



Syria: Oral intervention at the 22nd session of the UN Human Rights Council (25 February – 22 March 2013)

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Item 4: Human Rights situations that require the Council's attention

Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. President,

Following recent field research in Syria, Turkey and Lebanon, Amnesty International has also found increasing evidence that, war crimes and other serious human rights violations and abuses continue to be perpetrated with impunity. The vast majority have been committed by Syrian government forces and their allied militias, but numerous armed opposition groups have also increasingly been perpetrating abuses.

Serious violations of international humanitarian law are being committed by Syrian government forces on a large scale. These include frequent indiscriminate air strikes and other missile attacks on densely populated civilian neighbourhoods, often with internationally banned weapons such as cluster bombs. On 2 March 2013, an Amnesty International delegate arrived in the Masaken Hanano district of Aleppo shortly after the Syrian Air Force had dropped nine cluster bombs on a densely populated housing estate, killing some 19 and injuring more than 60 residents, including scores of children. The delegate investigated tens of air and artillery strikes, as well as attacks with long-range surface-to-surface missiles which killed and injured hundreds of residents and flattened entire neighbourhoods. Unlawful detentions, disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions of government opponents are widespread. Such attacks have caused millions of Syrians to flee their homes in search of safety.

Abuses by armed opposition groups often involve the abduction, torture and summary killing of members of government forces and state-armed militias and other persons accused of acting as informants for government forces. Amnesty International recently interviewed the family of Colonel Fou'ad 'Abd al-Rahman who was abducted on 16 August 2012. Although the family received a ransom demand the following day by persons claiming to be members of the armed opposition group 'Osood al-Tawhid battalion', in October 2012, their relative appeared on television in a video that showed him being beheaded and shot. At least one child appeared to be participating in the incident.

Thousands of refugees seek safety in neighbouring countries every day, placing considerable strain on the resources of those countries. For some Syrians and other nationals, including Palestinian refugees, it has not been possible to enter neighbouring countries. Tens of thousands of Syrians

are, for example, stranded in makeshift camps in northern Syria near the Turkish border. An Amnesty International delegate who recently visited them found the humanitarian conditions there to be dire.

Amnesty International hence urges this Council to call on the neighbouring countries to keep their borders fully open at all times for any person fleeing Syria to seek safety, and on the international community to significantly step up its support to Syrian refugees and the neighbouring countries which host them. No country must forcibly return any person to Syria as they would face a real risk of persecution or serious human rights abuses.

To ensure accountability for the grave violations currently taking place in Syria, we call upon the Council to urge the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Thank you Mr. President.