



General Assembly

Sixty-sixth session

96th plenary meeting
Monday, 13 February 2012, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Al-Nasser. (Qatar)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Körösi (Hungary), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 64 (continued)

**Report of the Human Rights Council
(A/66/53/Add.2 and A/66/53/Add.2/Corr.1)**

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): In Venezuela human rights are fully enjoyed, as we have an exemplary democracy that is improved every day through popular participation.

Over the past 13 years, there have been more democratic and pluralistic elections in Venezuela than in any other country in the world. The opposition enjoys all the rights and guarantees granted by our Constitution. Yesterday, for example, the opposition chose its presidential candidate, who will compete with President Hugo Chávez Frías, and who received all the logistical and technical support of the National Electoral Council — an autonomous branch of the State — and of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, which is the guarantor of our democracy. The quality and transparency of Venezuelan democracy has once again been proved to the world. Human rights and the full exercise thereof are the foundation of the participatory democracy that exists in my country.

Allow me to read out the communiqué on Syria adopted by the heads of State and Government of the countries that make up the Bolivarian Alliance for the

Peoples of Our America (ALBA) during its eleventh Summit, held in Caracas on 4 and 5 February.

“The heads of State and Government of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America reiterated their condemnation of the systematic policy of interference and destabilization in the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic, which aims to impose — by force — a change of regime on the Syrian people. The member countries of ALBA condemn the acts of armed violence that irregular groups, supported by foreign Powers, have unleashed against the Syrian people, and hope that Syrian society returns to peace and develops in an atmosphere of peace.”

“The ALBA countries reiterate their support for the national reform and dialogue policies promoted by the Government of President Bashar Al-Assad, which are aimed at finding a peaceful and political solution to the current crisis while respecting the sovereignty of the Syrian people and the territorial integrity of that brother Arab country.”

The League of Arab States observer mission in Syria, which acted in situ and which has been inexplicably suspended, said in its report that Western media had misrepresented the reality that prevailed in that country. It confirmed that President Bashar Al-Assad had met the democratic reforms aimed at achieving the coexistence of its people and has also met the commitments under the protocol signed with the Arab League. It noted that Government authorities did not suppress peaceful protests by Government

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supporters and opposition. It revealed that political sectors adverse to President Bashar Al-Assad had organized armed groups that committed acts of violence against Government forces and civilians, causing numerous deaths and injuries.

Included among those armed groups, as noted in the report, is the so-called Free Syrian Army, composed of more than 3,000 individuals. On 10 February, the BBC in London reported that

“members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) told the BBC that this organization was responsible for the double attack committed this Friday in Aleppo, Syria’s second biggest city, in which at least 25 people died and 175 were wounded”.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela deeply regrets the loss of human lives, be they supporters of the Government or of the opposition, and conveys to the families and friends of the victims its feelings of solidarity.

Popular demonstrations must be carried out peaceably and within the existing legal and constitutional order. We deplore the resort to terrorism for claiming the legitimate demands of the Syrian people.

On behalf of humanitarian assistance, the defence of human rights and the responsibility to protect, imperial Powers and some of their allies arm, finance, advise and train armed opposition militias to overthrow the Government of President Bashar Al-Assad. It is evident that those Powers and their allies do not want peace. They do not care about human rights or democracy. They do not believe in political dialogue for finding a political and peaceful solution to the situation in Syria. Quite clearly, they seek a regime change in order to replace — through violence — the Government of President Al-Assad. It is for that reason that they belittle the political reforms that the Syrian head of State has carried out. For that reason, they reject the mediation efforts of the Russian Federation, which seek a peaceful and negotiated solution to the situation in that country. Let us remember that the peace initiative promoted by the African Union in the case of Libya was demonized.

If the aim is to reaffirm a strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial unity of Syria and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, then foreign political, military, financial and media support provided to the opposition and terrorist groups in that country must stop.

The media, at the service of imperialism, constantly attacks the initiative of dialogue and peace promoted by the Russian Federation. They twist the dignified position taken by Russia and China in the Security Council, which prevented that body from endorsing a coup against the Syrian President.

The imperialist leaders and their allies groundlessly declare that an alleged international community rejects the proposals of Russia and China, as if those and other countries, including those comprising ALBA, were not members of the international community.

As clearly demonstrated in the case of Libya, the use of foreign forces to overthrow a legitimate Government only creates chaos, more violence and more human rights violations.

Let us not allow the ill-fated history of imperialist interventions in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean to repeat itself in Syria. Why insist on promoting chaos and violence instead of peace and fraternity in North Africa and the Middle East?

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom thanks the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for her briefing this morning. We welcome the vital role that she and her Office are playing to ensure that the international community is aware of the horrific atrocities being committed by Bashar Al-Assad and his regime.

I align myself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union.

It is barely a week since the Security Council was blocked from taking action to support the League of Arab States’ efforts aimed at ending the brutality in Syria and facilitating a peaceful Syrian-led political transition (see S/PV.6711). Emboldened by the Council’s failure to act, Al-Assad and his regime have stepped up their campaign of violence and repression. They are indiscriminately using heavy artillery to bombard unarmed civilians in Homs, Hama, Zabadani and the outskirts of Damascus, in an effort to silence those who seek only to exercise their legitimate democratic rights.

Hundreds of people have been killed over the past few days, adding to the more than 6,000 deaths reported to the Human Rights Council by the independent commission of inquiry in December. As the High Commissioner made clear, thousands of ordinary Syrians have been illegally detained, tortured and

murdered in gross and systematic violations of human rights, which almost certainly constitute crimes against humanity. Al-Assad's promises to end the violence have repeatedly been shown to be nothing more than empty words aimed at buying time to continue crushing with brute and bloody force the aspirations of his people.

The Syrian regime has brushed aside the strong condemnation of the Human Rights Council and of the General Assembly. It has ignored the calls of the High Commissioner and of the Secretary-General. It has denied access to the international independent commission of inquiry set up in response to the deteriorating human rights situation. And it has failed to implement the League of Arab States plan of action, despite having agreed to do so.

In the long term, Al-Assad's strategy will fail. His crackdown will simply feed the cycle of violence in Syria, and increase the likelihood of descent into full-scale civil war. The international community must seek a rapid, peaceful solution to prevent this terrible tragedy from unfolding further. There are those who argue that we must be patient, that we should allow time for Al-Assad to implement reform. But in almost a year of lethal repression, there has been no reform — only senseless murder, broken promises, transparent deceptions and endless prevarication.

We welcome the strong lead that the League of Arab States has taken in seeking a peaceful resolution to the crisis. We commend this weekend's statement by the Arab League. We remain committed to supporting an Arab-led process to end the crisis in Syria in a way that avoids military intervention.

