

20 September 2024

UN Human Rights Council, 57th session (9 September — 11 October 2024)

Item 4: Interactive dialogue with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

Statement on Syria

Speaker: Mariana Karkoutly via video

This statement is supported by Huquqyat.

The latest report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (A/HRC/57/86) clearly shows that under the Assad regime Syria remains unsafe for its citizens. The report documents ongoing war crimes and serious human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance, particularly in areas controlled by the regime. These findings highlight that any attempts to normalize relations with the Assad regime or forcibly return Syrian refugees are dangerous and unjustifiable. The report also underscores the ongoing violence, lawlessness, and lack of accountability in Syria. Women's rights are particularly at risk due to the systematic violence perpetrated by the Assad regime and non-state parties to the conflict, compounded by structural gender-based discrimination.

Due to these and other risks, Syria remains unsafe for Syrians who have fled to return. Despite this, refugees are being forced to return to regime-controlled areas—or, in certain cases, to areas under the control of *de facto* authorities in northern Syria. This is extremely dangerous for their lives and futures. There are numerous examples of the regime forcibly disappearing many Syrian refugees following their involuntary return to Syria. Protecting civilians from recurring incidents of abduction and enforced disappearance, and ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations, remains a critical priority.

We welcome that some European countries, along with institutions and civil society organizations, have made significant efforts in pursuing accountability and justice for some of the atrocities committed in Syria, such as the Koblenz trial. At the same time, it is imperative that all countries respect and protect the human rights of Syrian refugees. We echo the Commission's call on States hosting refugees to “ensure that any return is voluntary, safe, dignified, sustainable and without risk of irreparable harm on account of torture, ill-treatment or other serious breaches of human rights obligations.”¹

¹ A/HRC/57/86, paragraph 133 (c)

It is also important to address the severe suffering of Syrians in neighboring countries caused by economic pressure, rampant racism, and humanitarian crises, all of which have had profound gender impacts. Efforts to normalize relations with the regime or to forcibly return refugees undermine justice, violate international agreements, and put many lives at risk. Justice, human rights, and the implementation of international resolutions—especially the Security Council’s Resolution 2254—must remain the guiding principles in dealing with Syria.

We urge all States to address the alarming human rights situation facing refugees in Syria's neighboring countries and those being forcibly returned to Syria. Furthermore, we call on the international community to refrain from normalizing relations with the Assad regime as long as grave and ongoing human rights violations persist.