



Portfolio sample by Stacy Dry Lara

Interactive Dialogue With the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria September 19, 2014

On September 16 at HRC27 was an interactive dialogue with the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria. So, you may ask...what is the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic? I will be brief with my explanation about the Commission yet, let me stress, even the most basic understanding of the Commission's mandate will add meaning to the report and dialog that took place this week at HRC27.

The Commission was established in August 2011 by the Human Rights Council with a mandate to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011 in the Syrian Arab Republic. Due to its importance and findings, the mandate has been extended several times. Since the beginning of its work, the Commission has presented four reports, plus four periodic updates exposing human rights violation committed throughout Syria based on interviews with over 1,400 witnesses and victims predominantly in camps and hospitals in countries neighboring Syria. Skype and telephone interviews have been conducted with victims and witnesses inside Syria.

The Commission also reviews photographs, video recordings, satellite imagery, forensic and medical, reports from Governments and non-Governmental sources, academic analyses and United Nations reports. To make a finding, the Commission requires that incidents be corroborated to a level where the Commission had 'reasonable grounds to believe' that the incidents occurred as described.

Since the unrest began in March 2011, hundreds of thousands of persons have been displaced from their homes with four million people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The Syrian government has yet to allow the Commission to undertake investigations inside the country.

Mr. Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria, said during the interactive dialog opening statement that the war worsened every day and that he had run out of words to depict the gravity of the crimes committed inside Syria. He went on to say that the Commission continues to listen to and record the anguish of Syrian women, men and children whose voices shined a piercing light upon the brutal crimes being committed daily. With frustration, Mr. Pinheiro told the assembly that the Commission had implored the parties and influential States to forge a peaceful settlement, and asked the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, but had been faced with inaction which had allowed the warring parties to operate with impunity and nourished the violence that had consumed Syria.

Syria, speaking as the concerned country, said that once again the report of the Commission was politicized and unprofessional. It had turned a blind eye to the daily suffering of thousands of Syrians because of armed groups. If one persisted in this selective approach, it would be difficult to arrive at credible conclusions. One should accept the fact that the fight against terrorism was the only way to bring about reconciliation. Syria reaffirmed its rejection of reports and conclusions coming from the Commission of Inquiry.

In the discussion that followed, speakers expressed deep concern about the expansion of the war zone and the "appalling" increase flow of arms. Speakers voiced alarm over the growing number of victims

and the gravity of violations and crimes. Speakers strongly condemned the continuation of targeting of civilians and civilian targets and the use of chlorine, and called on the international community to ask for accountability for the authors of those crimes. Concerns over the vital need to cease all hostilities, to interrupt the provision of arms to all parties, and to provide timely and sufficient humanitarian assistance to the victims were expressed. The Syrian authorities were called upon to grant the Commission immediate and unrestricted access to the country.

Following are full reports as they were presented at the Interactive Dialog:

Introduction of Report by Mr. Pinheiro, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria

Statement by the Concerned Country

Interactive Dialogue from Member States with the Commission

Statements by non-governmental organizations who took the floor including the Cairo Institute to Human Rights Studies, Press Emblem Campaign, International Federation for Human Rights Leagues, United Nations Watch, Sudwind and Syriac Universal Alliance.

PAULO SERGIO PINHEIRO, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, presenting the report said that the war worsened every day and that he had run out of words to depict the gravity of the crimes committed inside Syria. The Commission continued to listen to and record the anguish of Syrian women, men and children whose voices shined a piercing light upon the brutal crimes being committed daily. The Commission was releasing redacted testimonies of those who had suffered egregious violations of international law. In the last two months, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had continued to brutally and publicly execute civilians, captured rebel fighters and Government soldiers. ISIS had been declared a terrorist group by Security Council Resolution 2170 in August 2014. ISIS had committed massacres, including the killing of civilians at the Al-Shaar gas fields in eastern Homs, execution of hundreds of captured Government soldiers in Ar-Raqqah, killed hundreds of people from the Al-Sheitat clan in Dayr Azerbaijan-Zawr and publicly executed two journalists, aid worker and scores of Syrians in public squares in the north and east of the country. Women had been banned from public life, education for girls was curtailed and early marriage was on the rise. ISIS had prioritised indoctrination of children who were deliberately exposed to violence and encouraged to attend executions, trained in the use of weaponry and used to participate in hostilities.

