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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Joint written statement* submitted by the General Arab Women Federation, the Union of Arab Jurists, the Arab Lawyers Union, North-South XXI, the United Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation, the Indian Movement “*Tupaj Amaru*”, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 February 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human rights situation in Syria**

The continuous crisis in Syria is affecting all aspects of life. The process of reform and peace building is being rejected by the leaders of the uprising rather than engaging in it.

Media reports show mounting level of violence by both government forces and defected army units and armed gangs. The violence is taking a heavy toll, leaving hundreds of people dead, wounded and traumatized with dramatic effects particularly on women, children and innocent civilians. This must be stopped immediately.

From the start of the upheaval the Arab and Western media have played a partial role by agitating internal conflict, spreading disinformation mobilizing international pressure against the government and blocking all efforts for dialogue. All under the pretext of supporting the Syrian people, while making certain that such intervene from the outside is bound to lead to the destruction of Syria as a state. Iraq and Libya campaigns are still in the minds.

The undersigned organizations are deeply concerned about the criminal acts that are being carried out, such as bombing buildings, trains carrying fuel, vehicles carrying diesel oil, explosions targeting the police, members of the media, fuel pipelines, religious and educational centers, and destroying the country's infrastructure.¹

The Arab League Observers' Mission report, released in January 2012, has provided a different perspective from that of the mainstream Arab and Western media about what has been happening on the ground in Syria. The mission's report clearly indicates that Syria is under relentless military attack, and that the government did cooperate with the Observers Mission, has granted amnesties, and is trying to maintain stability and negotiate peacefully with those who want peaceful reforms.²

Unfortunately, that report is not being published by the Arab League which caused the leader of the observers mission to resign in protest especially when the Syrian matter was put before the UN Security Council without submitting that independent report. The withdrawal of the mission is without doubt politically motivated to enable the biased reporting to go unchecked.

According to the report of the Arab League Observers Mission the protest movement serves as a pretext and a justification for a military intervention against Syria, while the evidences confirm the existence of an armed insurgency carried out by terrorist groups. It has also been critical of the government handling of the insurgency and the use of excessive force.³

The pressure on the UN Security Council by western powers to issue a resolution for military and political action against Syria while claiming that they are acting at the request of the League of Arab States, to whom no mention or attention has ever been relied on for the last 70 years except in the recent case of Libya and now Syria. Such resolutions if made will be contrary to objectives and aims set out in the UN Charter, and Arab League Charter.

** The Arab Lawyers Association-UK, the Iraqi Commission on Human Rights (ICHR), Monitoring Net of Human Rights in Iraq (MHRI), the Asian Centre for Jurists and Accountability (ACJA), the Association of Iraqi Diplomats (AID), Association of Iraqi Intellectuals, Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRDI), Arab Lawyers Network, Studies Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (SCHRDI), NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

¹ the report of the Arab League Observers Mission, items 27 and 75

² *ibid*, items 17, 35, 37, 38, 40 and 73

³ *ibid*, in particular items 71, and 14, 26, 27

On the other hand, the economic sanctions issued by the Arab League, EU states the USA and accepted by some other countries are creating a humanitarian crisis similar to that experienced in Iraq. Such sanctions, punish the entire population particularly women and children.

Already in December 2011, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warned of the consequences of sanctions imposed on Syria making the lives of ordinary people difficult. The ICRC stated that “some factories and shops are closing down, and electricity cuts are not unusual. Many Syrians rely on daily wages. If these were not paid out, many people would find themselves in an even more difficult situation.”⁴

We wish to draw the attention of the Council to the fact that Syria is presently hosting of the largest urban refugee and asylum-seeker population in the world.⁵ 93% of those registered with UNHCR in Syria are from Iraq, estimated to be about one million. These refugees have been given free access to all basic services, including job opportunities, education and health care, which has had tremendous impact on the country’s economy and security.

Our appeal:

- We consider that all these criminal acts encouraged by external powers do not help to provide solution to the crisis. It is only by calming the western threats and pressures, stopping the armed insurgence, facilitating the process of the dialogue with all parties concerned and by giving a chance for the implementation of the planned reform. Encouraging the opposition to enter into dialogue is the less costly option in human terms.
- Considering that all UN member states should comply with binding resolutions and resolve conflicts by peaceful means, we call on the government of Syria to cooperate fully and guarantee full respect for the civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights for all its citizens. We call on all parties to cease the use of force and certainly to stop using heavy weapons, explosive devises on cities and towns.
- We call for the immediate lifting of all sanctions imposed on Syria since the beginning of the crisis, as they affect the lives of the Syrian people as a whole and are considered incompatible with the international instruments on human rights, especially with the para 2 of Article 1 of the two main human rights conventions the (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) which states that “All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.”
- We call on all parties to the conflict, and all concerned international bodies, to support a comprehensive process of national dialogue and reconciliation in Syria; developing mechanisms for the disarmament of armed groups, and stop arming, funding and training of these groups by some regional and western countries.
- We are appealing to all parties to take into account the suffering of all those refugees and asylum seekers, there should be no more suffering to be added in any way to those people.

⁴ “Syria: needs mounting rapidly” – ICRC Operational Update No 11/02 (29-12-2011)

⁵ UNHCR reports on Syria