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Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review*

Syrian Arab Republic

Addendum

**Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments
and replies presented by the State under review**

* The present document was not formally edited before being sent to the United Nations translation services.

The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its commitment to its international human rights obligations and to the universal periodic review process. On 7 October 2011 Syria participated fully in transparency and frankness in the review of its human rights situation. It welcomed the statements and objective recommendations made to it on account of its desire to draw on other countries' experience in the area of human rights and to benefit from their objective recommendations in promoting human rights in Syria, especially at a time when Syria is engaged in building a regenerated State in which all persons enjoy the highest standards of human rights, notwithstanding the current major difficulties which have been openly acknowledged.

Unfortunately some States that participated in the interactive dialogue on 7 October 2011 and claimed to be endeavouring to get Syria to comply with its human rights obligations refused to comply with the principles of the universal periodic review set forth in paragraph 3 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 1/5, which stipulates that the review should be a cooperative mechanism and should be conducted in an objective, transparent, non-selective and non-confrontational manner.

As usual, posing as the guardians of human rights and acting as though they were above human rights law themselves, they prevented the mechanism from serving as a forum for exchanges of views aimed at producing positive outcomes that will promote human rights in Syria. They preferred to proceed with their customary dissemination of toxic material and to provoke tensions, just as they do at every international gathering that is dedicated to achieving human progress. They pervert such forums in order to advance their own agendas, which consist in establishing global hegemony and turning the world into their back garden, so that they may violate human rights with impunity, including those of the original inhabitants of their countries. They make speeches and express repugnance and horror at acts that they were among the first to commit and to support in other countries. For such States human rights are merely a foreign policy tool that serves the same ends as espionage, liquidation and military warfare.

The Syrian Arab Republic rejected the recommendations made by such States in the context of the universal periodic review process because they were not motivated by cooperation with a view to promoting and protecting human rights but by a desire to accuse and condemn Syria, thus flagrantly breaching the principles of the universal review process and the Charter of the United Nations. Such conduct amounts to brazen interference in the internal affairs of an independent and sovereign State which is neither a banana republic nor a sheikhdom that they can activate as they wish and whose human rights violations they conceal, just as they conceal Israel's violations of human rights in Palestine and the occupied Syrian Golan. We have not heard any outcry or even opposition from these States against Israel's practices in the occupied Arab territories. Instead they start looking for excuses for its conduct. In this context, we expected compliance with the rules of procedure of the review mechanism and inclusion of all points raised in the final report of the meeting rather than the selection of some and the omission of others. We hope that the final report will remedy those omissions.

The Syrian Arab Republic welcomed the constructive comments and recommendations made by other States that were motivated by the aim of promoting and protecting human rights, and it has actually begun implementing the recommendations in spite of the numerous impediments encountered as a result of the ongoing criminal conduct of armed groups.

In its presentation to the Universal Periodic Review Working Group on 7 October 2011, the Syrian Arab Republic described the current situation in the country and developments since the beginning of the crisis. During the intervening period of more than four months, some parts of Syria have been the target of terrorist criminal acts by armed gangs that have never been witnessed before in Syrian history. The blood of innocent citizens has been shed, their holy places have been violated, their property has been destroyed, roads have been blocked, and families have been rendered homeless in flagrant contravention of the law, religious prescriptions and human rights. Children under 2 years of age and older people, even one aged over 94, have been displayed before the eyes and ears of the world by satellite channels involved in a fallacious and barbaric media war of incitement against Syria. Moreover, some people continue to use the term “peaceful movement” to designate and conceal crimes of murder with a view to protecting the perpetrators from prosecution and punishment.

In spite of everything, the will to live remains strong among the Syrian people, who cling to their land, their life and their values. Their will to live is stronger than any sanctions, blockade or unprecedented media campaigns. They have been keeping track of the reform measures that are being introduced by the State in response to their legitimate demands and they continue to live together despite attempts at sectarian cleansing and expulsion by terrorists and armed groups in certain parts of the country.