We note the proposal in the Arab League's decision of 12 February to take forward a resolution in the General Assembly. We support that initiative and urge all Member States to do the same.

We welcome the announcement of the friends of Syria group. We will work closely with the Arab League as it sets up the group. We hope that the group of friends will focus international efforts to establish and oversee a process of political transition in Syria in line with the Arab League's decisions of 22 January. As part of the process, we hope it will be able to support the Syrian opposition to adopt a united position and become representative of all Syria's communities.

But those initiatives are not enough on their own. The people of Syria justifiably feel that the United

Nations has shamefully abandoned their cause. We must, as individual Member States and collectively, send them a clear signal that this is not the case. We must redouble our efforts to put an end to the violence in Syria. We must give our full support to the League of Arab States efforts to ensure a peaceful process of transition. And we must demonstrate clearly that those who commit terrible atrocities will be held accountable for their actions.

Mr. Rishchynski (Canada): Echoing repeated statements by our Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, Canada today again deplores the egregious violence unleashed by the Al-Assad regime against the Syrian people. Thousands have been killed and thousands more detained, tortured and deprived of their human rights. Syria's denial of access to the international media and most humanitarian organizations will not succeed in hiding the barbarity of the Al-Assad regime from the world.

The despicable, 11-month-long campaign of terror has prompted us to impose tough sanctions on the regime and its supporters. Canada has also contributed humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the people of Syria, through the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The recent failure by the Security Council (see S/PV.6711) to deal effectively with the crisis in Syria is disappointing in the extreme. The Security Council draft resolution would not have authorized the use of force or even imposed sanctions. The use of the veto by two permanent members blocked the Security Council from endorsing the Arab region's own proposal to end the violence. The continuing supply of arms to a regime engaged in killing its own people is reprehensible, and history will judge harshly those whose obstruction has served only to prolong the senseless violence.

(spoke in French)

Canada has supported the Human Rights Council's efforts to address the crisis in Syria. The report of the Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry contains profoundly troubling, substantiated findings that outline a terrible pattern of human rights violations, including horrendous crimes against women and children. The report gives voice to the suffering of all victims, despite the Al-Assad regime's obstructionist refusal to allow access.

Canada calls on Syria to fully implement the Human Rights Council's resolutions without further delay, including cooperating with the commission of inquiry.

Given the regime's repeated refusals to change its ways, including its failure to create an enabling environment for its proposed reforms, as well as the escalating bloodshed, it is incumbent upon the international community to act to support the Syrian people's legitimate calls for change.

Canada calls on all United Nations States Members to join in isolating the current Syrian regime until President Al-Assad and his supporters stop committing atrocities against innocent Syrian civilians. Al-Assad and those supporting him must get the message that peace-loving nations of the world are working together to end his oppressive regime.

(spoke in English)

Canada welcomes the engagement and leadership of the Arab League in attempting to bring an end to the crisis in Syria. Canada supports the Arab League proposal for a peaceful transition to democracy in Syria and urges Syria to cooperate fully with the Arab League. Canada looks forward to a free, democratic Syria that respects the human rights of its people and lives in peace with its neighbours.

Canada encourages the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights to extend all necessary assistance to the Arab League's efforts.

The refusal by the Al-Assad regime to respect and protect the human rights of the Syrian people and the failure of the Security Council to address the situation demand that the General Assembly act decisively. The people of Syria cannot afford any further delay.

Mr. Núñez Mosquera (Cuba) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Cuba is continuing to follow with the greatest attention the events occurring in the Syrian Arab Republic. The news and information available are incomplete, fragmentary and often manipulated. The calls to violence, military aggression and foreign intervention advocated by the media and high-level officials of some NATO members are of the utmost concern.

Cuba denounces the manipulation and media lies promoted to justify aggression against the Syrian people. Especially alarming are the calls by those who promote regime change in Syria and advocate the use

of force and violence, instead of contributing to efforts towards dialogue and negotiation among all parties.

We reject the tendency to disregard the proposals and measures of the Syrian Government and to ignore the efforts made by some countries to avert the continuing violence in that brotherly country. A civil war in Syria or intervention by foreign forces would have serious consequences for international peace and security, particularly for the troubled region of the Middle East.

Cuba shares the concern for the loss of innocent lives in Syria and in any part of the world and condemns all acts of violence occurring in that country. At the same time, our country categorically rejects foreign intervention, be it direct or through support for irregular armed groups and the promotion of violent attacks that only sow destruction and escalate the death toll.

The position assumed in recent months by some members of NATO on the Middle East, the unjustifiable bombings resulting from a manipulative interpretation of Security Council resolution 1973 (2011), the killing of civilians, and the acceptance of and complicit silence surrounding Israeli actions against the Palestinian people all show that the promotion of human rights is not what truly motivates those now calling on the General Assembly to pronounce on the subject before us today.

In light of the experience and precedents of recent cases in which the United Nations Charter has clearly been manipulated, and in light of the double standards and flagrant violations of international law, we reiterate our rejection of any attempt to undermine Syria's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Cuba supports the search for a political solution to the current crisis, with full respect for Syria's sovereignty and independence, because it falls solely to the Syrian people and their authorities to determine the ways and means to ascertain and implement the will of the people. The role of the international community at this difficult time for a Member State is to offer help in safeguarding peace and stability in that country, not to incite actions that cause death, crime and violence against innocent people and civil unrest.

We reiterate our strong commitment to Syria's right to self-determination, and we affirm our confidence in the ability of the Syrian people and Government to resolve their domestic problems without foreign interference or any imposition from the outside.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union earlier today (see A/66/PV.95).

While we are talking here in New York, a repressive regime continues to kill, wound and maim its own people. There can be no doubt that the Syrian people need our help.

Three months ago here in the General Assembly, the world community firmly and by an overwhelming majority condemned the systematic violence and human rights violations committed by the Syrian authorities. Today, we have heard yet again a gruesome and appalling account of the situation on the ground. It has been getting worse and worse. The death toll is mounting daily. Thousands of civilians, including hundreds of children, have been killed. Arbitrary arrests, torture, rape and ill-treatment by the regime in Damascus are widespread.

The killing and the repression must end. Those responsible for the atrocities committed must be held accountable under international law. We welcome the fact that the League of Arab States has joined that call. We applaud Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his clear and unequivocal condemnation of the bloodshed. He has given a voice to the wider United Nations membership at a time when the Security Council has not — for reasons well known — lived up to its responsibility.

We also welcome the clear words from High Commissioner Pillay about the shocking situation on the ground. I have no doubt that the report by the independent commission of inquiry to the Human Rights Council will again confirm those appalling facts. Germany continues to advocate for a Security Council-mandated commission of inquiry. Accountability has to be established beyond doubt. We also repeat our demand for unhindered access to medical care without discrimination.

