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UN Human Rights Council, 58th session (24 February to 4 April 2025)

Item 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

Statement on Syria

This statement is supported by Release Me¹ and Dawlaty.²

The Commission of Inquiry on Syria's January 2025 report, aptly titled *A Web of Agony*,³ exposes the atrocities committed by the Assad regime over more than five decades and reveals how sexual and gender-based violence in Syrian detention centres has been systematically used as a tool of political repression. The deep harm this causes survivors, compounded by the lack of accountability, perpetuates a devastating cycle of trauma that undermines prospects for reparation and reconciliation.⁴

The Commission's report, *Pillage and Plunder*,⁵ released in December 2024, highlights how discriminatory inheritance laws have prevented many women—particularly widows and the wives of forcibly disappeared men—from asserting property rights. With over 50% of Syria's housing damaged, particularly by explosive weapons, displaced women face the risk of permanent dispossession, which is further exacerbated by legal and social barriers.

Addressing these and other pre-existing inequalities, which are rooted in colonial traditions that perpetuate patriarchal norms, is essential for building sustainable peace and a just future in Syria.

In recent days, escalating violence between the interim government's security forces supported by associated militias, and armed factions loyal to the former Assad government in areas on the Syrian coast, has spread across multiple governorates, leading to the deaths of at least 803 civilians.⁶ Reports indicate mass executions, targeted attacks on civilian homes and properties, and the use of sectarian rhetoric to justify the violence. An

¹ <https://releasemesyria.org/>

² <https://dawlaty.org/en/>

³ "Web of Agony": Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Ill-Treatment by former Government forces in the Syrian Arab Republic (Companion Report to A/HRC/46/55). UN Index A/HRC/58/CRP.3. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/web-agony-un-commissions-report-unveils-depths-former-governments-detention>

⁴ For an analysis on how Sexual and Gender-based violence was systematically used as a tool of political repression particularly during the conflict in Syria, and its vast impacts in survivors and beyond, please see WILPF's Policy Brief *Sexual Violence by the Force of Arms Against Women in Syria* (2020), available at <https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Sexual-violence-by-force-of-arms-against-women-in-Syria-t.pdf>; See also "I lost my dignity" : sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic : Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. 13 March 2018. UN index: A/HRC/37/CRP.3, Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1480420?ln=en>

⁵ "Pillage and Plunder: Unlawful appropriation and destruction of properties of refugees and IDPs in Syria". UN Index A/HRC/58/CRP.2. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/pillageandplunder>

⁶ See report "803 Individuals Extrajudicially Killed Between March 6-10, 2025", Syrian Network for Human Rights. Available at: <https://snhr.org/blog/2025/03/11/803-individuals-extrajudicially-killed-between-march-6-10-2025/>

independent and impartial investigation is essential to accurately determine responsibility. Otherwise, impunity for these massacres will perpetuate the systemic lack of justice and accountability in Syria.

As Syria steps into this new chapter, we call on all states to:

- Urge all parties to the hostilities ensure the protection of civilians.
- Press for an independent and impartial investigation into the events that have taken place on the Syrian coastal region since 6 March.
- Protect Syrian refugees by halting any plans for forced deportations or coerced returns, as Syria remains unsafe for repatriation.
- Support a comprehensive, inclusive transitional justice process with a gender-responsive and survivor-centred approach focused on accountability for all past and ongoing war crimes, which also addresses pre-existing inequalities, including discriminatory provisions under the Personal Status law that restrict land, housing and property ownership.