The armed groups have violated the right to life, carried out extrajudicial killings and established strongholds where they detain and torture supporters of the State who fall into their hands or victims who are kidnapped for financial gain, thereby flagrantly violating the right of all persons to protection from enforced disappearance, deprivation of liberty and torture. They have also terrorized residents and driven them from their homes, violating the right to housing and the basic aims of human rights, namely freedom from fear and want, as set forth in the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The groups have sought to impede the educational process in schools by means of looting and vandalism, by burning their contents and by forcing students to demonstrate under threat of armed force, thereby violating the right to education, compelling children to act against their will, and committing extrajudicial killings. Moreover, academic activity has been disrupted in some universities, in Idlib and Homs, and life as a whole has been disrupted by the presence of large crowds of armed men bristling with ultra-modern weapons, who have set up road blocks and shelled urban districts with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, using state-of-the-art sniper rifles and extremely advanced weapons.

The right to food has also been violated by the armed groups’ crimes, since they have burned agricultural crops and prevented farmers from reaching their land. For instance, they created a bread crisis, depriving the Syrian people of a basic food item that is heavily subsidized by the State. They threw it into refuse bins to create an artificial food crisis. One of the main tasks of law enforcement agencies has consisted in distributing bread and foodstuffs in the areas that have been liberated from the armed groups, who had deprived the residents of food and water and had destroyed electricity networks and fuel supplies. Women were also abducted, raped and killed.

The armed groups have blocked roads and intercepted travellers, some in private cars which they stole, killing the drivers, and others in public transport vehicles.

We have seen people expressing doubts about the veracity of the Syrian account of the events and its allegations that terrorism against our people is being financed and supported from abroad. Some of them were misled by media campaigns fomented by journalists who breached their professional code of ethics. As a result, they were convinced that what was occurring was a peaceful movement and that there was no evidence to the contrary. Some five months later, we see that Syrian bloodshed is the price being paid for foreign terrorism and plots. A distinction has been drawn between peaceful demands for

reform and armed craving for blood and money. The picture is now crystal clear and there can no longer be any doubt that Syria is being subjected to a terrorist campaign with regional and international dimensions that are unrelated to human rights or freedom. Its aim is to undermine the Syrian State. The report of the League of Arab States Mission discussed the irrefutable facts concerning the practices of the armed groups. It was delivered a deathblow and prevented from continuing its work when the facts on the ground were revealed. Another aspect of the campaign against Syria is the interference by a number of foreign embassies and ambassadors in internal affairs. The leaders of the States concerned have incited and instructed the leadership of the opposition to escalate the disturbances, while foreign terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida have intervened to add to the confusion.

Syria's first affirmation in its presentation last October was its endeavour to engage in a constructive dialogue that would prevent the review from becoming a tool for the politicization of human rights. It listened to a large number of statements and accepted many of the constructive recommendations aimed at promoting and protecting human rights for all. It is also attempting to implement the recommendations that it accepted and will inform the Council of its position on the remaining recommendations at the meeting to be held on 15 March 2012. The Syrian Arab Republic now wishes to present a brief review of its achievements since October 2011.

It listened to the demands that were equitable and the State has taken steps to implement corresponding reforms, including some recommendations made in the context of the universal periodic review mechanism.

The Constitutional Review Committee completed its work and presented the President of the Republic on 13 February 2012 with a copy of a modern Constitution designed to protect and promote human rights. It contains radical amendments such as the deletion of article 8 of the former Constitution which stipulated that the Baath Party was the leading party in the State and in society. The term of office of the President of the Republic is specified and is renewable only once. There are also numerous other amendments that pave the way for political pluralism, democratic alternation of power, enhancement of the political, economic and social rights of the Syrian people, strengthening of the rule of law, enhancement of the role of the Constitutional Court, protection of the cultural diversity of Syrian society, and development of the concept of a State based on the rule of law. When this document is discussed, a referendum will have been held on the new Constitution on 26 February 2012.

Moreover, in December 2011 local elections were held in Syria in accordance with the provisions of the new Parliamentary Elections Act and the Local Administration Act, which were brought to the attention of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group. The electoral process was transparent and democratic, and the only disturbances were those due to attempts by armed gangs to prevent citizens in some parts of Syria from exercising their right to stand for election or to vote.

