

# WILPF ANALYSIS

Tying Language to Changing Realities:  
Analysing the Discourse of the  
International Community

---

Sarah Boukhary

---

23 June 2015

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR  
**PEACE & FREEDOM**



## **Not ‘Women’, but ‘Women *and* Children’:**

### **The International Community Burying the Agency of Syrian Women**

#### **Background**

The Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, delivered a statement at the Human Rights Council on June 23, 2015, as an oral update on the work of the commission (You can watch the [full session](#) here). The commission’s main objective is to examine the impact of the destructive war in Syria on civilians. Mr. Pinheiro, in his speech, stated that the commission documented numerous types of violations in Syria that include, but are not limited to, deliberate and disproportionate aerial attacks on civilians and whole areas, indiscriminate targeting of specifically protected objects such as hospitals, unlawful killings, torture, sexual violence, and enforced disappearances. Other serious and alarming repercussions of the conflict also include “a profound failure of diplomacy” and the internationalisation of the conflict, since many foreign states have not stopped supporting warring parties by the transfer of money and weaponry.

## Introduction

Following Pinheiro's speech, Member States of the Council have each given oral interventions (list at the end of the document), tackling different issues ranging from politics to human rights in conflicts. WILPF's Crisis Response team prepared the present analysis, which meticulously draws a language pattern of the 49 Member States' oral interventions during the session. This analysis provides a comprehensive presentation of the topics tackled at the Council during the sessions on Syria that, when compared to previous and prospective analyses, can reflect the alteration of priority issues and present the Member States' different stances across different stages of the conflict.

In addition, and as the internationalisation of the conflict in Syria has turned the situation in Syria into a reflection of other conflicts extending far beyond its borders, it becomes imperative for us, as a civil society organisation, to peculiarly understand and analyse the most minuscule changes in the discourse of states

### *Political issues*

Member States of the Council have tackled issues related to the political sphere more than any other matter (terms related to politics were mentioned 91 times). On a positive note, a very big majority of states was supportive of a **political solution** as a resolution to the conflict. Most of the states have also expressed the importance of the **Geneva communiqué** as a basis for this political solution between Syrian factions. While only a third of Latin American States called for a political solution, more than half of the MENA countries (including Turkey and Iran) did so. In total, 32 Member States out of 49 have mentioned a political solution and/or the Geneva communiqué – thus forming the most recurrent issue tackled by Member States during this session.

A considerable number of state members of the council have also **praised the de Mistura efforts**, and were in favour of seeing the conflict being solved by Syrians alone while highlighting the importance of **a national unity** in this process. Only one member state, Algeria, accused the Commission of Inquiry of being biased and subjective.

Not so unexpected, Member States known to be close to the Assad regime (including those in South America and Asia) have criticised the **interference of foreign states** in the conflict and deemed this interference to be problematic and causing more complications. From another perspective, other states struggling to be at the forefront of the regional hegemony and accused of being directly and vehemently involved in the on-going proxy war were accusing each other of engendering further intensification of the conflict. For instance, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accusing Iran and vice versa, and Israel pointing fingers at Hezbollah and Iran.

A slightly surprising finding was that not so many Member States tackled the issue of **terrorism, Daesh and/or Jabhat Al Nusra**, nor mentioned anything related to the war on terror. Only nine Member States out of 49 tackled Daesh, among which five Member States simultaneously mentioned Daesh and Jabhat Al Nusra.

### ***Accountability***

While most states were condemning the violations and **atrocities being committed by all factions**, some states specifically accused **either the Syrian regime or Daesh** as main perpetrators. However, none of the Member States accused the **Syrian opposition** exclusively (not even Jabhat Al Nusra). Saudi Arabia and the UK were the only states solemnly calling for the support of **“moderate” opposition forces**, while Cuba, Venezuela, Russia and Korea officially aligned themselves alongside the Syrian regime (China did not). The majority of Member States were

either criticizing impunity and/or calling for a referral of the current violations to the **ICC** while some just referred to “**international justice**”. New Zealand was the only State inquiring about **alternative justice mechanisms** since the ICC has not been put under effect yet. Likewise, many of them were calling for an **investigation of violations in general**.

### ***Use of weapons***

Good news is that a very big majority (almost all) Member States have tackled the primordial issues of the use of **barrel bombs, indiscriminate attacks on populated areas and the use of prohibited chemical weapons** (mostly chlorine). Of course, none of the states allied with the regime brought up these issues during their oral interventions – not even any problems related to war crimes, including the **besiegement** of some areas in Syria. Cuba only tackled the issue of **cultural heritage**, which is normally not associated with the atrocities committed by the regime but by Daesh.

