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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Public Organization "Public Advocacy", a non-governmental organization 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.

[30 May 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The six-year anniversary of the Abducted Bishops of Aleppo

We draw the attention of the UN Human Rights Council to the joint statement of the two Orthodox Patriarchs of the East, on the six-year anniversary of the abduction of bishops in Aleppo.

Beloved Brothers and Spiritual Children,

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

In anticipation of the renewed Holy Resurrection, we send you our Paschal greetings in the beginning of this Holy and Great Week. Today, which is the first day of our Great Week journey in both of our Churches, is the twenty-second of April. It marks the six year anniversary of the kidnapping of our brothers the bishops of Aleppo, Archbishop Youhanna Ibrahim and Metropolitan Paul Yazigi. This year, however, carries a special symbolic meaning. The bishops' kidnapping represents for us the beginning of the way of passion that discloses some of the sufferings the human being in this East, and Christians in particular, have gone through. Saying this, we do not despair, God forbid, but rather affirm that the way of passion ends with the dawning light of the Resurrection.

On this day, both bishops were kidnapped at the Syrian-Turkish border, while they were on their way back from Antioch. Since then, the analysis and investigation continue about this issue, and this is heavily burdening the situation of Eastern Christians. We have tried all available means to inquire, even looking at any thread that might uncover something related to their fate.

The dignity and destiny of both bishops are entirely the dignity and destiny of our Christian and Eastern people, who are now suffering from the devastating effects of war on their land, such as destruction, violence and kidnapping. The bishops' dignity is the dignity of this East, which is groaning under the influence of external and internal conflicts, and has so far paid the tax of terrorism and violence, in being displaced, kidnapped and murdered. Their dignity is the dignity of this East, which groans under false slogans, truth cover-up, and the often poisoning of the world opinion through media manipulation. We say all this out of bitterness resulting from our feeling of being ignored and disregarded. As we recall the bishops on this day, we also remember many people of this country, who have experienced the same destiny.

What is regrettable in the kidnapping case is the total blackout about it, the global lamentation and the apparent international inability to solve such a case. We thank all those who have joined us in prayer and supplication. However, we expect from those who are decision-makers, endowed by the major powers, international organizations, and governments and their agencies, to exercise pressure in order to reach closure, by revealing the fate of our two kidnapped brothers from many years. This blackout by the public opinion equals in bitterness the act of kidnapping itself, and equals the blackout that the kidnappers desire. Our human being is not cheaper than anyone else. Kidnapping is one aspect of terrorism. We have repeatedly warned against the use of terrorism as a bargaining tool, a religious commodity, and a fatal method to target states, create chaos, and sell weapons. As we say this, we draw attention to the fact that terrorism finds its initial root in ideological thought based on the abolition of the other. Also, the one who disassociates himself from every religion, whatever his religious claims are, is the most dangerous. What we are witnessing now is a fire spreading from one part of the earth to another, targeting and murdering Muslims, Christians and others alike. This is the result of what we have been cautioning about.

Last year, on the same day, we stressed certain principles, some of which we would like to reiterate again.

If the abduction of our bishops is meant to suggest that Christians are of a lower degree of citizenship, then from this podium, we definitely affirm that Christians in Syria and elsewhere are natives and fundamental components of these homelands.

If the abduction of our bishops is meant to intimidate the so-called minorities, our answer is clear: we reject the logic of minority and majority, since our fathers and children were, along with others, the pillars of the homeland and its army, and the partners in blood and martyrdom with all other components of this country, facing all who have tried to attack our countries.

If the kidnaping was intended to intimidate Christians in particular, and to induce them to emigrate, our answer is clear: The Christian presence that has lasted for 2,000 years old can not be shaken by an affliction, no matter how hard this affliction is. We are the make up of this land, its yeast, and have been planted here for two thousand years.

If the kidnaping is intended to feed sectarian strife and spread the spirit of takfirism towards the other, we see that these extremist ideologies are alien to our old and current Eastern civilization, and as Christians we see the other as the object of our love and piety towards God. We see in the other as the one through which we find divine mercies, and hope that the other looks at us in the same way.

If the kidnaping and disappearance of both bishops are meant to suggest that there is a conflict between Muslims and Christians in the East, and to put forward the claim that the East is Muslim and the West is Christian, we are here to affirm that Christianity was born in the East, and the last dreadful events did not spare a church or a mosque. The fire of terrorism did not spare a priest or a sheikh. The targeted victim behind all these atrocities is the human being living in the East.

As we say this, we insistently persist to make all necessary efforts in order to free them and reach closure of this case, bearing in mind that the Resurrection followed the Lord's Passion. We reaffirm that the Christians in this East, who have been crucified, perceive the radiance of the Resurrection. We are deeply rooted in this East, and remain steadfast in it through our good relationships with our Muslim brethren, and by being firmly established in the hope of the glorious Resurrection.

We implore Christ to remove the stone of distress from the hearts, and to soothe by His comforting consolation all suffering people. We send our Paschal greetings to our children in Aleppo, imploring God with them to grant the release of both bishops, and all those who are captives. We also pray with our abducted bishops and with all those who are suffering and heavy laden in this life, saying: *In our affliction and hardship, We worship Your Passion, O Christ. Show us also, Your glorious Resurrection.*

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

Damascus, April 22, 2019

Ignatius Aphrem II

Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church

John X

Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East”

On behalf of the human rights community and representatives of the civil society of the Republic of Syria, we ask the UN Human Rights Council to take into account the arguments contained in the statement and to promote the creation of an effective, permanent platform for inter-religious dialogue in the Republic of Syria with the participation of leading religious leaders of different religions.