The League of Arab States has demonstrated its determination to settle the conflict peacefully and to facilitate a Syrian-led political transition process. The Syrian Government, however, does not show any willingness to stop the repression and engage in a peaceful political process. The latest indiscriminate shelling of the city of Homs shows not only extreme brutality but also blatant disrespect for the efforts of the League of Arab States. We fully share the Arab League's sense of urgency to find a solution to the crisis,

including its renewed initiative to call on the Security Council to act. Germany remains convinced that the situation in Syria requires Security Council action.

Germany also supports the nomination of a special envoy of the Arab League to facilitate the political transition process. We also welcome the convocation of a meeting of friends of Syria on 24 February in Tunisia.

Lastly, we support the idea of a draft resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly by the Group of Arab States. We encourage all Members of the United Nations to support such a resolution.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): The Brazilian Government is deeply troubled by the rapidly deteriorating situation in Syria. The level of violence we are now seeing in Syria is extremely serious. Recent episodes in Homs and other cities are particularly disturbing. We reiterate our repudiation of the violence and human rights violations in Syria and our full support for the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the commission of inquiry established by the Human Rights Council. We renew our call on the Syrian authorities to abide by their international obligations under human rights and humanitarian law and their own commitments to the League of Arab States in that regard.

The solution to the Syrian conflict requires a political, nationally owned process. The Government must do more and work faster to establish the necessary conditions for negotiations to start. Political repression must cease immediately. Reforms must allow for real and timely change capable of promoting more democratic governance. The opposition has to contribute through constructive engagement as soon as the appropriate conditions are established. The future of Syria is obviously in the hands of the Syrians, but the international community can and should help.

The United Nations should send a clear and unified message of condemnation of human rights violations, while supporting the Arab League's efforts and the centrality of a Syrian-led political process. Our collective and individual action must be guided by the need to end the violence, promote stability and help the parties find a path out of the current political impasse. The international community should spare no diplomatic effort at this juncture and should seek a consensus platform. Brazil is ready to do its part.

The engagement of the Arab League will continue to be crucial. We strongly support greater involvement

by the United Nations in cooperation with the League of Arab States. We share the same goals. This hour requires true cooperation among us and a firm determination above all to avoid even greater bloodshed. We owe it to the people of Syria and their neighbours.

Mrs. Morgan (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation appreciates the convening of this very important meeting in response to the appeal of the Human Rights Council to the principal organs of the Organization to consider the report of the independent international commission of inquiry established by the Council to investigate all alleged human rights violations in Syria and to adopt the appropriate actions.

The special sessions of the Human Rights Council seek to address urgent human rights violations. It is important that, when the Human Rights Council requests the intervention of other bodies of the system, they respond with that same sense of urgency in order to find a solution to the situation in full compliance with international law. The involvement of the General Assembly becomes even more relevant given the lack of specific action by the Security Council and the deteriorating situation in Syria.

We appreciate the presence of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to brief the General Assembly on the worsening violence against the civilian population and violations of human rights. We support the actions that the High Commissioner has undertaken in accordance with her mandate.

Mexico reiterates its vigorous condemnation of the violence against the civilian population in the Syrian Arab Republic. Reports of the indiscriminate use of artillery and other armaments by the State forces in civilian areas are grounds for serious concern. We have seen a situation of escalating violations of human rights in recent months. That is why we supported the Human Rights Council and General Assembly resolutions condemning such violations. We regret the lack of cooperation of the Syrian Government with international mechanisms in that regard, in particular the international commission of inquiry of the Human Rights Council.

Mexico calls on the Syrian authorities to stop the use of force, to protect human rights and to establish an inclusive dialogue that meets the legitimate aspirations of its citizens. Mexico expresses its support for the international efforts under way seeking to resolve the current situation in the context of competent

international bodies, regional and universal, in full respect of international law. We recognize the efforts of the Arab League to promote a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The United Nations cannot remain passive or indifferent in the face of situations that threaten to degenerate into new humanitarian tragedies. The Security Council has the responsibility to act decisively in a timely way when indiscriminate violence is used against a civilian population. The principle of non-interference reaches its limit when it is a question of values that are fundamental to the international community and grave violations of the basic rights of peoples and individuals, even more so when they have been described as crimes against humanity.

In the context of the current situation in Syria, it is essential that the international community clearly affirm that it will not tolerate the basic norms of international law and human rights becoming irrelevant.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): We are also grateful for the detailed and sombre report provided by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Syrian authorities have deliberately declined to comply with its obligations under international law and have committed crimes against humanity. The Syrian authorities have chosen to brutally crack down on largely peaceful protests in Syria and are pursuing a shoot-to-kill policy. It is shocking that Syrian children reportedly have been subject to the worst crimes, including being tortured to death. Heavy weaponry is also used indiscriminately against innocent civilians in residential areas. Norway strongly condemns the violence carried out by the Syrian regime and deplores the human suffering that it has caused.

A Government that uses its military force against its own population in that manner has lost all legitimacy. Mr. Al-Assad cannot be said to speak for the Syrian people any more and should step aside so that a meaningful political transition towards democracy can start.

Despite agreement to abide by the Arab League's action plan of 2 November 2011, the Syrian regime has deliberately declined to implement those promises. While all parties have to end the violence, there can be no doubt that the Syrian authorities bear the prime responsibility to abide by international law. The Syrian authorities must also urgently allow full and unhindered access of international humanitarian assistance.

Since the crisis broke out in March 2011, together with its partners, Norway has firmly supported various efforts to have the situation in Syria addressed here in the United Nations. We have also called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court. Furthermore, we have imposed targeted sanctions against the Syrian authorities and those responsible for the violent repression. We are ready to consider, jointly with partners, additional measures if the repression continues.

Norway remains deeply disappointed by the recent double veto cast in the Security Council. However, 13 Council members voted in favour, which sent a strong message of broad international support to the Arab League's initiative (see S/PV.6711).

The Arab League's call for a Syrian-led political process to address the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people represents the most credible effort to achieve a peaceful and political solution to the crisis. That transition must be Syrian-led and should be supervised under the Arab League's auspices and follow a clear timetable on the basis of its decision of 22 January (see S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 1). The Arab League's effort over seven months to end the bloodshed have been commendable, though hard won. It enjoys our full support.

Norway has sent a clear message of support to the Syrian people, and will continue to engage with those representatives of the Syrian opposition who adhere to non-violence and democracy. That position, and the need to monitor the situation on the ground, is why Norway maintains its diplomatic presence in Damascus, which is subject to ongoing review. Together with Arab and international partners, we support the establishment of a broad-based international support group for a peaceful political transition by increasing the pressure on the Syrian authorities and to protect the Syrian people. We commend Tunisia for hosting the first meeting on 24 February.