### ***Humanitarian crisis***

A vast majority of Member States has also tackled the **humanitarian crisis** in different ways: either by simply expressing concern around the alarming humanitarian situation (including **refugee issues**), or by criticizing the inability of **humanitarian organisations to access restricted areas**. These issues were also not tackled by Latin American and Asian states allied with the regime. Other states, such as Turkey, KSA and the UAE, solely praised their financial contributions to humanitarian aid and relief and described it as valuable to the alleviation of the destructive humanitarian repercussions of the conflict.

## ***Women's rights***

Although some positive state positions emanated from this session, studying the patterns of issues related to human rights and women's rights is extremely disappointing. Women's issues were the least tackled issues during this session (only 7 out of 49) although the impact of this conflict on women is continuously growing and deemed to be devastating. Not surprisingly, Iceland on behalf of Nordic countries delivered the only statement that was primarily focused on **Sexual and Gender-based Violence, Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000)** and the **political participation of women** all at once. The only states that spoke about sexual and gender-based violence were the United States and Germany, although the latter tackled the issue of sexual and gender-based violence as part of the atrocities committed by ISIL. None of the Arab and MENA countries tackled the issue of women, except for Iraq but the latter's position was similar to that of Germany (sexual and gender-based violence committed by ISIL). Other states opted for the usage of "women *and* children" as the only term associated with women's issues, in a manner that perpetuates the victimisation of women and positions them as a vulnerable and dependent entity.

## ***Human rights***

Arab and MENA countries have also not tackled the issues of **detainees, journalists, civil society, enforced disappearances** and **absence of fair trials**. Generally speaking, these issues were also not at the forefront of the matters discussed by most of the Member States, although some of them allocated a considerable chunk of their oral interventions to them (USA and Germany). As a matter of fact, the US and Germany even named **civil society organisations and activists**, such as the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and Razan Zaitoune and Khalil Maatouk (and colleagues) respectively. These two states were the only states that gave practical examples of breaches as form of human rights advocacy.

Not surprisingly, several states brought up the startling **situation of minorities** while this issue was also generally associated with the atrocities committed by Daesh. On another note, two Latin American states tackled the issue of **education**.

## Concluding remarks

Despite the fact that the Commission of Inquiry has released [several reports](#) documenting the myriad of human rights violations since its establishment in 2011, the international community has failed to resolve or even attenuate the conflict in Syria. It has also not been able to specifically address the distinct impact of the conflict on women, whom have not only been subject to mass killings and torture as results of the military conflict, but have also been disempowered and marginalised from effectively participating in national and international political dialogues and forums. WILPF, in collaboration with the Graduate Institute in Geneva, has [conducted a study](#) providing a gender analysis of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and the Human Rights Council resolutions and examining how women are treated as agentless participants in the Syrian conflict.

Such analyses of Member States' discourses, Human Rights Council and other UN bodies' resolutions on Syria, constitute a substantial tool for civil society organisations to effectively advocate for peace and security in Syria. In addition to enabling them in their efforts to influence the changing dynamics of the conflict in Syria, discourse analysis also enables civil society organisations to determine the fluctuating trends in states' positions and priorities.

**List of Member States in order of oral intervention:**

<i>European Union</i>	<i>New Zealand</i>
<i>Iceland (on behalf of Nordic countries)</i>	<i>Czech republic</i>
<i>Benelux countries</i>	<i>Germany</i>
<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Brazil</i>
<i>United States of America</i>	<i>Venezuela</i>
<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Greece</i>
<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>Jordan</i>
<i>Chile</i>	<i>Canada</i>
<i>KSA</i>	<i>Algeria</i>
<i>Portugal</i>	<i>Qatar</i>
<i>Australia</i>	<i>Cuba</i>
<i>Tunisia</i>	<i>Korea</i>
<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>China</i>
<i>Poland</i>	<i>Iran</i>
<i>Albania</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>
<i>France</i>	<i>Kuwait</i>
<i>Bahrain</i>	<i>Russia</i>
<i>Spain</i>	<i>Maldives</i>
<i>Japan</i>	<i>Slovakia</i>
<i>Israel</i>	<i>Morocco</i>
<i>Ecuador</i>	<i>Italy</i>
<i>Estonia</i>	<i>Turkey</i>
<i>UAE</i>	<i>Iraq</i>
<i>Paraguay</i>	<i>Botswana</i>
<i>Ireland</i>	<i>Romania</i>