Anti-Government armed groups continued to commit crimes with no regard to international law and in the last two months had launched attacks on villages in Hama and Al-Suweida, killing men, women and children, while Jabhat Al-Nusra had also been labelled a terrorist group by Resolution 2170. ISIS and the anti-Government armed groups were not the only agents of death in Syria and the Syrian Government remained responsible for the majority of the civilian casualties, killing and maiming scores of civilians daily. Checkpoints were often the starting point of a horrific journey of disappearance, torture, sexual abuse and for many, death. They were used to enforce sieges and to trap civilians in areas under indiscriminate bombardment. For many years, the Government had overseen the system of widespread torture in its detention facilities and many detainees in Syrian prisons had died; those deaths occurred behind locked doors and were deliberately shrouded in official silence. They were hidden but they were real and they continued to occur with impunity. The Government was maintaining sieges of civilian-

inhabitant areas of Al-Ghouta area of Rif Damascus and Yarmouk camp in Damascus city had been besieged for over 400 days.

The Commission had implored the parties and influential States to forge a peaceful settlement, asked the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, but had been faced with inaction which had allowed the warring parties to operate with impunity and nourished the violence that had consumed Syria; its most recent beneficiary was ISIS. In failing to search for peace, Syria had been moved further into a war that had spilled over into Lebanon and Iraq and was threatening the entire region and beyond. The Syrian conflict would not be resolved on the battlefield; it was now at a critical moment, with the rise of ISIS emphasising the need for the Government and the opposition to find common ground and commit to making compromises needed to reach a comprehensive political settlement. In closing, Mr. Pinheiro said that he no longer had faith that enumerating the thousands of dead and displaced would provoke the international community to act; he asked the States to read instead the stories of the victims, who only wanted to return to what was left of their lives, in peace, in their country.

Statement by the Concerned Country

Syria, speaking as the concerned country, said that once again the report of the Commission was politicized and unprofessional because it persisted on an erroneous basis, working with unbelievable testimonies and interviews held outside Syria with persons hostile to Syria, turning a blind eye to the daily suffering of thousands of Syrians because of armed groups. All this had led to biased accusations against the Government of Syria of violating human rights. If one persisted in this selective approach, it would be difficult to arrive at credible conclusions. Ignoring the work of other terrorist groups was not an objective method. What about the silence over the States that were supporting terrorists in Syria? One should accept the fact that the fight against terrorism was the only way to bring about reconciliation. The World Food Programme had provided food assistance to more than 4.1 million Syrians thanks to the facilitation of the Syrian authorities. It was strange to note that the report turned a blind eye to the consequences of economic coercive measures on the situation of Syrians. Syria reaffirmed its rejection of reports and conclusions coming from the Commission of Inquiry.

Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria

Poland said the scale and cruelty of abuses committed in Syria was indeed appalling. A spiral of violence was being witnessed that affected regional stability and, potentially, international peace. The international community could not turn a blind eye to the mass atrocities committed by combatting parties in Syria. European Union said the situation in Syria was resulting in an ever increasing number of deaths, serious injuries and all kinds of inhuman and degrading treatment. How could the Council further support the mandate of the Commission, in particular in fighting impunity and ensuring accountability for all violations and abuses committed by parties to the conflict? Jordan reiterated the urgency of immediately putting an end to the violence and finding a political solution to the crisis that would end the suffering and bloodshed of the Syrian people. Jordan was shouldering great burdens as a result of the crisis, through the presence of 650,000 refugees on its territory.

Russian Federation said that the work of the international community together with Damascus had managed to accomplish improvements, including in terms of humanitarian access. The Russian Federation welcomed progress made to destroy chemical weapons. The real threat to Syria was these terrorist groups. There was a need to consolidate the international community's efforts to combat

terrorism and the initiative by France to hold on conference on how to address the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant was therefore welcomed. United States condemned the violations by Syrian forces and affiliated groups as well as atrocities committed by ISIL. The Syrian regime was responsible for numerous gross violations, including torture, executions, sexual violence and arbitrary detentions of activists and human rights defenders. Some 85,000 persons had reportedly been disappeared. The United States called for the release of activists abducted by the Syrian authorities and armed groups. Morocco was deeply concerned about human rights violations in Syria, including torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities. Morocco also condemned attacks on health personnel as well as the use of chemical weapons. Morocco called for free and unhindered humanitarian access to assist the victims. Morocco finally demanded that the international community work on identifying an end to the conflict with the involvement of all parties.