Moreover, we welcome the Arab League's decision of 12 February, which we consider to be part of a comprehensive political road map on the basis of the Arab League's decision of 22 January. We therefore regret that it was immediately rejected by the Syrian authorities.

We gather in the General Assembly to demonstrate our solidarity with the Syrian people by increasing the

pressure on the Syrian regime and to adopt a resolution in support of ending the crisis in Syria.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): Over the past week, the world has witnessed the barbaric massacre of civilians in Homs. That violence has shocked the world. For over a year now, we have seen violence and human rights abuses take place right across Syria.

As we heard from High Commissioner Pillay today, well over 5,400 people have died. The United Nations Human Rights Council has pointed to substantial evidence of gross human rights abuses by Syria's security forces. As the High Commission has noted, widespread and systematic human rights violations have not only continued but sharply escalated.

The regime is targeting innocent civilians, including by directing heavy weaponry, tanks and snipers against civilians in major population centres, such as Homs, Idlib, Hama and Dar'a. Those abuses are getting worse as Syrian people are being subjected to unjust detention, sexual violence and torture. The reports of the torture of children are, in particular, shocking to all of us. That must be and is unacceptable to the international community.

My own Government is profoundly disappointed at the 4 February veto of the Security Council's proposed draft resolution on Syria (see S/PV.6711). Draft resolution S/2012/77 did not call for military action, regime change or an arms embargo or even impose sanctions. What the draft resolution did, crucially, was to call for support for the Arab League's own initiative to bring a peaceful and Syrian-led political resolution to the crisis.

The Arab League has stood by the Syrian people and has shown great commitment and global leadership in the crisis. The League and, above all, the people of Syria should and must know that they are not alone. Australia is united with our Arab and other international partners in our commitment to do what we can to help. Our support for the efforts of the League is unwavering. President Al-Assad should cooperate fully with the Arab League, including its decision of 22 January to facilitate a peaceful political transition in Syria (see S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 1).

Australia therefore welcomes calls to work with Arab partners to establish an international support group of like-minded countries to work in concert to support a peaceful transition in Syria and the earliest

end to the bloodshed. That would be a key mechanism for coordinating international assistance to the people of Syria, for backing the diplomatic efforts of the League, for maintaining pressure on the Syrian Government to immediately end the violence, and, of course, for ensuring that the crisis remains on the agenda of the Security Council. We welcome the conference anticipated by Tunisia on 24 February.

The international community has a responsibility to act to protect the people of Syria from the appalling violence of their own Government. Just as the people of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and many other regional countries now have new freedoms for a more representative and democratic political life, so the Syrian people have the same right to the same opportunity. President Al-Assad has lost all legitimacy and shown a complete disregard for the rights and welfare of his own people. The violence by his Government must end.

Australia's own commitment to the people of Syria remains resolute. We will continue to provide support for the immediate humanitarian needs of the Syrian people, including through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. As High Commissioner Pillay has stated today, it is, of course, essential that humanitarian actors be guaranteed immediate and unhindered access.

In conclusion, the Australian Government believes that the international community still has a vital role to play in seeking to resolve the crisis. Syria must remain on the agenda of the Security Council, and we will continue to encourage that. We also look forward to working with the Arab League and like-minded groups on the draft resolution on Syria that Egypt has proposed for consideration by the General Assembly, with a view to supporting it. Such a draft resolution is, clearly, unambiguously necessary.

The Australian Government firmly believes that those committing acts of violence, human rights abuses and crimes against humanity must be held accountable for their actions, and that the Syrian people, like the other peoples of the Arab world, should enjoy their fundamental freedoms — rights that, as High Commissioner Pillay has recalled today, are the rights of every human being.

Mr. Cabral (Portugal): Through you, Sir, I thank the President for convening this meeting of the General Assembly to discuss such a serious and pressing matter as the one before us today. I would also like to thank High Commissioner Navi Pillay for updating us on

developments since 19 December, when the Assembly last addressed the human rights situation in Syria (see A/66/PV.89). Her accounts are simply horrifying and, once again, underline the urgency of ending the bloodshed in Syria and initiating a meaningful political process.

Portugal associates itself fully with the statement delivered by Ambassador Mayr-Harting on behalf of the European Union.

Indeed, the deteriorating situation in Syria is appalling. We must spare no efforts to stop the dangerous spiral towards civil war. We deeply regret that the Security Council was unable to adopt a resolution seeking an end to all violence and the establishment of a genuine Syrian political dialogue. It is totally unacceptable that, since then, the Syrian regime has escalated its deadly onslaught against its own population. That simply must stop and it must stop now.

Over the past 11 months, the Syrian regime has broken promise after promise and failed to match action with words. If its announced pledges on reform, dialogue and peace are to have any credence at all, the Syrian Government must immediately end its brutal campaign and fully implement all commitments that it has undertaken, including in the framework of the League of Arab States.

The widespread, systematic and gross violations of human rights by the Syrian authorities that the High Commissioner has just reported have to cease at once, and all those responsible for such violations must be held accountable. We renew our appeals to the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the commission of inquiry.

Portugal fully supports the efforts of the League of Arab States to end the bloodshed and to ensure a peaceful political solution to the crisis. We firmly believe that its November plan of action and the 22 January decision (see S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 1) provide a comprehensive and peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis that preserves the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, while enabling a political transition to a democratic and plural political system, in which all citizens are equal and the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians can be fulfilled. The decisions taken this past weekend by the League of Arab States

represent a further contribution to that goal, namely, the constitution of a group of friends.

Therefore, Portugal urges the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully with the League of Arab States and calls upon all Syrian parties to engage constructively in a peaceful political dialogue under the auspices of the League of Arab States, as set out in its recent decisions. Coordination among the European Union, the United Nations, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is critical in that regard. The aforementioned initiatives of the League of Arab States represent the best viable means of solving the crisis peacefully through political means.

For its part, Portugal will continue to actively work with the Arab League towards the fulfilment of those objectives.

Mr. Errázuriz (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Chile wishes to join its voice to those who have expressed their concern and dismay in the General Assembly, the Security Council and Human Rights Council over the violence and extensive violation of human rights in Syria that have caused thousands of deaths, including those of hundreds of children. The progressive and accelerated deterioration of the situation in Syria, which is the outcome of armed clashes between Government troops and armed and civilian groups, cannot leave us indifferent.

The briefing that we heard this morning by Ms. Navanethem Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, whom we thank for her report, confirms that such concern is well-founded and that it is necessary for the international community to adopt a prompt and effective decision to halt the conflict and achieve a political solution to the crisis based on full respect for the will of the Syrian people.

