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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Note verbale dated 23 May 2012 from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Further to its numerous notes verbales on the current situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and in the light of the reform process initiated by Syria in response to popular demand and to the development requirements of the State, the Mission has the honour to draw the attention of the President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Laura Dupuy Lasserre, to the People's Assembly (parliamentary) elections that were held in the Syrian Arab Republic on 7 May 2012, the results of which were announced on 15 May 2012. While the Syrian People's Assembly has a long history, dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, these elections were particularly important because they represented a new experiment for Syria. The Syrian Arab Republic should like to draw your attention to the details of this experiment.

1. The elections were held in the framework of the new Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic that was endorsed in a plebiscite held on 28 February 2012. Key amendments were made to the Constitution. What in the former text was article 8, concerning the role of the Baath party in the State and society, has been abrogated, but important articles have been added that take account of human rights reforms and the numerous international commitments that Syria has undertaken in the framework of the United Nations human rights system.

2. The elections were conducted in accordance with a new electoral law — Act No. 101 of 2011 — which was adopted following the promulgation of a new law on political parties in Syria (Act No. 100 of 2011) that establishes new, modern rules on the formation of political parties in Syria and the strengthening of democratic practice. In fact more than 18 political parties were authorized to participate in the elections, as compared with only 9 in past elections. In the new Political Parties Act account is taken of the evolution of electoral laws in the international arena and of international standards for gauging freedom of assembly.

3. Another law was needed to complete the electoral reform process and ensure that elections and State laws more generally are transparent and fair. Thus, a law was recently adopted establishing the Supreme Constitutional Court. To sum up, the recent parliamentary elections in Syria were held in the context of a new electoral process developed according to international standards. All sectors of society were afforded equal rights of representation, transparency and fairness were ensured, and the right to freedom of opinion, expression, assembly and party membership was granted to all in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and numerous Human Rights Council and General Assembly resolutions that Syria has endorsed and undertaken to implement.
4. A total of 5,186,957 Syrian citizens took part in the elections, accounting for 51.26 per cent of the electorate. Conducted in 15 electoral districts, the elections were fully free in every sense.
5. In the new People's Assembly, there are 250 seats, 30 of which were won by women. That is a good result, considering that the elections were held in circumstances that are unprecedented in Syrian history. However, efforts will continue to be made to increase the percentage of seats held by Syrian women so as to reflect the important role that women play in Syrian society and build on efforts to empower them politically and economically.
6. Several candidates and their agents objected to the handling of the voting at a number of polling stations, because the new electoral law was not being observed there. A fresh round of voting had to be organized in 18 polling stations, and this delayed the declaration of the results. This was the first time that such an exercise had been carried out at a polling station and it is proof that the electoral process was conducted according to democratic principles.
7. The results were announced on 15 May 2012 at a press conference attended by a large number of Syrian and foreign journalists.
8. The elections were conducted in accordance with a new set of laws enacted to satisfy public demand for comprehensive political, economic and social reforms in which human rights have top priority. However, some people did not want the process to succeed; they did not want to see Syria move forward and continue with the reforms. Instead, they wanted to impose retrograde, extremist, Salafist ideas on Syrian society so as to give themselves and their supporters a pretext for taking up arms, killing, abducting, torturing, and destroying the property of, Syrian citizens, and perpetrating human rights violations. Some armed terrorist groups attempted to disrupt the elections and refused to accept the results even before the elections had begun.
9. The Syrian people refused to be intimidated and embraced the reforms and the new democratic process. Given the prevailing situation in Syria, voter turnout was high.
10. The outcome of the elections and the stumbling blocks and obstacles encountered along the way made it a unique experience from which Syria can draw many useful lessons when it comes to instituting further reforms in the future. Syria has made a genuine, good-faith effort to proceed with the democratic reforms that the people want based on dialogue, which is, perhaps, the starting point for any change in Syria.
11. The Syrian Arab Republic wanted to share this information with the special procedures out of a genuine desire to pursue cooperation with international human rights mechanisms that are not biased or motivated by political considerations. It wishes to inform the special procedures about the reform and democratization process that Syria is pursuing, notwithstanding the great difficulties that it faces because of terrorism at home, a foreign embargo and a press that tells lies every day. At the time of writing, for example, television stations that persist in spinning lies about Syria are making claims, which are patently

untrue, about the fall of a large number of State officials. This simple example is an illustration of the completely false picture of Syria that these media outlets are attempting to convey, outlets that receive support, instructions and funding from States that are known to be hostile to Syria.

The Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva should be grateful if the present letter could be translated into the official languages of the United Nations and circulated as an official document of the Human Rights Council, at its twentieth session, under agenda item 4.

The Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic takes this opportunity to convey to the President of the Human Rights Council the assurances of its highest consideration.
