

Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay at the Human Rights Council 18th Special Session to examine the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic

Geneva, 2 December 2011

"The violent crackdown against peaceful protesters and civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic has continued unabated since I last reported to this Council on 22 August 2011. Since March of this year, more than 4,000 people have reportedly been killed. Tens of thousands have been arrested. And more than 14,000 are reported to be in detention as a result of the crackdown. At least 12,400 have sought refuge in neighbouring countries and tens of thousands have been internally displaced. Reports of increased armed attacks by the opposition forces, including the so-called Free Syrian Army, against the Syrian military and security apparatus are also of concern.

Allow me to recall that the Human Rights Council in its seventeenth special session on 23 August 2011 decided to establish an Independent International Commission of Inquiry to investigate all violations of human rights in Syria since mid-March 2011. The Commission's report, released on Monday, concludes that Syrian security and military forces have committed crimes against humanity against the civilian population. These include acts of killings, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, imprisonment, or other forms of severe deprivation of liberty and enforced disappearances throughout the country since March of this year.

The Commission's report documents widespread, systematic and gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by Syrian authorities by acts such as: killing of children by beating or shooting during demonstrations, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment. It records at least 256 deaths of children – I understand since increased to 307 children - and instances of schools being used as detention facilities, demonstrating the State's disregard for children's right to education and personal safety. The Commission collected evidence of sexual violence against civilians, especially sexual torture of male detainees and children and sexual assaults upon women in places of detention.

The Commission's report further concludes that the sheer scale and consistent pattern of attacks by military and security forces on civilians and the widespread destruction of property indicates authorization or knowledge of the Syrian Government.

I welcome the report of the Commission and thank the Commissioners for their thorough investigation, despite being denied access into the country. The Commission was able to gather numerous, consistent, and credible first-hand accounts of gross human rights violations and the authorities' complicity in those violations. It interviewed 223 victims and witnesses, including military and security forces who had defected and testified to the role of Syrian forces in the use of lethal violence against peaceful protests.

The Syrian authorities' continual ruthless repression, if not stopped now, can drive the country into a full-fledged civil war. In light of the manifest failure of the Syrian authorities to protect their citizens, the international community needs to take urgent and effective measures to protect the Syrian people. The United Nations Secretary-General has urged the international community to act as one and take action in a collective and decisive manner to protect the Syrian people against the violations of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. All acts of murder, torture and other forms of violence must be stopped immediately. All prisoners of conscience and those arbitrarily detained must be released and acts of reprisal against human rights defenders must end. International and independent monitoring bodies, including my Office and

the League of Arab States, must be allowed into the country, particularly to all places of detention. All humanitarian actors must be guaranteed immediate and unhindered access to the country. The Commission of Inquiry should equally be given access to enable it to carry out its mandated investigation with the view to updating its report for the March session of the Council.

I wish to conclude by recalling that in August, the OHCHR Fact-Finding mission mandated by this Council to ensure full accountability concluded that crimes against humanity may have been committed in Syria. At that time, I encouraged the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. The Commission's report reinforces that the need for international accountability has even greater urgency today.

See the [statement](#)