At the same time, the Government of Chile is aware of and categorically supports the efforts of the League of Arab States towards peace, as well as those of the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly towards adopting measures and recommendations to restore peaceful coexistence and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and to end the grave and persistent violations of human rights in Syria.

It is essential that a decision be adopted to ensure the protection of the civilian population, full respect for human rights, the functioning of institutions, good governance and stability in Syria, in accordance with

the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law.

The Government of Chile regrets that the Security Council was not able to agree to a resolution on 4 February (see S/PV.6711). We therefore reiterate our hope that this important body will soon be able to adopt an effective decision to ensure the protection of the civilian population and stabilize the situation in Syria, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law.

In that regard, the Government of Chile believes that the exercise of the right of the veto by permanent members of the Security Council should be done in a restricted manner, all the more so when dealing with allegations that could constitute crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, war crimes or genocide. Chile hopes that the paralysis in the Security Council will be replaced by a decision that, in the context of the Council's powers and in accordance with its duties under the Charter of the United Nations, will contribute towards the achievement of a solution to the political and humanitarian crisis and human rights violations that are occurring in Syria.

Mr. Barriga (Liechtenstein): We welcome the President's decision to convene today's meeting and thank the High Commissioner for her briefing on the latest developments in Syria. This meeting is an important opportunity to signal to the Syrian people that their suffering will not go unnoticed or unsanctioned at the United Nations.

Liechtenstein welcomes the constructive initiative of the League of Arab States to engage the Syrian authorities in a process to end the violence immediately and to ensure a peaceful transition and accountability. The initiative deserves the full support of the United Nations, including the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General. The initiative is the only game in town, and it is the only hope for an end to the senseless bloodshed.

We therefore deplore the fact that two members of the Council chose to veto a draft Security Council resolution (see S/PV.6711) that would have supported the initiative, despite the fact that the draft text had already been reduced to its bare bones after intense negotiations and despite the fact that all other Council members voted in favour of the draft. In our view, such behaviour is incompatible with the often stated commitment to cooperation with relevant regional

organizations. It is incompatible with the legal and moral responsibilities of the permanent members of the Council as it deals with situations involving genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity. And it is, indeed, incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. As the Security Council has so far failed to live up to its responsibility in that regard, the General Assembly must step in.

Since we received the report of the Human Rights Council commission of inquiry on Syria in November 2011, the situation on the ground has deteriorated greatly. Already then, there were serious grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed. Three months later, we are alarmed at the ever-intensifying indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population.

The Syrian Government must immediately put an end to all such acts of violence and allow unhindered access for humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, violations of international law, in particular all ongoing serious human rights violations, must be thoroughly and independently investigated to provide full accountability and to safeguard the rights of victims.

At the current stage, the only realistic avenue for such accountability — at least for those bearing the greatest responsibility — is through a referral of the situation by the Security Council to the International Criminal Court. We therefore submit that the General Assembly should — in addition to lending its full support to the initiative of the League of Arab States — recommend that the Security Council consider such a referral.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its appreciation to Ms. Navanethem Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her briefing. Indonesia is deeply appalled by the recent escalation of violence and the deteriorating situation in Syria, which has led to grave violations of human rights in the country. The overall impact of the violence on the greater population in Syria amounts to a humanitarian crisis.

Indonesia firmly rejects the use of force in the country, which has caused the suffering of more civilians, and urges the Syrian authorities to ensure the safety and security of its population and the protection of their human rights. In that light, Indonesia calls for an immediate end to all of the violence. Enough is enough — of the violence. We must make every effort to protect civilians.

We therefore urge all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and respect for international human rights and humanitarian law. Without a doubt, the responsibility to take the measures required to ensure the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its population falls on the Syrian Government. That is a task that can neither be deferred nor delayed.

We therefore reiterate the urgent need for the Syrian authorities to implement, without delay, the obligations and measures to which they have previously, on several occasions, committed themselves. The Syrian Government must cooperate fully with the United Nations human rights mechanisms on that important issue. The conflict in Syria must be resolved through peaceful means. There is therefore a clear need for a genuine and inclusive political dialogue among all parties in the country.

We, the international community, must act in unison to assist in achieving that objective. We must create conditions conducive to a political settlement and political dialogue, which must be launched immediately. The political settlement must reflect the aspirations and the will of the Syrian people.

Finally, Indonesia supports the proposed establishment of a joint peacekeeping force. But first, we must work to ensure that peace returns to Syria; the peacekeeping force should ensure the protection of civilians and pave the way for political settlement.

Indonesia looks forward to discussing further details of that proposal and, at the same time, working together to formulate our common response to help resolve the situation in Syria.

Mr. Sin Son Ho (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea would like to take this opportunity to clarify its position on the agenda item currently before this meeting of the General Assembly.

First, any discussion on human rights issues should be based on the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference into Member States' internal affairs, in compliance with the United Nations Charter and without any interference from outside forces. As a full-fledged member of the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Republic is no exception in that regard.

Secondly, the use of violence against the Syrian Government and against innocent Syrian people must

be stopped immediately, and all elements of instability should be removed. In order to bring the situation in Syria under control, the use of any violence, which causes deterioration of the situation, should be ended at once. All instances of the use of violence must be eliminated.

Thirdly, all issues relating to the Syrian Arab Republic must be resolved in the interest of the Syrian Arab people. The future of Syria and its people should be in the hands of the Syrian people. Therefore, the peace and stability process in Syria should be a Syrian-led process, free from any outside interference.

My delegation underscores once again that sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic must be respected and all issues must be resolved through negotiation and dialogue. My delegation sincerely expresses its hope that the Syrian situation will be stabilized as soon as possible.

Mr. Khazae (Islamic Republic of Iran): With regard to today's meeting of the General Assembly, I would like to express our views both on the procedures for convening this meeting and on the substance of the issue.

First, on the procedure, as my delegation explained this morning, we received the President's letter dated 9 February, which was circulated to all Permanent Representatives, in which he conveyed his intention to convene this formal meeting of the General Assembly under agenda item 64, entitled "Report of the Human Rights Council". We had wished that prior consultations could have taken place in advance with concerned Member States or even with the General Committee, before the announcement of this meeting.

Even under extraordinary circumstances where an urgent, formal General Assembly meeting is required, that should still be done through established procedures. There is no justification for circumventing the normal, practical processes concerning the preparation of such meetings. This can set a precedent, opening the door for any situation to be brought before the Assembly, without having a specific mandate, without going through proper channels and without conducting the necessary consultations in a neutral, transparent and genuine manner, as required in conducting the work of the Assembly. In the case of Syria, we should also take into account that the Security Council has the situation under its review.

On the substance of the decision on the situation in Syria, I should like to say the following.

