



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 4

### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## Written statement\* submitted by Public Organization "Public Advocacy", a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 May 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **Voice from inside and outside of the Syrian civil society: Priority measures to ensure security and restoration in the Syrian Arab Republic**

Our organization appeals to the UN Human Rights Council on behalf of representatives of civil society, namely on behalf of the Syrian refugees and representatives of the diaspora of the country who are currently forced to live outside the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the difficult conditions in their country, these people do not lose hope of returning to their homeland and are convinced that their return to the Syrian Arab Republic will further contribute to the stabilisation of the situation both in the country and in the Middle East as a whole. Moreover, their return, from their perspective, will alleviate the financial and economic burden as well as social disarray that the war has brought to many states, and especially to the immediate neighbour states of the Syrian Arab Republic.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, during the years of ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, 6.6 million people were internally displaced and 5.6 million became refugees.

According to statistics from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, after the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, 11 million Syrians were forced to leave their homes. More than a million Syrians fled to Lebanon. 2 million Syrians registered by UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, 3.5 million Syrians registered by the Government of Turkey, as well as more than 33,000 Syrian refugees registered in North Africa.<sup>2</sup>

According to statistics from the Lebanese side, the number of refugees has already reached 1.5 million people.

70- to 80 percent of the refugees live under the poverty line, children are deprived of education and many are forced to work to help them and their families survive.

The refugee crisis is far from over and both the Syrians living in neighboring countries and their host communities will require international support for the foreseeable future.

The question arises: what actions should be performed primarily in order to ensure the return of refugees to the Syrian Arab Republic and will such actions be effective?

We draw the attention of the UN Human Rights Council to the responsibility of the international community for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic in terms of both restoring the warring country and taking all measures to end the war and ensure safety, security and dignity.

Considering high degree of religious motivation both in armed clashes and in the society of the Syrian Arab Republic, we consider that the most effective primary step should be an inter-religious dialogue in the format of a permanent conference of representatives of all religious communities of the Syrian Arab Republic who have authoritative influence on various religious groups of the country. Such a dialogue can be an effective platform for seeking a point of reconciliation, consolidating society and solving problems with the irreplaceable role of religious leaders of denominations who possess a thousand-year experience of peaceful coexistence in the region.

Interfaith dialogue allows to reach practical results. An example would be the signing of an armistice agreement after massacres and mass destruction in the Indonesian province of Maluku province. Despite the fact that more than 5,000 people were killed and more than half a million were displaced in 2002, 35 Christian and 35 Muslim communities signed the agreement to end the conflict. This outcome became possible due to the position of the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://juzuruna.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria\\_durable\\_solutions](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions).

religious leaders of this country. There are many other examples of the painstaking and fruitful work of peacekeepers from religious communities and civil society.<sup>3</sup>

Placing our hopes on inter-confessional dialogue to establish peace in the region, we draw from the fact that both Islam and Christianity are based on a common Biblical tradition that sprang from one text – the Old and New Testaments, and the peoples professing these religions have longstanding experience of peaceful coexistence in the region.

In this regard, we draw your attention to the joint statement of the two Orthodox Patriarchs of the Middle East, dedicated to the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abduction of two Orthodox bishops of Aleppo: “we are here to affirm that Christianity was born in the East, and the last dreadful events did not spare a church or a mosque. The fire of terrorism did not spare a priest or a sheikh. The targeted victim behind all these atrocities is the human being living in the East.”<sup>4</sup>

In our opinion, it is apparent that leaders of the Christian and Muslim world are not only demonstrating readiness for dialogue, but are also extremely interested in help and support from international organizations and the world community needed to organize the process of reconciliation in the region. From our perspective, such a dialogue should be organized at the highest level and include the making of joint actions to help the victims, especially those located on the territories affected by the war.

At the same time, inter-religious and civil dialogue will not be effective without real economic, political and international support, which in our opinion should be presented clearly and decisively.