With regard to the creation of new political parties in accordance with the right to peaceful assembly and the establishment of trade unions, the Political Parties Act, which complies with international standards governing the creation and organization of parties, was adopted. The Committee on Political Parties, which was established pursuant to the new Act, has studied applications for the creation of parties and has so far announced its approval of the creation of six parties, which are now operating lawfully. The Committee is currently studying additional applications.

Syria has been cooperating since October 2011 with the League of Arab States in the hope of ending the crisis in Syria with Arab assistance. It signed the Arab League Observer Protocol in accordance with the Arab Plan of Action. Syria received the delegation, opening all doors for it and offering it all possible facilities to enable the Mission to acquaint itself with the real conditions on the ground in Syria. The Mission submitted its report after one month's work, which confirmed the presence of hundreds of armed men in Homs alone, who attack civilians and law enforcement officers. Unfortunately, while this report could have paved the way for the necessary political solution, those who wished to exploit it as a pretext for attacking Syria rejected the report and resorted to hysterical tactics in regional and international forums, calling for stiffer sanctions against the Syrian people and foreign military intervention. While these parties claim that their action is designed to benefit the Syrian people, the sanctions have had a direct adverse impact on the entire Syrian population. Moreover, as already noted, the Mission has finished its work.

In the meantime, the parties in question have continued to support escalating violence against the Syrians on an unprecedented scale. Such barbarity is far removed from any human rights law or any other kind of law: murder, mutilated corpses, torture, assassination of scholars, religious leaders and intellectuals, as well as theft, intimidation, looting, destruction of basic facilities, and destruction of pipelines in order to create a fuel crisis, thereby forward to Friday as a day of worship and leisure. The armed groups have unfortunately turned it into a day of bloodshed and contrived explosions. The terrorists intentionally mounted a devastating attack on Damascus and Aleppo on a Friday, while continuing to shed Syrian blood every day of the week. They made use of the corpses, taking photographs of their killing sprees in order to sell Syrian blood cheaply in the form of films sent to satellite channels that support the murder of the Syrian people. One notes with indignation that the States which claimed to be concerned about the spilling of Syrian blood ignored for nine months the presence of armed terrorist groups who kill innocent people and law enforcement officers. When the report of the Arab Mission exposed this attitude, the States in question acknowledged the presence of armed groups and presented their well-known absurd justifications for the crimes.

Human rights advocates cannot act in this way, and human rights defenders cannot support this kind of terrorism. These are criminal acts and nobody should be allowed to throw sand in people's eyes and call them "freedom advocates". When confronted with such acts, any State has a duty to protect its citizens and to restore peace and security. We expect the international community to assist Syria in this task and not to incite these groups or to provide them with money, weapons and political, military and media backing.

In spite of this, the Syrian State has not abdicated its responsibility to protect its people, and it will continue to respond to appeals from citizens in different regions in order to rescue them from the armed groups. The security forces have taken steps to halt the bloodshed, while maintaining a high degree of self-restraint and professionalism in distinguishing between citizens and armed groups. The law enforcement agencies have discovered huge arsenals of weapons, sites for the production of explosives, underground passageways for arms smuggling, and advanced communications equipment that cannot be found in Syria and that is used to conduct communications with foreign countries. The agencies will continue to protect citizens from the armed groups until such time as security and stability are restored in Syria, while complying with their obligations under international human rights law. More than 2,000 members of the law enforcement agencies have been killed in clashes with the armed groups. We have sent documents containing their names to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Syria has also submitted information to OHCHR concerning Syrian civilian fatalities and will continue to do so in its follow-up reports.

These terrorist operations have unfortunately impeded Syria's ability to implement the recommendations to which it committed itself. However, it is determined to proceed with their implementation in view of their importance for the promotion and protection of human rights in Syria in accordance with the highest international standards. Syria hopes that when it participates in the next round of the universal periodic review process, it will have recovered from the current crisis and that the State will be reinvigorated in terms of the rule of law, democracy and protection of human rights, while remaining deeply attached to its history and retaining the country's deep-rooted human rights values of freedom, justice, independence, sovereignty and human welfare.