First, Syria is undergoing very a difficult time in its history, where its national integrity and solidarity are at stake. There are numerous partial or biased depictions of current events in Syria that are contrary to the reality of what is taking place on the ground. The events in Syria should be viewed and considered in a comprehensive manner.

Secondly, in recent months many terrorist attacks have occurred in Syria, the latest of which took place a few days ago in Aleppo, resulting in a heavy toll in loss of human life and public property. Just yesterday we even heard from an Al-Qaida leader calling for more acts of violence against the Syrian people and the Government. We should be clear on that and condemn all foreign interference, acts of violence and incitement to terrorism.

Thirdly, we believe that addressing the legitimate demands of the people through a peaceful and domestically led political process, free of foreign intervention, is the only way out of the crisis. Coercive sanctions, pressure and attempts to interfere in Syrian internal affairs would only lead to a deepening of the political and social crisis, with all its ramifications for the region as a whole. Our goal, therefore, should be to seek a process that leads to a more democratic nation, to broader political and economic participation and to strengthened national unity, thereby ensuring public order, national security, stability and the prosperity of the Syrian people. That must be done while bearing in mind that the primary and ultimate responsibility for the security and stability of the Syrian people lies with the people and the Government of Syria.

Fourthly, Syria has historically played an important role in the Middle East. Prolonged instability and unrest in Syria would have implications for peace and stability in the wider region. We should all think of a comprehensive, effective and practical way to help find a peaceful resolution to the present crisis, without any foreign intervention. We believe that the main role of the United Nations, including the General Assembly, is to help facilitate engagement between Syrian political groups and the Syrian Government, as part of a Syrian-led political process. That must be done while taking into account the reform process announced by the Government, based on the aspirations of the Syrian people, as well as while ensuring respect for the

country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. There is a Russian initiative to hold a dialogue in Moscow. That call should be heeded by all groups.

Finally, as has already been stated, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports any constructive, unbiased and peaceful Syrian-led political process and stands ready to play its role in that process.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): On 5 February at the eleventh Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), in taking up the issue of foreign involvement and aggression against the brotherly people and Government of Syria, our heads of State and Government reiterated their condemnation of the systematic policy of interference and destabilization against the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic, the purpose of which is to impose regime change by force on the people of Syria.

They also condemned the acts of armed violence unleashed by irregular groups supported by foreign Powers against the Syrian people and expressed their hope that Syrian society would return to calm and be allowed to develop in an atmosphere of peace. They also restated their support for the policy of reform and national dialogue introduced by the Government of Syria aimed at arriving at a political solution to the current crisis that respects the sovereignty of the Syrian people and the territorial integrity of that brother Arab country.

Today we are confronted with a repetition of the same script used in Libya by NATO and its allies. Nicaragua warned then that a new model of foreign interference and military intervention was being implemented in the case of Libya in order to later duplicate it in other developing countries. Today there is a sense of déjà vu as the scenario of military intervention and regime change takes place in Syria, in flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter, in particular Article 2.

It is no secret that some of the countries of NATO and its allies are already on Syrian soil arming the groups of irregulars that are causing the tragedy that the Syrian people are experiencing. Politicians and military leaders from those countries speak passionately, make humanitarian arguments and urge that all possible options be explored, while at the same time drawing up plans to render official and ensure the arming of terrorist groups. They work hard and secretly to achieve

direct military intervention, all in order to remove the legitimate Government of Syria.

All those statements and actions are clear evidence that those plans are being carried out on the basis of that Libyan-style model for military intervention against the peoples of the world. It is clearer than ever that what NATO is really pursuing is regime change, to ensure imperial hegemony and access to the natural resources of our countries, which they covet.

It is very fresh in our minds how those same actors carried out the same practices and policies in Libya, yielding results with which we are all familiar. In the current situation, not even the media of the powerful, or non-governmental organizations, are able to hide this reality. This is a drama in several acts, including provocation, the arming of terrorists, military intervention, the destruction of the country and, lastly, divvying up juicy contracts for rebuilding of a country that they themselves have destroyed.

State terrorism, aggression, foreign manipulation and violence against the Republic of Syria must cease immediately in order to pave the way for a climate of trust and an inclusive process to establish an urgently needed dialogue, making possible a peaceful political settlement among the people of Syria, which is the desire of that sister country and Government.

The United Nations was established to promote peace, not to promote war or interference of any kind.

Nicaragua has always asserted its commitment to peace, its love of life, its rejection of violence and war, its unswerving determination to defend the sovereignty and solidarity among peoples, and against colonial or imperial occupation. Those principles have guided all throughout our popular Sandinista Revolution.

The President took the Chair.

We have also always deplored the loss of innocent life anywhere in the world and condemned such violence. But we must make clear that we do not share the view that the apocryphal protection of human life, which is now being labelled as the responsibility to protect, should be allowed to become a devious argument to justify foreign intervention or interference in the domestic affairs of States. The United Nations should not continue to allow such a double standard, which serves only to establish precedents that undermine international peace and security. We must

achieve genuine cooperation in defence and promotion of human rights.

Nicaragua recognizes that the Syrian Government is fully committed to engaging in a national dialogue and establishing a significant reform agenda. That includes the drafting of legislation leading to the holding of general elections, responding to the aspirations of the Syrian people and thereby lay the basis for political pluralism and democracy. Syria has also demonstrated that it has fully complied with the protocol of the Arab League observers and the Arab action plan. It has withdrawn military forces from the streets and released thousands of detainees who were not involved in acts of violence. It has facilitated the work of foreign media, which was abundantly apparent to the observers of the Arab League mission, whose report is now being swept under the carpet.

Nicaragua believes that it is essential to make further political efforts to avoid a crisis of greater magnitude in the Middle East. We appreciate the Russian Federation's initiative to mediate a diplomatic, political and peaceful solution to this crisis. We also fully support the position taken in the Security Council by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. As my President, Commander Daniel Ortega Saavedra, recently said, "It is a firm stand in favour of negotiation, in favour of dialogue, in favour of peace and against war".

In conclusion, we want to make it clear that we reject the call for this meeting today, which was convened without even the courtesy of consultation with the legitimate Government of Syria. We also reject the results that are sought from this meeting, since their true purpose is further interference in the domestic affairs of a State and an erosion of the sovereignty and the right of self-determination of the Syrian people. That is a path towards setting yet another negative precedent for the peoples of the world, closing off the chances for dialogue and negotiation and opening the doors wider every day to military intervention and war.

Mrs. Kolontai (Republic of Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): We take note of the information concerning the situation in Syria submitted today to the General Assembly by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. With regret and concern, we must once again express our doubts about the impartiality and objectivity of the information on the real situation in Syria.

