

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Ligue Internationale de Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté

Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad

رابطة النساء الدولية للسلام والحرية

Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO; Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO, and UNICEF



2 July 2019

Statement on the oral update of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria

UN Human Rights Council 41st session (24 June to 12 July 2019)

Item 4

Interactive Dialogue with Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation unfolding in northern Syria. The Commission of Inquiry (CoI) has repeatedly warned this Council about the catastrophic consequences that an attack by the Syrian regime in the area of Idlib would have on civilians.¹ The Commission has emphasised that a military offensive “would trigger mass displacement and gravely affect the lives, livelihoods and basic human rights of up to three million civilians in north-western Syria.”² Despite those repeated warnings, States took no concrete action to prevent the escalation of violence that we are witnessing today.

There are currently over 3 million civilians in Idlib, many of them are internally displaced people (IDPs) who have either fled other areas in the country or were forcefully displaced from those. Since the most recent military operation against Idlib started early June, an estimated 330,000 of its civilian inhabitants have been forced to flee their homes and move toward Turkey according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).³ Repeated internal displacement inflicts numerous hardships on civilians, and on women in particular, since it disrupts women's livelihoods and exposes them to a myriad of violations, including grinding poverty, gender-based violence, and lack of access to medical care, in addition to wider restrictions on their mobility and privacy.

¹ See ‘UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria: Urgent steps needed to prevent outright catastrophe in north-western Syria’. Press release. Available at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=24586&LangID=E>

² Ibid

³ See ‘ Idlib, Syria: “We are faced with a humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes” – UN humanitarian chief.’ Available at:

<https://www.unocha.org/story/idlib-syria-“we-are-faced-humanitarian-disaster-unfolding-our-eyes”---un-humanitarian-chief> . See also Security Council Briefing on the Situation in Syria, Special Envoy Geir O. Pedersen. Available at:

<https://dppa.un.org/en/secury-council-briefing-situation-syria-special-envoy-geir-o-pedersen>

Moreover, WILPF is profoundly concerned by the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, such as schools, markets, hospitals and medical facilities, through the extensive use of explosive weapons in highly populated areas undertaken by the Syrian regime and its allies. This is having specific impacts on women and girls. For example, the destruction of hospitals and medical facilities has forced women in Idlib to give birth outdoors,⁴ and prevented them from accessing any form of post-partum medical care.

We urge members and observer States of this Council to:

- Exert pressure on all the parties to the conflict to immediately stop carrying out any attacks on civilians and to respect all their obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Take concrete steps towards pushing all relevant parties to immediately ensure appropriate, affordable, accessible and gender-sensitive healthcare services.
- Immediately cease the supply of weapons to warring parties and curb arms proliferation in Syria and ensure that the Human Rights Council support this call in its response to the situation in Syria.

⁴<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/pregnant-and-alone-syrian-women-fleeing-idlib-offensive-forced-give-birth-outdoors>