Tunisia condemned the growing number of victims and the gravity of violations and crimes and reiterated its deep concern about the expansion of the war zone and the increase in the flow of arms which contributed to the continuation of the war. Austria said that the work of the Commission of Inquiry on accountability represented one of the most important contributions of this Council to protect human rights. The findings of the report were deeply troubling, including the regime of terror by ISIL, public executions, the fate of persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities and the spread of extremism. Austria asked the Commission about the possibilities to stop and revert this appalling trend. United Kingdom remained deeply concerned about torture in detention by Assad's forces and the tens of thousands of persons subjected to unimaginable suffering. The United Kingdom was intensifying its efforts on accountability, funding the investigation of atrocities, looking to add individuals responsible for war crimes to the African Union sanctions list and working to build the support for the referral to the International Criminal Court. Algeria had constantly called for an end to bloodletting and called again on the warring parties to promote dialogue and engage in negotiations towards a political solution that would take into account the legitimate interests of all Syrians. Israel said the cruelty and inhumanity of ISIS had been incomparable and was shocked by findings of the report showing the Government forces using chemical agents and sometimes deliberately targeting civilian gatherings.

Italy said it was with deep frustration that it participated in another debate on the Syrian crisis. There was no point in reiterating the main findings of the Commission. They all knew what steps were necessary to put an end to this bloodshed. All those responsible for atrocities perpetrated would be held accountable. Egypt said that it had followed with growing concern the deterioration of the situation in Syria. It condemned using civilians as targets of violence and condemned other violations of human rights. All parties were called upon to listen to the calls of the Syrian people and to stop the ever-expanding violence of the conflict. United Arab Emirates said that despite several international resolutions designed to put an end to the violence, the Syrian regime was continuing with the massacres. The use of chlorine, a prohibited product, had occurred against civilians. The international community was called upon to ask for accountability for the authors of those crimes.

Turkey said that developments in Iraq underlined the need to develop a more holistic approach and a comprehensive strategy in confronting the pressing challenges in Syria. Unless the international community took resolute action, the region could be driven into a wider sectarian conflict. Brazil said the dramatic situation in Syria had profound consequences for the stability of the region which were by no means unpredictable when hostilities erupted in March 2011. There was an imperative need to cease all hostilities, to interrupt the provision of arms to all parties, and to provide timely and sufficient humanitarian assistance to the victims. Qatar strongly condemned the continuation of attacks against civilians and civilian targets. It also condemned the use of chlorine in contradiction of relevant

resolutions, as well as barrel bombs. The authorities continued their policies of massacres, torture and abductions. The international community was called upon to act urgently.

Bahrain paid tribute to the work of the Commission and deplored that it was not allowed to enter the Syrian territory. Bahrain condemned the heinous and barbaric crimes committed in Syria in violation of international humanitarian law. The international community had to take action, and perpetrators of these crimes had to be held accountable. Bahrain was also concerned about the rise of extremist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Netherlands said that the events in Syria amounted to the most dramatic situation in recent history, and expressed concern about the continued rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The Netherlands urged both the regime and non-State armed groups to uphold their obligation to protect civilians and comply with humanitarian law, underlined that women and children were the most vulnerable victims of this conflict, and called for unhindered humanitarian access. China condemned all violence against civilians in Syria, including by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other terrorist organizations. The resolution of the conflict had to be political and inclusive, and was in the hands of the Syrian people. It was worth noting that terrorism constituted a real threat to Syria and neighbourhood countries. China called on all parties to implement the Security Council resolutions on Syria, including providing humanitarian assistance with respect to Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

France was concerned regarding impunity of the Syrian regime and other groups responsible for human rights and humanitarian law violations. France was deeply worried about the threat constituted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. France was also concerned about the systematic use of torture in detention facilities by the Syrian authorities. France would support all efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in accordance with the Geneva discussions. Slovakia regretted that the Commission of Inquiry had not been allowed to access Syrian territory, and strongly condemned crimes against humanity and war crimes by Syrian authorities and armed groups. Slovakia insisted on the necessity to end impunity, and expressed concerns that persons belonging to minorities had become targets of extremists. Belgium was alarmed by the devastating toll on the war on children's lives, and noted that the conflict in Syria had had dramatic impact on women and children. Belgium was concerned that THE Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant had established camps to recruit child soldiers, and remained concerned about the disregard for the special protection to be accorded to hospitals and medical workers.