Belarus has frequently drawn attention to the lack of balance in Human Rights Council resolutions on country-specific situations in Syria, including that adopted at the eighteenth special session of the Human Rights Council (Human Rights Council resolution S-18/1), and the country-specific resolution on Syria adopted by the Third Committee (resolution 66/176). Those documents are based on conclusions that reflect the point of view of only one party to the conflict and as such they cannot be objective. It has long been well understood that Belarus does not in principle accept country-specific resolutions as a means of political coercion.

Belarus is deeply concerned by the continuing confrontation between Government and anti-Government forces in Syria and the reports of bloodshed and casualties among the civilian population, including women and children. We support the swiftest possible settlement of the situation through negotiations between the parties involved. In this connection, we welcome the constructive measures that have been taken at the regional level, aimed at strengthening the principles of mutually respectful dialogue among the parties. We highly commend and welcome the responsible mediation efforts of the Government of the Russian Federation to bring the positions closer together and to normalize the situation in Syria and the region as a whole.

Belarus calls on the opposing parties to immediately end the violence and to come to the negotiating table. We are convinced that this is the only responsible, lasting way to resolve this problem in the interests of the entire Syrian people. The only true path to normalizing the situation is broad-based national dialogue with strict and unswerving respect for the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Syrian State. We need to facilitate such a dialogue, based on impartiality and a balanced approach. We call on members of the General Assembly to act with the wisdom and responsibility of sovereign Governments and to distance themselves from hasty and unfair decisions.

Mr. Bernardini (Italy): While aligning itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union (EU), Italy wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. We wish to add our voice to those condemning the continued use of force against civilians in Syria and the widespread episodes of arbitrary executions, torture, sexual assault and aggression, including against children. Protesters,

human rights activists and journalists continue to be persecuted and detained on political grounds. There is a growing number of disappearances and the regime is even targeting medical support activities. The situation is so serious that United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Pillay has concluded that crimes against humanity may have been committed by the Syrian security forces.

The Al-Assad regime has broken all its promises, including its pledges to end the repression, release political prisoners, allow unimpeded access to the League of Arab States observer mission and international media, and withdraw armed forces from urban areas. Instead, the violence and repression have increased over the last few weeks.

The unfolding scenario is unacceptable. The legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people must be met. Italy deems an immediate cessation of violence to be essential and continues to strongly support the efforts put forth by the League of Arab States for a peaceful and democratic solution to the ongoing crisis. In this sense, we welcome the outcomes of yesterday's ministerial meeting in Cairo.

While Italy continues to call for the Security Council to act on the Syrian issue, we welcome the efforts made by other bodies of the United Nations, in particular the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. Italy and its EU partners have undertaken a broad range of measures to place increasing pressure on the regime to put a stop to the violent crackdown it has been engaging in since last March. We have adopted individual sanctions against many of those responsible for the repression, including President Al-Assad.

We are now working on a further round of sanctions. We are ready to adopt them at the next European Foreign Affairs Council on 27 February, and intend to keep stepping up the pressure on the regime until it stops the repression. We welcome the measures adopted by other partners in this direction, and call upon the rest of the international community to join these efforts by establishing restrictive measures against those responsible for the repression, while taking care to minimize negative impacts on the civilian population.

The critical situation in various areas of the country is severely impairing the lives of Syrian citizens. The EU has reiterated that the regime must respond to the needs of its people by providing the necessary assistance and allowing medical treatment, as well as unhindered

access by the relevant humanitarian organizations. International assistance must be permitted into the country immediately. Support also needs to reach those who have crossed the borders into neighbouring countries. Italy has already acted in this respect by sending medical supplies to help Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Italy remains committed to a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis, in line also with the indications that emerged from the League of Arab States meeting of 22 January for a political transition process in Syria supported by the international community, first and foremost the regional partners. We therefore look forward to the meeting to be held in Tunis on 24 February of the friends of Syria, and believe that strong political support for the Syrian opposition should be assured by encouraging a broader unity among its different components in order to establish a unified political platform.

Mr. Prozor (Israel): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important discussion, which is long overdue.

As I watch this debate unfold, pictures that I saw over the weekend linger in my mind. Today, I recall the images of infants and young children from the Baba Amr neighbourhood of Homs. They are injured, covered in bandages and terrified beyond belief. They look out at the camera with pleading eyes, desperate for help. In the only way that they know how, these children are trying to reach out to the world. They are asking the world to lend a hand.

No decent human being can ignore pictures like these. It does not matter where one comes from, what faith one belongs to or what politics one preaches. These pictures of helplessness in the face of death serve as a moral call to every person and every nation in the world. Nowhere is that call more clear than here at the United Nations, which was founded primarily to safeguard the principles of human rights, dignity and life.

These children in Syria are not the indiscriminate victims of natural disaster. They are not the tragic fatalities of famine. They are not the accidental casualties of war. They are the deliberate targets of a brutal regime that will commit any crime and cross any line to cling to power.

We all know that the consequences of inaction will be horrific. Winston Churchill once said that "the

further back you look, the further forward you can see". If we want to understand this regime's intent, we must look at its track record. Exactly 30 years ago, this same Government massacred 10,000 of its own people in Hama in a single campaign. Nothing has changed. Bashar al-Assad is systematically murdering civilians. His tanks are trampling on the rights of peaceful protestors. His forces are raping and torturing men, women and children. Al-Assad has no moral authority to govern. With every home that is destroyed by a mortar, with every youth who is struck by a sniper bullet, with every person who is tortured, the twisted moral compass of that regime comes into greater focus.

Bashar Al-Assad may have been trained as an eye doctor, but in practice he only tries to blind the international community to the crimes committed by his regime. The international community can no longer afford to see the situation in Syria with anything less than 20/20 vision. More than 6,000 people have been killed since the uprising began. How many more innocents must die before the world acts?

As the death toll rises, so does our moral obligation. Our common humanity binds us together, and those bonds are now being put to the test. It is time for the international community to stop standing on the sidelines watching murder after murder. It is time for the voices of the victims to finally unite with the voice of the world against the tyrant of Damascus. It should be obvious that Al-Assad and his regime have no moral authority to govern.

It is time for this Organization to start doing something meaningful to stop him from killing his own people. The children of Syria — from Homs to Hama — cry out to us. Their fate is in our hands.

Ms. Cavanagh (New Zealand): May we start by thanking you, Sir, for holding today's meeting on this important issue. It is with great sadness that we find ourselves here discussing the worsening situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

We welcome the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Pillay, and thank her for the update on the latest developments.

New Zealand takes this opportunity to again support the Human Rights Council's special session on Syria and its resolution referring to the report of the independent international commission of inquiry on Syria. The report made it clear that crimes against

humanity are likely to have been committed. The Commission also found substantial evidence of grave violations of human rights, including summary executions, arbitrary arrests, torture and violation of children's rights. That is abhorrent; it must stop; and Syria must protect its population.

