

Statement by the Deputy High Commissioner for the Human Rights Council Special Session on Syria

United Nations Human Rights- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 16th Special Session of the Human Rights Council on “The situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic”

29 April 2011

Madam Vice-President,
Distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council,
Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honoured and pleased to address the sixteenth Special Session on behalf of the High Commissioner, who is currently on an official mission to Mauritania. We welcome the convening of this Special Session, which demonstrates the Human Rights Council’s commitment to fulfilling its mandate to address urgent human rights concerns and situations.

Indeed the recent events in Syria warrant the Council’s urgent attention. Information gathered since mid-March paints a disturbing picture: the widespread use of live fire against protestors; the arrest, detention and disappearance of demonstrators, human rights defenders, and journalists; the torture and ill-treatment of detainees; the sharp repression of press freedoms and other means of communication; and attacks against medical personnel, facilities and patients.

Yet even these deplorable practices have been exceeded over the past week. According to reports, entire towns have been besieged. Tanks have been deployed and shelled densely-populated areas. The delivery of food has been impeded. Access to electricity has been cut. And transportation systems have been shut down. There have been reports of snipers firing on persons attempting to assist the injured or remove dead bodies from public areas.

We have noted with concern that military and security officers have been among those killed. Still, the preponderance of information emerging from Syria depicts a widespread, persistent and gross disregard for basic human rights by the Syrian military and security forces. Syrian and international human rights organizations have already documented more than 450 killings and around four times that number of injuries.(...)

(...)Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to recall that Syria is a State party to nearly all of the core international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Thus, Syria must ensure that the rights to life, liberty and security of person are protected in all circumstances, including in the context of efforts to maintain law and order. Let me also recall that Syria has a **responsibility to protect**

its population from crimes against humanity and other international crimes. In this context, I should like to underscore that any official ordering or undertaking of attacks against the civilian population can be held criminally accountable. Such attacks that occur on a widespread or systematic basis may amount to crimes against humanity.

It is against this backdrop that the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner have repeatedly called on the Government of Syria to halt violence against protestors; to immediately engage in a broad, inclusive, and constructive dialogue regarding their legitimate desire for increased respect for their human rights; to open a full, independent investigation into credible allegations of violations; and to take action to ensure that perpetrators of violations are brought to justice. Earlier this week, the Secretary-General further stated, and I quote: “I condemn, utterly, the continuing violence against peaceful demonstrators, most particularly the use of tanks and live fire that have killed and injured hundreds of people.” Under these circumstances, the High Commissioner has already started discussions with the authorities about the deployment of a mission to assess the human rights situation in Syria. (...)

See

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