, and by

the Iranian authorities, who continue to forcibly disappear, torture and arbitrarily execute prisoners as bombs fall.

Israel's unlawful occupation of the Palestinian territory and its system of apartheid continue to exact a cruel toll on Palestinians, who are grappling with the hardships caused by Israel's ongoing illegal blockade in the Gaza Strip and rampant state-backed settler violence and Israeli forces' brutality in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem.

It is the role of this Council to insist that respect for international law and tackling impunity must be the centrepiece of any genuine political resolution, and that holistic approaches to investigations, condemnations and accountability efforts, driven by the gravity of the harms done, rather than politics, are far more likely to breathe life back into the international legal system than piecemeal or one-sided approaches. This Council must champion a comprehensive and sustained strategy leveraging all tools and mandates available, such as: the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, treaty bodies, and the Human Rights Council mandates and processes.

Thank you.