New Zealand joins others who have commended the role played by Syria's neighbours. The establishment of the group of friends of Syria is another welcome development, as is Tunisia's offer to host its first meeting. The Arab League's plans set out a process for a peaceful transition that would allow the Syrian people to decide their future. In short, we should listen to the countries in the region and follow their lead.

In that regard, New Zealand was dismayed at the failure of the Security Council to support the Arab League plan. As the President of the General Assembly and the High Commissioner have noted, the longer the Security Council is divided, the more Syrian people are killed. It is deeply troubling to hear reports that the situation in Syria has intensified since the Security Council failed to act.

New Zealand calls for the Syrian authorities to stop the violence immediately, and we call on them to fully comply with their obligations under international law to investigate, prosecute and punish all perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

We also urge Syria to implement the recommendations of the commission of inquiry and the Arab League plans.

Mr. Vinay Kumar (India): The Syrian Arab Republic has, by virtue of its geographic and strategic location and the genius of its people, played an important role in the Middle East throughout recorded history. Even in modern times, Syria's role in the developments in the Middle East cannot be overemphasized. Prolonged instability and unrest in Syria therefore have implications for peace and stability in the wider region.

India is deeply concerned over the present situation in Syria, which has resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians and security forces personnel over the past 11 months. We strongly condemn all violence, irrespective of whoever the perpetrators are. We also condemn the violations of human rights. India holds the rights of expression and peaceful assembly among the fundamental values that should be respected, while ensuring the stability and security of society. As the

problem in Syria is primarily political in nature, India has, from the beginning of the protests, called for a peaceful and inclusive political process to address the grievances of all segments of Syrian society.

India has conveyed that message to the Syrian leadership, both bilaterally as well as along with its IBSA — India, Brazil and South Africa — partners. We have impressed upon the Syrian side the need to abjure violence and pay heed to the aspirations of the people of Syria.

We are firmly of the view that a political process aimed at the resolution of the present crisis should be led by the Syrians themselves. We believe that the main role of the international community is to facilitate the engagement of the Syrian Government with all sections of Syrian society for an inclusive political process, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians while ensuring respect for the country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

The League of Arab States, as an important regional organization, should play its required and historical role in the promotion of political dialogue among the Syrian parties. In that context, we welcomed the deployment of the League's observer mission across several areas of the country, which had a calming effect on the level of violence and provided a more accurate picture of developments. We have also been supportive of the efforts made by the League for a peaceful resolution of the crisis through an inclusive, Syrian-led political process. We support the League's call for serious political dialogue between the Syrian Government and the whole spectrum of the opposition under the auspices of the League of Arab States. We believe that the leadership of Syria is a matter for the Syrian people to decide.

In conclusion, we think that for an expeditious resolution of the problem in Syria, the League of Arab States should facilitate the peaceful engagement of all Syrian opposition forces in a constructive dialogue with the authorities. We hope that this will create a new environment for peace and promote a political process. Such a political dialogue should build upon the political reforms already announced by the Syrian leadership, with the changes necessary for them to find acceptance among all segments of Syrian society.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): Mr. President, we welcome your initiative in convening this meeting. We also thank

the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Pillay, for her briefing.

Turkey deeply regrets the ongoing violence and the mounting civilian death toll in Syria. International efforts should be focused on bringing the bloodshed in Syria to an immediate end and paving the way for a peaceful and democratic Syrian-led transition process that is in line with the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Syrian people. The possibility of a civil war and a religious, sectarian and ethnic divide must be avoided at all costs.

The international community must speak with one voice on the human rights situation in Syria before it is too late.

Turkey commends the ongoing efforts of the Arab League to end the crisis in Syria and expresses its continued strong support for the comprehensive initiative it has undertaken. We welcome the call for the establishment of a group of friends on Syria.

The risk of a humanitarian crisis throughout Syria is growing. We have approached all relevant United Nations agencies and bodies to gear up their efforts to raise awareness of the increasing need for unfettered access by humanitarian partners in order to assess and respond to the situation. The international community and humanitarian organizations need to mobilize resources now in order to cope with the rapidly escalating humanitarian needs. The international community must make every effort to prevent the situation from deteriorating further. In that endeavour, Turkey will continue to stand by the Syrian people.

The President: One representative has requested to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Israel, whose country occupies Arab territories in the Golan, Palestine and southern Lebanon, has very clearly revealed his cards today before the General Assembly. It is very important to hear the words of the representative of an entity that has carried out an unending series of massacres in Deir Yassin, Kibia, Nablus, Jenin, Qana — twice — the Golan, Jerusalem, Sabra and Shatila, and so on.

There may not be one single location in Palestine that has escaped the hand of organized Israeli crimes. That is well documented in the records of the United Nations, which has created commissions of inquiry that Israel has refused to accept and fact-finding missions that Israel has refused to receive. The Organization established the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, which Israel has refused to receive for 43 years. The Human Rights Council has held three special sessions to consider Israeli massacres in Gaza and southern Lebanon.

Despite his country's heinous human rights record, the representative of Israel stands here and gives us advice, levels accusations and sheds crocodile tears over the children of Syria. His country has participated in the killing of thousands of Syrian children. For instance, 300 Syrian children have been killed by Israeli mines planted in the Golan alone, in addition to the hundreds more who have been mutilated by landmines.

As everyone knows, the Israeli occupation authorities have Judaized Jerusalem and expelled tens of thousands of its residents. They completely demolished Bab al-Magarbeh two days ago. We have cautioned and warned against such behaviour for many years. Israel continues to hold 10,000 Palestinian prisoners, including the Speaker and several members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Through its aggressive occupation and policies, continued violations of human rights, hostilities and ongoing threats against its neighbours — which have expanded to include the potential use of nuclear weapons without deterrence or

criticism from its patrons and protectors — Israel itself is the cause of instability in our entire region.

It is extremely important that those present here today join me in observing that the language used by the representative of Israel has been consistent with that used by States members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. That is proof of their partnership in efforts to target Syria, its Government and its people.

The President: The current plenary meeting is now drawing to a close. I once again thank Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her valuable contribution. Ms. Pillay gave us a clear and informative, yet deeply troubling report on the latest developments in Syria.

I thank all representatives for attending today's meeting and expressing their views on the human rights situation in Syria. Many member States whose representatives spoke today expressed their concern about the ongoing violence in Syria and the need to end the killings. They also underlined the need to put an end to all human rights violations. A large majority of member States regretted the inability of the Security Council to adopt a resolution in support of the Arab plan.

I am encouraged by the dialogue between the Secretary-General and the League of Arab States, which I hope will help to promote decisive action towards a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. As President of the General Assembly, I stand ready to call on the Assembly to further consider this issue whenever Member States deem it necessary.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.