Germany was deeply concerned about findings that the Syrian military had repeatedly used chlorine gas, which was a war crime. Germany also raised grave concerns about the recruitment of children as soldiers, mounting evidence of widespread systematic torture in Government detention facilities, continued indiscriminate shelling of civilians. including by the terrorism group ISIS, sexual violence in conflict and sieges on residential areas; the use of starvation as a method of conflict was a grave war violation. Portugal said the Commission of Inquiry continued to bring to the Council evidence of massacres of civilians, including women and children, which may amount to crimes against humanity. Those responsible must be held accountable by the International Criminal Court. It also expressed serious concern about the spill-over effects of the Syrian crisis into the region.

Venezuela said those who exercised violence in Syria had been trained by foreign powers intent on overthrowing the Government. It deplored the ongoing media manipulation of what was really happening in the country. It recognized the significant democratic reforms and will demonstrated by the Syrian Government which had received renewed legitimacy from the overwhelming majority of the people in recent free and transparent elections. Democratic People's Republic of Korea said the United

States and western countries were responsible for systematic and severe human rights violations in the occupied Golan Heights and the bloody crisis in Syria, due to the terrorist attacks by anti-Government forces. Any unjustifiable interference, including the use of armed force, would not be tolerated under any circumstances as it infringed upon the sovereignty of Syria.

New Zealand registered its deep concern at the continuing widespread violence in Syria, the multiple and shifting nature of the conflict and the increased incidents of brutality and human rights. July was Syria's bloodiest month yet, with 6,000 deaths. New Zealand contributed to the humanitarian effort, but was deeply aware that a much deeper political settlement was required. Ecuador said hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians were affected by the conflict in Syria. It welcomed the destruction of the Syrian Government's chemical weapons stock. The West and its allies had not taken into account the offer of the Syrian Government to act jointly against the terrorist group ISIS and its associates. The Commission had deliberately ignored the electoral process in Syria.

PAULO PIHNEIRO, Chair of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria, responding to some questions, said that the Commission and the team were at the disposal of the Syrian delegation for a presentation on the Commission's methodology, and its way of collecting information. It objectively applied international law to all parties and did not have any preference for the Government or non-State armed groups. Yes, it had analysis in the report about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and also Al Nusra. Violations by ISIS had been documented and the Commission would continue to do so. There was concern about the fate of those detained during the ceasefire in Homs but it was emphasized that there was no specific information about those persons. The Commission also asked States to share information regarding nationals that travelled to Syria to join ISIS or other armed groups. Only a political solution could stem the continued rise in extremism. States were urged to cease sending weapons and investigate funders of these groups. It was hoped that there would be an end to the current particular deadlock despite the unpredictable nature of current developments. The international community and influential actors were asked to help with the resumption of the political process and to urge the Council to help with regards to access to the territory.

Australia said that the parties to this conflict had flagrantly abused the human rights of Syrians for years, creating the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today. The latest report documented a whole new level of brutality perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. It underlined the necessity that the situation in Syria be referred to the International Criminal Court. Bulgaria urged parties to the conflict and in particular the regime in Damascus to implement fully United Nations Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2165 on the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria. Bulgaria was worried about the spill over effect of the Syrian crisis over the region. There would be no lasting peace in Syria without justice. Japan found it unfortunate that the Government of Syria continued to be uncooperative with the Commission and urged it do so, including by granting access to the country. Japan was deeply concerned about the grave human rights violations and abuses as well as violations of relevant international law being committed by all parties to the conflict.

Cuba reiterated its vocation to peace and respect of principles inscribed in the United Nations Charter, international law and particularly international human rights law. Cuba firmly condemned the loss of thousands of lives during the conflict. It did not agree that deaths in this conflict be attributed, in a manipulated way, to only one party. Republic of Korea said that the indiscriminate attacks against civilians, widespread torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence in detention centres as well as enforced disappearances and recruiting and use of children in hostilities were being rampantly perpetrated. Those who committed these crimes should be held accountable. Thailand was appalled by the violation

of children's rights and the rights of other vulnerable groups and by the indiscriminate attacks against civilians, journalists, humanitarian workers and medical staff. In particular, it condemned the brutal acts of violence against innocent civilians committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Kuwait called for the cessation of aggression against civilian populations in Syria, and to allow them to leave, and cautioned against the repercussions of the fighting which could affect the security of the whole region. Kuwait was attached to humanitarian diplomacy and had hosted two fundraising conferences to that end; it had paid all of its pledges. It thanked other contributors and called on other States to also support, especially with the onset of winter. Norway recalled that the Security Council resolutions on Syria underlined that the primary responsibility to protect the Syrian population lay with the Syrian authorities. The Syrian Government had manifestly failed to fulfil that responsibility to its own citizens, as seen by the continued targeting of health facilities, health workers, schools and other civilian infrastructure by the military, and the use of indiscriminate barrel bombs as well as cluster munitions.

