Statement to UN Human Rights Council 43rd session (24 February - 20 March 2020)

Item 4: Situations requiring the Council’s attention - Interactive Dialogue with Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

Statement on Syria

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) welcomes the gender analysis and the sex-disaggregated data incorporated throughout the Commission’s report (A/HRC/43/57). We particularly commend the Commission’s approach in shedding light on how factors, such as age, disabilities, religious and ethnic backgrounds, have amplified the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women.

Distinguished Commissioners, your report includes a specific reference to attempts by armed groups with extremist ideologies to dismantle efforts to advance Kurdish women’s rights and their roles in decision-making processes. In particular, that “by targeting almost every aspect of Kurdish women’s lives in the Afrin District and – progressively – in areas affected by Operation Peace Spring – armed groups generated a palpable fear of violence and duress among the female Kurdish population.”\(^1\) Could you elaborate with examples of such targeting?

Mr. President,

WILPF regrets that, unlike previous reports,\(^2\) the Commissioners did not include strong language on the need to curb supplies of weapons to parties to the conflict. Instead, the present report merely recommends that the international community take “all feasible precautions when conducting operations” in Syria to minimize harm to civilians.\(^3\) We would like to ask the Commissioners why this shift in the language used around arms transfers, particularly as we are watching yet another calamity unfolding in Idlib?

On the ninth anniversary of the Syrian revolution, we are still witnessing entire towns turning into piles of rubble, and still see warplanes pouring down explosive weapons on homes, hospitals, schools, just to name a few. We keep delivering statements conveying the same messages. We are here, yet again, asking States to uphold the rights of civilians in Syria, give particular attention to women and girls who often bear the heaviest brunt, and put an immediate end to the cycles of violence. We continue to reiterate these calls and urge the Human Rights Council to support our recommendations in its response to the situation in Syria even though many of the complicit States – both those who support war criminals and those who engage militarily in the conflict and in arms transfers to Syria – are present in this room today.

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\(^1\) A/HRC/43/57, paragraph 89
\(^2\) For example, refer to paragraph 109 of A/HRC/34/64
\(^3\) A/HRC/43/57, paragraph 103 (a)

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