As we know in 2019, the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syrian Arab Republic amounts to US\$ 3.3 billion to provide immediate life-saving, protection and resilience support to 11.7 million people. In addition, US\$ 5.5 billion are required for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) to support refugee and host-community humanitarian and resilience-related assistance in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

An estimated 1.4 million displaced people returned to some areas of the Syrian Arab Republic in 2018, about 95 percent of whom were internally displaced. At the same time, the conflict has continued to generate large-scale displacement of people, with some 1.6 million people newly displaced in 2018 alone.

The humanitarian needs continue to be extremely high. Over 11 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 5.6 million Syrian refugees are displaced outside the country.

In connection with the above, a combination of humanitarian aid and development measures is necessary, which requires a significant increase in funding and stimulating entrepreneurship.

Before the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, agriculture accounted for a quarter of the country's gross domestic product. Now a third of the population in the Syrian Arab Republic, or 6.5 million people, are experiencing severe hunger, and the conflict leads to the largest migration crisis in the world.

We call on the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to undertake additional activities to help the Syrians and invest in agriculture as a stabilization and recovery mechanism.

Despite numerous concerns about the timeliness of investments, we believe that further delay in providing the Syrian Arab Republic with effective international funding in sufficient amounts, as well as further economic sanctions will lead to irreversible consequences, while

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.icermediation.org/news-media/meeting-coverage/inter-faith-conflict-mediation-mechanisms-and-peacebuilding-in-nigeria/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/the-six-year-anniversary-of-the-abducted-bishops-of-aleppo/2160/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/03/14/brussels-iii-conference-on-supporting-the-future-of-syria-and-the-region-co-chairs-declaration/>.

the possibility of demographic, political and economic recovery of the region will be lost for a long time to come.

In particular, we believe that it is necessary to create real conditions for the participation of Syrian business located outside the Syrian Arab Republic in the restoration of the country's economy. For this purpose, we call on the international community to lift the economic sanctions, which serve to restrict capital flow, as well as encourage economic support from the international community such as credit guarantees and access to markets.

The international community needs to contribute to addressing the concerns of the Syrian business community outside the Syrian Arab Republic about their personal safety and security, the rule of law, investments securities and the upholding of housing, land and property rights.

At the same time, we are convinced that the population of the Syrian Arab Republic needs immediate support and organization of the living space, taking into account the further development prospects of this region, and the process of restoring these prospects cannot be postponed.

In this regard, we urge the Syrian business and the patriots of the Middle East to invest in SME business projects aimed at supporting the remaining population, creating jobs in the Syrian Arab Republic regardless of the opinion of political players, sanctions or restrictions on financial flows. These actions are urgent for the sake of immediate salvation and the remaining population, which is not only in a difficult economic state, but also in the moral and psychological prostration and lack of hope.

The rescue and restoration of the region of the Syrian Arab Republic today depends not only on logical decisions and economic rationales, but also on the volitional decisions of people who are able to sacrifice and act on the basis of humane, patriotic and universal motives.

We call on the United Nations and European Union structures to increase economic and financial assistance to the Syrian Arab Republic through its religious communities, civil society organizations and SME structures, to provide targeted support to humanitarian initiatives and programs that operate not only within the Syrian region to meet safety and security, but also provide minimum impetus for economic growth in the region.

We believe that a proper conditions and financial support will provide the refugees with health, water, sanitation, food, education, psycho-social support, community services and other essential relief. Assistance also should be given to 4 million people in the communities hosting them.

Our organization, the Syrian diaspora and refugees willing to repatriate voluntarily support the UN efforts to advance the political process, including the creation of a constitutional committee and the resolution of the issue of prisoners and missing persons.

We urge the European Union, which has accepted significant migration flows, to provide full support to Syrian capital in order to prepare and implement effective economic job projects in the Syrian Arab Republic. Such projects will be able to raise the region economically, bypassing and reducing the degree of political tensions. The projects will also be able to partially solve the problem of immigration flows to the European Union. It is necessary to support the grassroots, civil society and active entrepreneurs who are still present in the region or are prepared to return there.

Our organization is prepared to ensure contacts with representatives of civil society and religious communities interested in effective dialogue and participation in solving the economic, social and political problems of the Middle East.

Find out more at [www.juzuruna.com](http://www.juzuruna.com)