Liechtenstein called on all parties to end all restrictions on humanitarian access and in particular for full implementation of Security Council resolution 2165. Regarding accountability, it regretted the vetoes cast in the Security Council last year against referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court in the face of overwhelming support for such a referral in the Council itself. Switzerland encouraged the Council to adopt a resolution on Syria which would end the continuing impunity for crimes committed by referring the situation to the International Criminal Court. Switzerland called on all parties to the conflict to protect civilian populations and allow rapid humanitarian access to those in need in combat zones. It asked the Commission how the international community could protect children in Syria.

Ireland said the reported atrocities - 200,000 deaths and three million refugees - were a chilling record of the barbaric inhumanity and destruction of Syria perpetrated since the outbreak of the conflict. Ireland welcomed the recent appointment of United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and called on all States to support his work in seeking to renew negotiations based on the June 2012 Geneva communique which remained the only viable means to end the conflict in Syria. Canada said regime forces had committed numerous attacks against civilians and was particularly concerned by reports of chemical arms used by regime helicopters in April last year. Canada deplored the use of children in conflict and the use of sexual violence. What could be done to minimize the spread of the threat of violence from Syria to countries such as Iraq?

Czech Republic called upon the Syrian authorities to grant the Commission immediate and unrestricted access to the country. It strongly condemned the extensive and systematic attacks against civilians, women and children as well as against ethnic, religious and other vulnerable groups, including the Christian communities. Iceland called for the implementation of the report's recommendations without delay, including referral to the International Criminal Court by the Security Council. No child should be deprived of its innocence, let alone in such a horrific and prolonged manner. The Commission was also urged to continue documenting cases of sexual and gender-based violence. Malaysia was deeply saddened that the situation continued to worsen, leaving the country in a fragile situation and threatening the stability of the region. Millions were displaced and deprived of their human rights. Acts of terrorism had further exacerbated the already dire situation. All methods and practices of terrorism were once again condemned by Malaysia.

Greece said that despite recent steps taken in the right direction, humanitarian access was still highly problematic. The issue should also be dealt with effectively and as a matter of priority in an effort to

reduce the death toll, treat the injured and combat starvation. Greece expressed deep concern at the spread of extremism and the absence of protection of the rights of the civilian population. Romania deplored the immense suffering of the civilian population in Syria and regretted that extremism had risen to such appalling levels that barbaric crimes were witnessed in many parts of Syria, especially the territories occupied by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Terror and dramatic scenes that the world had thought would never be seen again had become a daily reality. Sudan expressed serious concern at the increasing violence and the suffering of the Syrian population in light of this violence. Sudan stated that violence was not a way to find a satisfying solution and the international community was urged to seriously continue efforts aimed at finding a peaceful solution and to re-establish peace and stability in Syria.

Estonia said continuing incidents of war crimes and crimes against humanity by both Government forces and non-State armed groups indicated that the culture of impunity was being fostered uninterrupted in Syria. That could not be tolerated, and Estonia supported the Commission's recommendation to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Estonia said it was especially worried about the impact of the war on children. Sovereign Military Order of Malta condemned the ongoing human rights violations in Syria, and called for an end to the violence. The Sovereign Military Order of Malta said the human rights of Syrians, including the right to religious freedom and freedom from violence and torture, should be guaranteed. Chile condemned the conflict in Syria and emphasized the urgency to stem the conflict in all forms, including sexual violence against women, arbitrary arrests and other horrific acts, and attacks against schools and hospitals. In particular, it condemned the attacks against humanitarian workers which represented a serious breach of international humanitarian law.

Iraq said the report of the Commission showed blood was still flowing through Syria. Half of the civilian population were now either refugees or internally displaced persons. Iraq was a victim of the Syrian conflict, and with no signs of a military settlement, the country was on its knees. Iraq appealed to the international community to come to the aid of the Syrian people to ensure the deaths came to an end. Iran said it shared the Commission of Inquiry's view that the only solution to the crisis was a political solution. Acts of terrorism by terrorist armed groups alongside extremism and sectarianism were not only aimed against the country but also targeted the entire region. Regarding the recent spread of so-called ISIS across the border, Iran said it supported Russia's idea that a separate report be provided on crimes committed by ISIS and other terrorist groups in Syria. Denmark expressed serious concern about the extent of abuses uncovered by the Commission regarding enforced disappearances and torture. Such acts continued to be committed throughout Syria to repress and silence people and foster a climate of fear and intimidation. Denmark was especially appalled by the rise in reports of torture inflicted by ISIL on civilian populations in areas under its control.

Botswana said that women and children continued to bear the brunt of the conflict as sexual violence continued to be used as an instrument of war and children across Syria could not continue education as schools had been converted into military installations, while many children had been recruited into armed forces. Saudi Arabia voiced deep concern at the deterioration of the situation in Syria following the conduct of the illegitimate Government which continued to kill its own citizens and commit crimes including the use of chemical weapons. Despite having access to the field denied, the Commission of Inquiry continued to provide independent and impartial reports on the situation in Syria, said Spain who expressed alarm over the growing number of victims in this country and asked the Commission about the most important recommendations it would give to the international community. The rights of the Syrians were not being protected in this war and its spreading into the region was of utmost concern, Maldives said and expressed regret that, despite the 200,000 killed and 3 million displaced, weapons of

war continued to be supplied to both sides.

Cairo Institute to Human Rights Studies said that half of the population was affected by the conflict and stressed the important work of human rights defenders and peaceful activists who suffered torture, killings and detention. Press Emblem Campaign said that more than 60 media workers had been killed in Syria since the beginning of the civil war and underlined that all parties were responsible for arbitrary arrests, abduction, kidnapping, torture and extra-judicial killings, and called on the Commission to continue to investigate the fate of Mazen Darwish, Director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, arrested in 2012.

International Federation for Human Rights Leagues said that acts perpetrated by all parties amounted to crimes against humanity and war crimes. The International Criminal Court was the most legitimate institution to ensure accountability for those crimes. Civilians were the powerless victims of the conflict. Among them, peaceful activists and human rights defenders continued to suffer tremendously, including from arbitrary detentions. United Nations Watch said Syria was the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today, and regretted that the United Nations stopped updating its lists of victims. Syria had stated repeatedly that the primary human rights issue in the world was the Palestinians. But the Syrian regime was responsible for the death of countless Palestinians. Sudwind was concerned about the high number of civilian casualties in Syria and the security situation for Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. The recognition of recent Syrian elections by some States such as Iran had worsened the situation in the country. Syriac Universal Alliance said that the Commission was biased and politicized, and applauded the Syrian army's good reputation. It called on the Council to respect Syria's sovereignty and respect the free and fair elections that took place there.

PAOLO PINHEIRO, Chairperson of the Independent and International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, answering questions from States and non-governmental organizations, said the priority of the international community was a political solution, which with the rising threat of so-called armed group ISIS was more urgent than ever. The parties in Syria must come to the negotiating table based on the Geneva communiqué. There was no other solution, he emphasized. Mr. Pinheiro urged States to push for accountability. Syrian women must play a bigger role in the political solution to the conflict; they suffered hugely and their voice and experience must be properly represented at the negotiating table. In response to a question about the protection of Syrian children, Mr. Pinheiro said the Commission had documented the military use of children by both the Government and non-state armed groups such as the so-called ISIS, which prioritized the indoctrination of children. The only exception was the opposition group IPG, which this summer had pledged not to use child soldiers and had demobilized children from its ranks.

Responding to other questions posed during the dialogue, Mr. Pinheiro said the Commission was ready to work closely with the High Commissioner's mission to Iraq to shed light on the violations committed by so-called ISIS in Syria. All parties were violating international law, he confirmed; the Government committed war crimes, anti-Government armed groups committed war crimes, and so-called ISIS committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. Answering a question on the best way to fight ISIS, Mr. Pinheiro replied that the Commission did not advise States on the best ways to fight and reiterated that all parties must respect the laws of war. He also said that today Syria was probably the most dangerous country in the world for journalists and human rights defenders, and the Commission's next report would focus on attacks against them.

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